

Living Mercy Conference, Brisbane 2011 - Conference Stream: Challenges from our World - Care of the Earth**Presentation: Our Core Business includes Environmental Responsibility****Name:** Lawrie Hallinan

Lawrie Hallinan has been employed by the Sisters of Mercy, Singleton within Mercy Community Services as Manager with responsibilities for OHS, Aged & Disability services, and various management roles since 2006. His previous positions were with Youth Ministry with the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Social Work with Centrelink; and Support Work & Management within mental health organisations. He has qualifications in Social Work, Management and Theology. In 2010, he was a participant in the Australia/New Zealand Mercy Leadership Pilgrimage to Dublin organised by the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane.

Organisation: Mercy Community Services**Postal Address:** 32 Union St., Tighes Hill NSW 297**Email Address:** lawrie.hallinan@mercyservices.org.au **Phone:** (02) 4961 2686**Abstract**

Since 2007, Mercy Community Services (Newcastle NSW) has made a concerted effort to understand its impact on the environment and to minimise its negative effects. Along this journey a persistent source of resistance has been the belief by some that environmental responsibility is not part of the “core business” of providing care to the aged, people with disabilities and families in distress. This presentation will set out the reasons why a Mercy organisation sees environmental responsibility as integral to who we are and how we operate. As well as outlining the steps taken in environmental responsibility, this presentation will also show the change management process taken to redefine “core business” and secure staff support for environmental responsibility.

Mercy Community Services (MCS), based in the Newcastle area, exists to care for the aged, people with disabilities and families in distress. These needs have been the MCS focus since the Sisters of Mercy established the organisation in 1976. However, in recent years, MCS management have also included a focus on environmental responsibility as part of the everyday operations of the organisation. For some people environmental responsibility was seen as a distraction from what they saw as the “core business” of the organisation. This paper will outline the basis upon which MCS Management argue that environmental responsibility is also part of the organisation’s core business. This paper will also describe the ways in which environmental responsibility is practiced at MCS and the actions taken to secure staff support for environmental responsibility.

Environmental responsibility is also core business

The basis for seeing environmental responsibility as an essential part of the identity and mission of MCS has several foundations:

1. **Global life.** When MCS staff have been asked why we should focus on environmental responsibility the first, and strongest, reason given is that the continuation of life depends on it. The scientific evidence is that without significant changes in the way humans use resources we will have less habitable land, less food, less clean drinking water, less clean air and more extreme weather events¹. MCS staff understand that for their sake, and for their descendants, the whole of society, including MCS, has to change to a more sustainable way.
2. **Mercy tradition.** It can be argued that Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, was a person who “thought globally and acted locally”. She lived at the dawn of the Industrial Era and the environment was not the most significant issue. The major structural injustices she saw were the oppression imposed on the Irish people by colonisation and the oppression of the class system and patriarchy within Ireland. Catherine’s response was to help women and children gain the health, education and skills they needed to make their own way without a need for ongoing charity. Just as God called Catherine to see and address the issues of her time so too does God call the Sisters and their associates today. At its 2004 Chapter the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia reaffirmed Eco-Justice as one of the priorities that they believe God is calling them to address. As a Mercy ministry MCS also shares this priority.
3. **Mercy Values.** The Singleton Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, who established MCS, has five values (Care, Service, Justice, Respect, and Unity) all of which can be seen as requiring environmental responsibility. The value of Unity, in particular, puts before MCS a worldview that sees connections between people, organisations, countries and the environment. A person cannot have a partial or narrow commitment to Unity. It forever compels individuals and organisations to have relationships with others that grow in strength and breadth. Unity leads MCS to see that we can have a positive or negative impact on the environment and this impact affects other people and parts of creation.
4. **Church Teaching.** The Catholic Church has in recent years applied scripture and tradition in a much clearer teaching on the importance of creation and humanity’s place in it.² Back in 2001

¹ CSIRO, Bureau of Meteorology, and Australian Greenhouse Office *Climate Change in Australia: Homepage* <http://www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au/> (accessed 16 September 2011) and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change *Homepage* <http://www.ipcc.ch/> (accessed 16 September 2011)

² Australian Catholic Bishops Conference *Social Justice Statement: A New Earth, The Environmental Challenge*, (North Sydney: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2002) http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/pdf/2002_new_earth_environmental_challenge.PDF (accessed 16 September 2011); and Catholic Earthcare Australia (2004) “*The Gift of Water: A Statement from Catholic Earthcare Australia endorsed by Bishops of the Murray-Darling Basin*” http://www.catholicearthcare.org.au/pdf/TGOW_Full.pdf (accessed 16 September 2011); and McDonagh, Seán “Official Catholic Teaching on the Environment Still in its Infancy” Earthcare Mission’s Blog posted on September 22, 2010 <http://earthcaremission.wordpress.com/2010/09/22/official-catholic-teaching-on-the-environment-still-only-in-its-infancy/> (accessed 16 September 2011); and Pontifical Council For Justice And Peace *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), (especially Chapter 10) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html (accessed 16 September 2011); and

Pope John Paul II called all people to an “ecological conversion”³. Nine years later, Pope Benedict XVI extended this call for ecological conversion to the consumption and production processes in society when he said:

*It is becoming more and more evident that the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our life-styles and the prevailing models of consumption and production, which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view.*⁴

MCS as a ministry within the Catholic tradition is open to this teaching that it undergoes an ecological conversion and to renew its consumption and production processes.

5. **Stakeholder affinity.** MCS faces pressure to keep up with the environmental efforts of other not-for-profit organisations. In 2007, Australia had: 41,008 not-for-profit organisations; with 889,919 employees and 2,182,476 volunteers; with \$76b in income (of which only 33.5% was from Government and 9.5% or \$7.2b from donations/fundraising).⁵ In this crowded field each organisation has to win and keep the loyalty of staff, volunteers, clients and donors. MCS staff and volunteers need to see that we are addressing, and making progress on, the issues that matter to them. For some people the knowledge that we are addressing environmental responsibility matches their personal values and gives them a stronger motivation to work with us despite wages and situations that are not as attractive as those in other industries. Both donors, and increasingly clients, can decide to support any number of organisations and for its survival MCS needs for them to choose MCS. By developing a positive environmental image MCS has a better chance of winning the support of its stakeholders.

Pope Benedict XVI “Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps”, 11 January 2010, Vatican City http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100111_diplomatic-corps_en.html (accessed 16 September 2011); and

Pope Benedict XVI “If you want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation”, World Day of Peace Address: January 1st 2010, Vatican City http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html (accessed 16 September 2011); and

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Pope John Paul II “God made man the steward of creation”, General Audience: Wednesday 17 January 2001, Vatican City http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117_en.html (accessed 16 September 2011); and Pope John Paul II “Peace with God the Creator: Peace with All Creation” World Day of Peace Address: January 1st 1990, Vatican City

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html (accessed 16 September 2011)

³ Pope John Paul II “God made man the steward of creation”, General Audience: Wednesday 17 January 2001, Vatican City http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117_en.html (accessed 16 September 2011)

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI “If you want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation”, World Day of Peace Address: January 1st 2010 Vatican City, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics “Not-for-profit Organisations, Australia, 2006-07” Publication No. 8106.0 [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/8106.0~2006-07+\(Re-Issue\)~Main+Features~Overview?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/8106.0~2006-07+(Re-Issue)~Main+Features~Overview?OpenDocument) (accessed 16 September 2011)

6. **Financial savings.** Unnecessary energy use, water use and waste has a financial cost. We know that in NSW the following price increases are scheduled:

- 100% increase in charges for waste to landfill from 2010 to 2014;⁶
- 64% increase in electricity prices from 2010 to 2013;⁷
- 34% increase in water charges from 2009-2013;⁸
- 17 % increase in gas prices from 2010 to 2013;⁹ and
- Economists are also predicting that petrol prices will stay high and probably increase¹⁰.

By using less energy and water and generating less waste MCS saves money. This is money that can be redirected into additional services.

Being environmentally responsible

There are various degrees to which an organisation can strive to be environmentally responsible. The MCS goals¹¹ are to:

- Ensure more efficient and sustainable use of resources by:
 - a. Reducing electricity use per service output by 20% by 2020
 - b. Reducing transport fuel per km travelled by 10% by 2020
 - c. Reducing gas use at each site by 5% by 2020
 - d. Reducing waste to landfill by 20% by 2020
 - e. Reducing water used at each site by 10% by 2020
- Integrate environmental sustainability into all facets of business planning and operation
- Promote environmental sustainability to staff and stakeholders

⁶ Mike Ritchie "Clever Waste Contracts", *WME Magazine*, May 2010, 43-45

⁷ Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal "Fact Sheet: Regulated electricity retail tariffs for 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2013 – Final Report," 20 March 2010 <http://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/files/Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Regulated%20electricity%20retail%20tariffs%20for%201%20July%202010%20to%2030%20June%202013%20-%20Final%20Report%20-%20March%202010%20-%20WEBSITE%20DOCUMENT.PDF> (accessed 16 September 2011)

⁸ Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal "Fact Sheet: Prices for the Hunter Water Corporation Based on Determinations and Final Report," 17 July 2009 <http://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/files/Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Prices%20for%20the%20Hunter%20Water%20Corporation%20-%20Based%20on%20Final%20Determinations%20and%20Final%20Report%20-%20July%202009%20-%20Website%20Document.PDF> (accessed 16 September 2011)

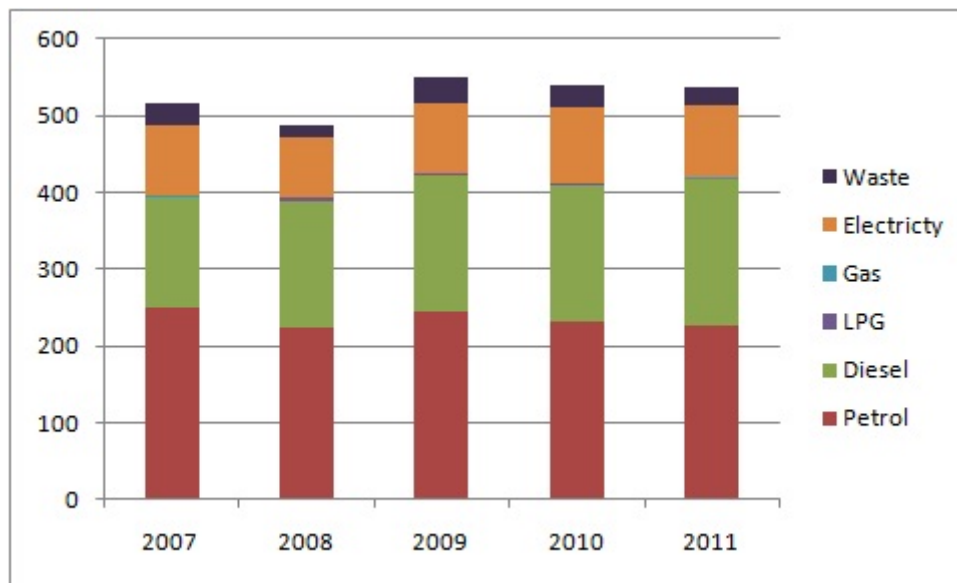
⁹ Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal "Fact Sheet: Review of regulated retail tariffs and charges for gas from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2013 – Final Report," <http://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/files/Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Review%20of%20regulated%20retail%20tariffs%20and%20charges%20for%20gas%20from%201%20July%202010%20to%2030%20June%202013%20-%20Final%20Report%20-%20WEBSITE%20DOCUMENT.PDF> (accessed 16 September 2011)

¹⁰ Australian Associated Press "Petrol price rises set to continue" *Courier Mail* September 13, 2010 <http://www.couriermail.com.au/money/petrol-price-rises-set-to-continue/story-e6freqoo-1226135357760> (accessed 16 September 2011)

¹¹ Mercy Community Services A.4 *Environmental Responsibility Policy* (2011), 2 http://www.mercyservices.org.au/images/stories/PDFs/Policies_page/A/A.4_Environmental_Policy.pdf (accessed 13 September 2011)

Each year when MCS conducts its environmental audit it considers only staff/volunteer use of transport fuels for MCS activities and each MCS sites electricity use, natural gas use, water use and waste going to landfill. MCS then uses the Australian Government's formula for calculating Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions¹² from its transport fuel, electricity, gas and waste. Graph 1 shows that over the past five years there have been minor variations in the amount and composition of GHG emissions.

Graph 1. MCS Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Composition By Source 2007-2011¹³



MCS has had some success in reducing its environmental impact from 2008-2011:

- 29% reduction in waste to landfill;
- 26% reduction in water use;
- 11% reduction in natural gas use;
- 4% reduction in electricity use; and
- 1.1% reduction in transport fuel use.

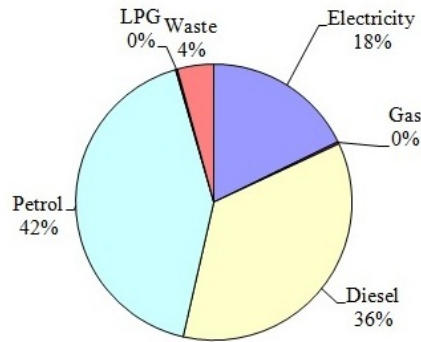
Graph 2 shows that by far the greatest source of MCS GHG emissions is transport fuels, typically around 80%. This is not surprising given that almost all of MCS services are provided in client's homes or by transporting clients to community appointments/activities.¹⁴

¹² Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) "National Greenhouse Accounts (NGA) Factors" 2011 <http://www.climatechange.gov.au/~media/publications/greenhouse-acctg/nga-factors-july-2011.pdf> (accessed 16 September 2011)

¹³ Mercy Community Services "Progress on environmental responsibility as at 13 September 2011" http://www.mercyservices.org.au/images/stories/ER_Progress.pdf (accessed 13 September 2011)

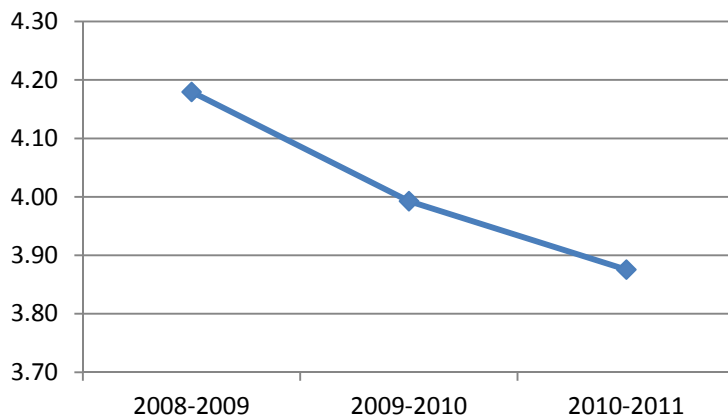
¹⁴ Mercy Community Services "Progress on environmental responsibility as at 13 September 2011"

Graph 2. MCS Greenhouse Gas Emissions By Source 2010-2011



MCS is aiming to deliver more services to people in need while at the same time reducing its waste and use of energy and water. As Graph 3 indicates MCS has delivered more service for less GHG each year for the past three years. From 2008 to 2011 MCS achieved a 7% reduction in emissions per service output.

Graph 3. Kg of CO₂e produced per MCS service output (hour, trip, meal, delivery) 2008-2011¹⁵



MCS is rightly proud of the modest turnaround in our environmental impact. The main steps taken to reduce the MCS environmental impact were:

General actions

- To join the NSW Government’s Sustainability Advantage program (and completing relevant modules) as a means of investigating and adopting a thorough, planned and resourced adoption of environmental responsibility;¹⁶
- To adopt a comprehensive Environmental Responsibility Policy with an annual Sustainability Action Plan;

¹⁵ Mercy Community Services “Progress on environmental responsibility as at 13 September 2011”

¹⁶ http://www.mercyservices.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=27

- To form an Environmental Responsibility workgroup with representatives from each site (This group meets every two months to ensure progress on the annual Sustainability Action Plan and address new environmental opportunities as they arise);
- To include environmental requirements and performance indicators in Manager and Coordinator position descriptions;
- That each program must review its environmental progress and incorporate environmental responsibility in its Annual Operational Plan;
- To have Annual Reports on MCS environmental impact (available on MCS website);
- To have comprehensive monitoring and public reporting on MCS efforts to reduce waste to landfill, water use and energy use by site, by program and per output of client service;¹⁷
- To provide monthly reports to staff on their fuel efficiency compared with the rest of the Mercy fleet and compared with the manufacturers estimated fuel efficiency;
- To provide a mandatory environmental education session for all MCS staff and ongoing education through at least four environmental articles a year in the monthly MCS newsletter;
- To provide a reward (afternoon tea) every three months for the site with the largest percentage improvement in energy use, waste to landfill and water use;
- To provide a reward (lunch) every year for the site with the largest percentage improvement in energy use, waste to landfill and water use;
- To establish a fundraising appeal for MCS environmental initiatives (total so far \$565);

Reducing electricity use

- To engage a consultant to conduct energy efficiency audits at the two largest sites;
- To replace an electric clothes dryer with a more efficient gas clothes dryer;
- In 2008 to install a solar hot water heater instead of an electric water heater at one site;
- In 2010 to replace a large electric hot water heater with a smaller more efficient instantaneous gas hot water heater at another site;
- To reduce unnecessary electrical appliances (e.g., number printers reduced from 19 in 2008 to 14 in 2011 aiming for 10 by 2014)
- To require all air conditioners be set between 18-21°C in winter and 23-25°C in summer;
- To conduct monthly site audits to ensure that lights/equipment are turned off and that air conditioners are set at the appropriate temperature – with feedback to staff when needed;
- To place signs in each office reminding staff to turnoff their computer, monitor and printer before they leave work;
- That all computers are programmed to shutdown automatically at 7pm (if staff forget to do so when they leave work).

¹⁷ Mercy Community Services "About Us: Environmental responsibility"
http://www.mercyservices.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=7 (accessed 13 September 2011)

Reducing transport fuel per km

- To progressively replace the MCS cars and buses with more efficient vehicles;
- To reallocate vehicles within the fleet to ensure that staff have the most efficient vehicle for their needs;
- To join the Fleetwise¹⁸ program (to reduce emissions and improve fleet management practices);
- To pilot the rostering of staff according to smaller geographic teams (hoping to reduce unnecessary travel between clients homes);
- To prepare a cost/benefit analysis on replacing the current rostering program with one that could reduce travel, reduce the necessity to (re)print rosters and is integrated with our payroll & accounts;
- To match staff contributions towards annually purchasing of GHG offsets for vehicles driven for personal use;
- To provide a reward (car detail) every three months to the driver of the MCS vehicle year with the largest percentage improvement in fuel efficiency.

Reducing waste to landfill

- To complete a review of administrative and purchasing procedures to reduce waste, paperwork, postage and travel for payment of bills;
- To display posters at all sites informing staff of MCS recycling options;
- To program all printers to print double sided by default;
- To reformat forms to reduce number of pages;
- To ensure that each office has at least as many recycle bins as waste bins;
- To conduct half yearly audits of waste and giving staff feedback on how much of the waste should more properly have been placed in the recycling bin.

Reducing water used at each site

- To replant the garden with drought tolerant plants (eliminating the need for watering);
- In 2008 to renovate a building – adding rainwater tanks connected to toilets and clothes washing machine; and
- In 2011 to install rainwater tanks at another site and connected these to toilets and clothes washing machine.

Integrating environmental responsibility in our core business

Taking environmental responsibility from an ideal to a reality at MCS will involve a multi-faceted approach over a long period of time.

¹⁸ <http://www.cleartheair.nsw.gov.au/fleetwise/>

There is a hierarchy with which MCS approaches implementing environmental responsibility:

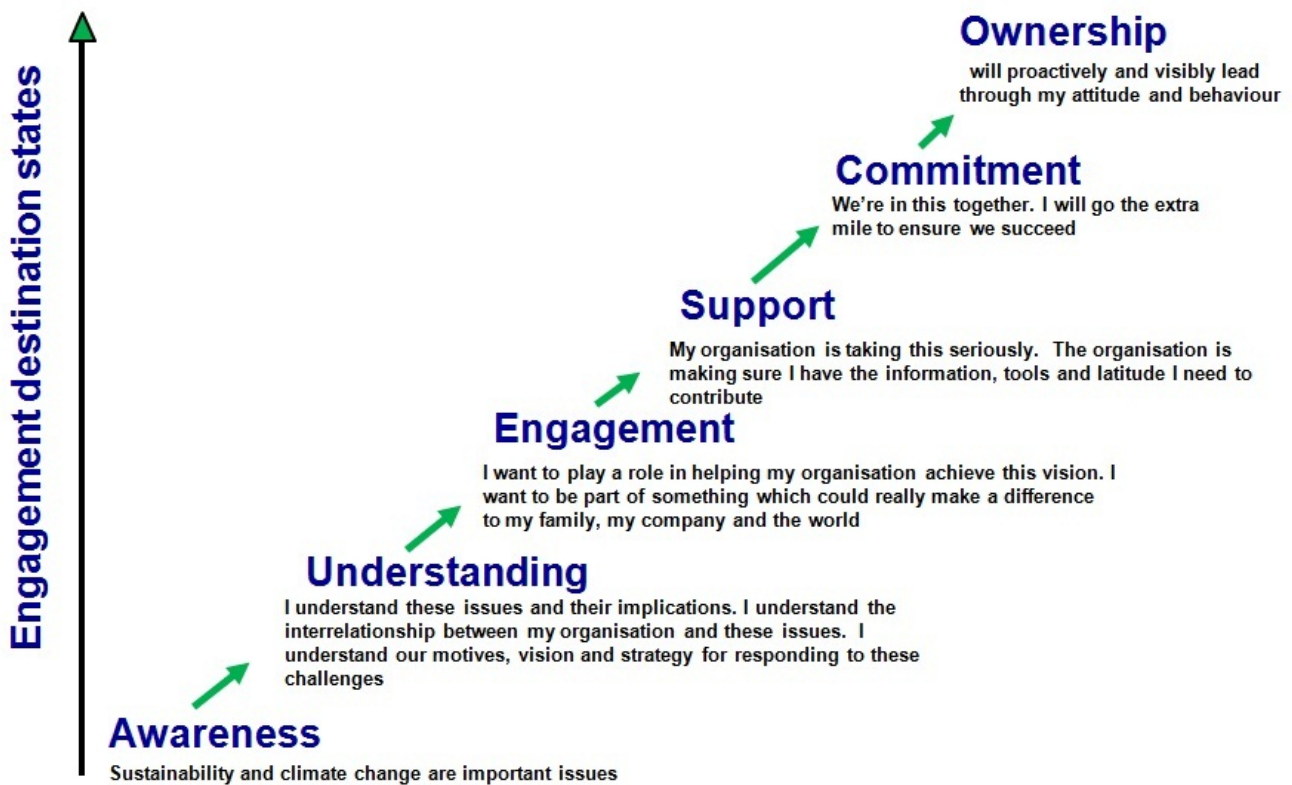
1. Eliminate the environmental risk
2. Engineer better environmental results
3. Encourage better environmental results

The first option is to eliminate the environmental risk. An example of this was unnecessary printers being removed rather than just buying more efficient printers or putting a timer on them to ensure they power down at the end of the day. By eliminating equipment or processes we permanently remove their ability to have a negative impact on the environment. In reality there is limited scope in eliminating equipment and processes without compromising services.

The second option is to engineer better environmental results by providing more efficient equipment and processes. Adopting more efficient equipment and processes reduces the reliance on human behaviour. This option is often still vulnerable to people misusing the equipment leading to a reduced environmental outcome. For example, staff with a more efficient car can still continually use the air conditioner and accelerate too heavily resulting in fuel efficiency that is worse than the manufacturer's estimation.

The final option is to encourage better environmental results via education, reward/punishment, and social pressure (from peers and management). At MCS, waste and recycling reduction strategies are examples of the encouragement approach. Staff are given education on what can be recycled, there are posters reminding them of recycling options, they are given the bins for recycling, waste bins are occasionally audited but ultimately they are the ones who need to reduce their waste and recycle more.

The MCS environmental responsibility journey was initiated by MCS Management. In one sense this has been helpful as staff/volunteers can see that the Management Team is committed to environmental responsibility. It does leave the organisation with the challenge of ensuring that the rest of the staff understand and support the environmentally responsible approach. Environmental responsibility will not become MCS practice unless the dominant organisational culture is supportive. The strategy at MCS has been to establish environmental practices and consistently reinforce their compliance so that these changes become permanent. The aim is to have most people saying environmental responsibility is the "new normal" or "the done thing" at MCS. For example that: we turn off unneeded lights/equipment, we recycle, we drive more smoothly, we keep electronic copies (rather than paper). Eventually MCS wants to have a culture of sustainability where staff at all levels of the organisation are suggesting and leading environmental improvements (see graph 5).

Graph 5. A Culture of Sustainability¹⁹

Some of the means MCS has adopted to facilitate a culture of sustainability are:

- Publicly recognizing the success of individuals and sites in reducing their environmental impact so they might have a sense of feeling valued and involved;
- Using rewards that also bring the team together to celebrate and share the reward (afternoon tea or lunch);
- Including an element of playful competition between people and sites for the best environmental performance;
- Providing staff/volunteers with the freedom to voice any concerns about environmental improvement plans;
- Giving staff/volunteers opportunities to contribute their ideas on how the program/site can improve its environmental progress;
- Promoting a sense that MCS Management care about the well-being of employees and the planet;
- Providing a translation of saved energy/water/waste into a currency valued by staff e.g. extra client service;
- Consistency of message and actions; and
- Providing regular feedback to people on environmental progress.

¹⁹ Graph provided by Sonja Duncan, of SD Environmental Management Pty Ltd to the Sustainability Advantage Staff Engagement Workshop, Newcastle, July 2010

Future plans/hopes

MCS still sees itself as being at the beginning of a long environmental responsibility journey. It is a journey that has its foundations in how MCS defines itself. Thus far, and into the immediate future, this journey aims to reduce the negative impact MCS has on the environment. Some of the next environmental actions that MCS has planned are:

- Implement the recommendations of the energy use audits at Union St, Tighes Hill and West Wallsend sites;
- Increase recycling and composting efforts at all sites;
- Explore ways of reducing our vehicle use with better rostering;
- Seek funding for photo-voltaic cells at Union St, Tighes Hill and West Wallsend;
- Seek funding for a solar hot water system at Union St, Tighes Hill;
- Continue efforts at reducing our vehicle fuel use with better driving behaviour; and
- Replace fleet vehicles with more fuel efficient vehicles (when they are due for replacement).

Eventually MCS hopes to be in a position where it can talk about having a positive impact on the environment rather than just limiting its negative impact. With this perspective, environmental responsibility is an ongoing journey not a destination that can be achieved. This journey has helped to redefine what Living Mercy means for both our identity and our way of operating.

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