

Interview Sathya Sai College 20/11/2020

Jeremy Melder 00:00

Hello, my name is Jeremy Melder, and i'm the presenter from Beaming Green. Before we start, I would like to acknowledge that this podcast is being held on the traditional lands of the Bundjalung people and paying our respects to elders both past, present and emerging. The Beaming Green podcast is a weekly pod, which will help you to take out some of the stress and confusion about how to live your life more sustainably. And we do this by introducing people that have first hand experience and expertise in all aspects of sustainability. So you can get some amazing insights. You can implement simple and practical solutions to enhance your life and the lives of your family. In Episode 13. Today, I want to announce the winner of the bees wax wrap kit, proudly supplied by Bee Folk. And the winner is Jane and Jane, I've sent you an email and would love to get your address details so that we can send out that prize to you as soon as possible. Now I've got an idea I'd love your input with as a listener, you're probably, if you celebrate Christmas thinking what do I want to get or give to someone that I care about during Christmas? Now we're wanting to get some ideas from you about what would be the perfect, sustainable gift to give or to receive now I'd love your ideas. And if you can go to the Beaming Green website and put in a comment there, or to social media and put a comment, I'd love to hear from you as to what would be a great, sustainable gift to give or receive. Today I'm going to be speaking with Isabela Kesli- Frantti, who is from the Sathya Sai College in Murwillumbah. Isabella helps with their sustainability program. But we're also going to go in depth into a little bit about what Sathya Sai college is all about. And I am sure it will be interesting listening for you. Let's welcome Isabela, welcome to Beaming Green.

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 02:37

Thank you, Jeremy. I feel very honored to be here with you today.

Jeremy Melder 02:40

It's really lovely to have you here. And look, we met i'm trying to, remember now was it four years ago,

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 02:47

four years ago?

Jeremy Melder 02:48

And at Sathya Sai school? And what's what's been happening in the last four years for you?

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 02:57

Well, I think we started this journey together. Yeah, because it was when our school actually started to become more active with environmental practices. And I would say from the very start, that it's actually a team that can make it possible. So first of all, I think that the values, our human values, and the culture of supporting each other that we have at our school with a strong presence of the families as well, has really paved the way to success in terms of our environmental practices at our school. Yeah, and in addition to that, counting with a wider community. As you know, I think that Tweed Shire is an amazing area. Beautiful isn't it. So many champions, I would say, are promoting the positive environmental changes, because there is a difference between environmental awareness and positive

environmental behavior. And what we see here in our Valley, is that people really practice they walk their talk and to become a habit, and we really use the habits and use the practices on the databases, yeah, is a huge transformation that requires effort. Therefore, counting on the local champions of the Tweed Shire, in particular to help us on our journey has played a huge role. And I remember having this meeting with you an Andia. Yeah. And our staff and we were together, creating a vision of using the Boomerang bags and having workshops and that was one of the amazing projects.

Jeremy Melder 04:43

A lot of fun

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 04:44

together.

Jeremy Melder 04:45

We have so much fun wasn't and what I really loved about that was it wasn't just you know, the principal of the school and the teachers participating but you had kids participating and their parents coming in, you know, I don't know about my upbringing was that my parents really didn't participate in many projects in schools. So I think well done to your school for actually getting that family participation. And they must think highly of, of your organization, your school to want to participate.

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 05:19

Yes, it's one of the main principles of the founder of our school is that educators work together with the families to bring up the children. And it's not only about character, strength, or only about curriculum, academic work is the two together to actually give the opportunity for the student to have a holistic development during this stage of their lives that is so important.

Jeremy Melder 05:49

I think it's very good from a development perspective, isn't it if you have some philosophy or a belief, now I'm really interested, if you could share a little bit about the philosophy of Sathya Sai college, and what what it's about so that our listeners can know,

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 06:09

Sathya Sai college is an independent school, and the founder, Sathya Sai Baba, he had very, very clear objectives and principles when it comes to education. First of all, he would always say that education should be for free. Yeah, that every citizen, every child should have access to good education. And that education should not only focus on academic achievements, but also character strengths and spirituality in a way that is, he can be denominational, because it's about really cultivating the inner life, but also accepting the different belief systems, the different beliefs the different faiths. Yeah, so it says cool that even though it's called non-denominational. The philosophy encompasses opportunities for cultivating the rich inner life. So for example, we start our day with silence sitting. It's that moment that we sit still as a school as one. And we can really focus within before we start with our day's routines.

Jeremy Melder 07:27

Yeah. And that's something that's missing in our in our lives. Now, I think that's been something that generations ago that there was a lot more consciousness in terms of going to school, there was a consciousness, there's a spirituality and so on. And that's the one thing that really stood out for me when I visited your school was that, you know, trying to build a person from the inside out, you know, that character of themselves. And it's not converting them in any particular way. But it's to say, well, what's within yourself, that needs to come out and to express yourself in the world. And that's something that I felt that your organization, your school, your teachers, really encompassed that and really encouraged students to do that? How is that going? Is it Do you find that that is somewhat challenging at times? Or is it something that you feel like your students really are embracing through over time that they see the benefits of this?

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 08:30

I think that because we humans, are complex beings, we cannot ever see a life or a particular type of phase in the development of an individual in a dualistic way, because the challenges are always opportunities for growth. So of course, that every individual will go through processes that may involve negative emotions, however, is the way that we deal with that. It's by allowing one to get in touch with their emotions, and see where they're coming from, in having that ability to actually reflect upon it. Yeah. And ask questions that really leads to an authentic being understanding. And it's a process. It's not like, let's fix this. It's a process. So it's not linear. Yeah. But we believe that every seed that is planted when it comes to water, we promote in terms of values of our school and also practices. They are there and they are going to blossom. At the right time at the right place. Sometimes we hear amazing testimonials straightaway. Yeah. It's amazing to actually hear the children use the language of values and make choices. reflections based on their own experiences, because we know that when they are forming their personality, that's when they're forming their character and their habits. Yeah. So if we are providing them with opportunities to focus on reflection and values that promote healthy life, healthy relationships, yeah, good citizens for this planet. Yeah. I think that, definitely, they will tap into that. And they will teach us as well. Because as humans, do, we have our moments. And sometimes I don't think it's uncommon that we will hear them actually given insights that we say thank you. That's a beautiful insight for my life as well. Yeah. So it's a it's not a one way road is actually an ongoing dialectic process that we teach. And we are taught, I am not a teacher, particularly. But I think that when we are at a school education is the main role. And regardless of the role that we have, we are aware that whatever we do whatever we say, we are giving an impact on those lives. So it's,

Jeremy Melder 11:17

what would you say it's following up with your own integrity? It's finding what your integrity, and how you can express that in the world? And with other people? Yes, yeah, yes. And I think it's beautiful, what you were saying that, you know, whilst you are a teacher, you can still learn from your students. And it's a two way dialogue. It's not just a one way, it's not like an authoritative type of procedure, is it all process, it's where you actually, obviously want to impart knowledge to your students. But you can also learn something from your students. And I think that's a beautiful thing about life is that we're always evolving and learning and growing, until we leave. And that's a great thing to say that. Now, I see this as a sustainability subject, because it's all about human sustainability. But I also wanted to talk about what you're doing in terms of, you know, educating your students with the environment, what, what are you finding the children's attitude to the environment? Do you feel like there's a sense of

concern about what's happening to our planet? And and what are you doing to help them to feel empowered?

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 12:35

Well, in our school, we do have an eco committee, just that waves so that for teachers that we have different roles, and we do and interact with the students in the wider community, in different areas of sustainability. However, the whole school community, all the teaching staff, and admin staff, everybody has embraced this cause because first of all, we need to be passionate about it, we need to do it in order to instill that in the children. And if you ask if they are concerned about the future, I think that as educators, and also I'm at the moment finishing my degree in marine in science, Marine Science and management, one of the particular aspects that I really appreciate in both fields of work and study is that we are solution driven. And that really helps us keep the positivity happening. Yeah. Despite despite the problems that we see that are occurring, and I think we need to deal with the facts. It's important to also understand that humans have an amazing capacity to solve solve problems that we have been responsible for. Yeah. And I think that it's also up to us to provide these opportunities for the students. So one of one of the examples that I can give to you is, I think that providing students with opportunities to go in the wider community and do some form of service, which was also one of Sai Baba's main teachings gives them so many different insights into life. Yeah, because first they see the value of giving and serving, that they are being actually giving something to a community that goes beyond their own family, beyond their own friends. And that extends to nature and the wildlife. Yeah, so we do have various service clubs, that's what we call them, and they will be focusing on different areas. So for example, we have in year one, they do the dolphin club and they will be focusing on the marine environment. They will be focusing on dolphins. And it's also an opportunity to support one of the local organizations that we have in our Tweed Shire, then we have a service club that focus on Fingal Head coastcare. And they go out there, and they're planting trees in their little rain forest, which in the fall and endangered rain forest, and they're learning from those who have already done so much in their lives. There's a an amazing group of very active members, that they're teaching the students, the school, the wider community, so passing on their wisdom and experience and knowledge. So it's a great opportunity to for the students to learn about respect and appreciation for receiving that type of knowledge that is not found in books. And the way that they are engaged with these activities, we can tell that they really feel that they are doing something important, not only for that moment, but they are literally planting the seeds for the future. And they know the repercussions of their actions. So the more we engage students in coming up with innovative solutions, or using their creativity, for thinking about the future that they want to see. I think that's an ideal way to actually talk about sustainability. So let's not focus on the problem of plastic. Yeah, but how can we solve the problem of Yeah, what is it that we can do in our lives to start with on a daily basis, and then you just go with, with the ripple effect, like the wider community, and on the planet, but that's how it should start. As we know, it starts with our daily practices. And we our might, I say, very good at that, because our school actually has a core philosophy with the human values that also extend to sustainable practices. Because when we make choices, we are looking after the earth, we are showing we care for the planet, we are showing that we care for humans, because all that ends up affecting us anyway. So we have policy of red lid been free. Yeah, school grounds. In that way, we have reduced dramatically the amount of litter that is found on the school grounds. We also make sure that we keep it fun, and it's not judgmental, but we do the Wednesday's waste free so the students bring their lunch boxes, and there is a survey that's carried out

so that we can check in, encourage the students to bring nude food in their lunch boxes like that. Yeah. And that it's become a habit now. And they know. And of course, we don't want to bring anyone to shame. So we need to do it with sensitivity as well, because we want to promote the positive behavior yet, we need to understand that we all at some point in time, we'll have a piece of plastic will have some form.

Jeremy Melder 18:23

And we all been there really. We've all made mistakes of that sort in that behavioral thing that we've you know, we've learned how to behave like that. And now it's like, unlearning that.... learning exactly. And you know, we still will, I will I will speak for myself, I continue to make mistakes as well. But it's all about well, what can I learn from that mistake and keep learning and and that's what why we in this program, really while we're doing Beaming Green is to try and find out ways that we can have more impact and make changes without, you know, feeling like you said that you're being shamed into doing it, but something that you feel empowered to do. Because you want a better planet because you want a better environment to live in. It's not just for our kids, but the future generations that we're looking at, isn't it?

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 19:11

Absolutely. And because habits, they start at that age. So if we are aware enough of what we want our children to actually have in terms of the way they live, they live their lives. So in terms of how they live their lives, their lifestyle, the earlier we start with sustainable practices, the better and we know that they go home. They go to homes that actually support that kind of behavior, but also it allows them to have conversations and educate their parents. Yeah, because when they say what happened at school, what they did, they are both having an opportunity of mutual growth or they will learn from a B or C different practices that they do. They really think it's a great idea. And that's how we change our community. So this intergenerational learning opportunity is vital for promoting the changes that we want to see. And kids are great at that.

Jeremy Melder 20:14

Absolutely. I remember and I correct me if I'm wrong here, but I remember when we were doing the boomerang bags, that's a group of kids wrote letters to a supermarket chain, to encourage him to get a red bin (For soft plastics). And, you know, I remember walking up to Sunnyside Plaza and seeing this red bin, I was like, wow, that's the impact these children have on changing an organization's value set in terms of changing the environment, a small step, but it's a great step, if you know what I mean. And I think that was your school that did that a number of years ago, I stood we still now Andia and I take these up to the red bin and use that, you know,

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 21:00

that's right. For the soft blessing. Yeah, absolutely. Yes. It was a beautiful initiative from our teacher, Steph Banks.

Jeremy Melder 21:10

That's right. Steph did a wonderful job there. I'd like to acknowledge her for that too she was wonderful in that. And it was great. It's still there, which is still going. So that's something a legacy that was started, I don't know, three or four years ago.

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 21:24

Yes. And the important thing is that teachers are very good at eliciting or having opportunities to allow the students to come up with their own solutions, because it's far more valuable when they are the ones actually taking action. It's far more empowering, and it gives more meaning to them and to the action. They'll never forget. And that's what we want, we want to see them taking the initiative in the right direction.

Jeremy Melder 21:56

Yeah. And, and I don't, so you mentioned that Wednesdays, you're doing this whole mood, I love the term nude food. But I also the understanding that you've really reduced the amount of soft plastic and plastics and you know, bottles and so on coming into your school to quite a substantial amount.

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 22:18

Yes, we have we do have surveys and audits to assess the amount of landfill that regenerate in the beginning of the year. And towards the end of the year. That's actually our topic for this year. So every year, we have changed the focus to a particular type of litter that we want to educate ourselves on. Yeah, so this year has been landfill. Yeah. And so in that way, yes. I think that hardly ever we see nowadays. Glad wrap. boxes, that's really, really, really rare. Yeah, or Ziploc bags or even poppers. So there is this constant awareness and campaign and our sustainability monitors, who are mentored by our other eco committee member, our science teacher, Jane Fairly, yeah, they really work together on a weekly basis. And they do a lot of jobs to really manage our waste. So they are really doing the hands on job. But I think that like them, I can relate to many people that start doing waste management, it becomes an addiction, because you really want to understand the behavior of humans. As you are going through the, you know, the bean, you want to understand what is happening, why it's happening, how we are improving, and then you want to change whatever needs to be changed to reduce the impact. Yeah, that we have on our landfills, which is so such a priority, I think, in any country. So I have occasionally just walked past and I have, you know, just spotted the sustainability monitors, going through the bins and having a look out of curiosity, and then they actually make questions and comments of something that may not be in the right being so they are very pro-active to come and give suggestions about what to do. Yeah. How it should be changed. So, yes, I think the hands on experience is fantastic for students.

Jeremy Melder 24:34

Hmm, yeah, I think it's very important. So another thing that I noticed, Isabela is that you know, your gardens, you know, you've got lots of vegetables grown there. I saw some nice papayas here the other day when I was walking past as well. And that seems to be very well maintained and looked after. Is it something that you get students participating in doing this and learning about how to grow their own garden and presuming This is all done by students and and some of your teachers, is that right?

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 25:11

Absolutely. We started with our gardening activities a long, long time ago. And Miss Kay McNaught who has had different roles at our school, and it's still like she's still very active at our high school at the moment. gardening has always been her passion. And then when she retired, we were very fortunate to have Mrs. Carleone, our librarian, yeah, who is the gardening coordinator. So Mrs. Corleone now takes groups of students to do the garden activities. So that we will of course, encompass weeding, planting, sowing, harvesting, pruning, all different types of activities that will keep those gardens really healthy, and very diverse. As you can see, we also have a couple of bush Tucker plants already.

Jeremy Melder 26:07

What are some bush tucker plants? Do you know them? Um, I put you on the spot.

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 26:12

Well, I actually have them too in my garden at the moment. Oh, yeah. I do love the dianella.

Jeremy Melder 26:17

Okay.

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 26:18

It's a blueish purple Berry. Yeah. That we actually have at Fingal. Yeah, we do have the finger lime. Oh, yes. It's a very nice Bush Tucker as well. Yeah. And you know, midgion berries, there quite a few berries around available that are actually wonderful. And, you know, highly nutritious as well. And they attract the native fauna. Yeah. So that's another very important aspect about having our gardens. Yes, because they provide habitat and also food for so many different types of, you know, insects and, like the beautiful butterfly that we see there everywhere. We also have a native beehives. Oh, so yes, it is wonderful to see native birds and insects in our gardens. Yeah. And they harvest Mrs. candiani usually will do either, you know, she will make like a pesto and then serve it with some carrots or you know, there'll be some finger lime that is served or lime juice, there's always something which will be appreciated by all the students. So they have actually have the opportunity to go through the whole cycle of planting, harvesting and then eating, we actually connect our gardening practices with our compost. Okay. And in that way, we actually have zero organic waste Wow compost turns into soil that is using our garden. Yeah. So that's also another way that we have tackled a lot of our waste. Yeah, to actually reducing the amount that goes out of our school, and is actually very well utilized within our school grounds. Yeah, so we are very grateful to our librarian, and gardening coordinator. Yes. Mrs canoli.

Jeremy Melder 26:21

Yeah. You have other extra-curricular activities that you do. after school programs, what are some of those programs that are being offered?

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 28:24

We have a program called bird's eye view, which is offered fortnightly after school hours and outdoors. This program comes under the initiative from New South Wales Government. Yeah, which is take me outside so any school can have access to. Okay, so it's a way of New South Wales Government and the education industry in general, yeah, to promote more outdoor learning opportunities for the schools,

which is what we want to see more and more of course. So with our bird's eye view, we are a team of myself as a sustainability person of our school, but also parents, parents that actually offer the knowledge, skills, dedication and time to provide students with opportunities to go on field trips. So we have explored actually different ecosystems that go from rain forest from the aberdein gi Mount Warning Wollumbin to all the way to Pottsville and Hastings point like the rocky shores. And in that context, we are going to always have a lesson on what that habitat provides for the communities ecological communities that are found there. So the students have a very hands on experience and gain an understanding of these important ecosystems in our reachire. So with that, we actually Surely, sometimes also take some opportunities to have the students involved in programs that they can actually voice their concerns and care through focusing on the solution. So with the green Innovation Awards, we had a campaign, which was based on the waterways in our Valley. And they students came up with a video campaign to educate the children about alien fish species and alien plant species that are found in our waterways. So they did the research. They filmed and they spoke, and when it was edited, it became video campaign. Wow. So yes, that goes from very spontaneous activities, which is also a great opportunity for socializing. Yeah, parents meeting parents, parents meeting other children, and vice versa. It also having a wonderful time learning about our local environment.

Jeremy Melder 31:05

Now, I guess none of this would have been really possible without a good leadership regime. So I know that I've been, we've been blessed by Cal, the principal, helping immensely with our Boomerang Bag thing. But I know that, you know, that's, you know, the leadership that she's shown through the throughout the organization has been, you know, helping to steer that ship in the right direction. And I think she's done a wonderful job, as well, as you know, all this. Teachers, the students, and also the parents, because you need parents to participate as well, if you'd like to just talk about that you felt about that leadership.

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 31:51

I feel very grateful. And I think you are absolutely right. It's the culture of the leaders of any organization that will really promote that culture. It's the culture of the leader, that will be the culture of the organization. Yeah. So if we have a great leader like Cal, yeah, that is so open for innovativeness, and for the right practices in every area, including environmental practices, which she's very passionate about. So, of course, that the school will thrive on that Cal has been pivotal for all these changes. She has been present in different events. And, you know, like, I don't know, because we know how our leaders, especially principals are so busy, but Cal will always find time to go to events and participate in collaborate with other schools to promote this exchange of information, because one will learn from each other. So I really have great respect for her, she has allowed us to have so many opportunities for growth, and for connection with a wider community. We also have had the support of our business manager, Siva, yeah. And now we have our new deputy principal, Michael Forester, who's also very open for sustainable practices. Fantastic. So we are very lucky to have our leaders on board with all the sustainability practices

Jeremy Melder 33:27

I've got to say it's really important that you do have that, because it brings in binds this whole community spirit, so to speak together to get things done. Speaking of community, you've also had, you

know, other organizations help and support you as well. Now, I think one of them was or from memories are correct me if I'm wrong, one of them was the Tweed Shire Council, but there's some other organizations wonderful,

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 33:53

I love how we are talking about these amazing people. Because that's what can really change. Yeah, if we don't have a culture and a network of people who think alike, it's really hard to make any change. So the fact that the Tweed Shire has always been there, supporting us and you know, taken us in right directions when it comes to opportunities to interact with other organizations or promoting events. Yeah, yes. I don't think we would have gone so far. But yes, through the Tweed Shire Council, so we have had opportunities for incursions on liter literacy, when we learned like how to recycle, right. We've the Northeast waste an amazing NGO. Yes, I highly recommend for school. Yeah, we also have had the opportunity to interact with the sustainable schools network, another amazing organization, and it's just growing. Our relationship with these organizations is just evolving constantly, and also eco schools, eco Schools has been also pivotal for the changes. Because sometimes we do require grants, to be able to change or set up some systems like, for example, a different bin system that will help everyone make the right choice. So it's thanks to some of the grants that we got from Eco schools and also the Landcare. program. Yeah, wonderful And when you saw the papayas, in that Landcare program with Woolies, yeah, they gave us an opportunity to actually apply for a grant and we succeeded. And you, there are so many projects, but one very important one as well. Is the community grant that we got, yeah. For the bush regeneration project, it our high school. Oh,

Jeremy Melder 35:56

yes. I forgot about your high school as well.

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 35:59

Yeah. There are some amazing projects happening there. But yes, so the community grants allowed us to actually work with the wider community and local bushi regenerators and actually eradicate some weeds and start to propagate in plants, some native plants more so the rain forest that's particular of the Dungie area, and in that way, attract more of the wildlife and provide them with Habitat. Mm hmm.

Jeremy Melder 36:31

So, important, isn't it? Isabela, I want to just say thank you so much for coming on to Beaming Green today. It's been very insightful. I, as I said, I've really enjoyed working with your school. I think you all as a team work really well together and support one another. But yes, I thank you for being on beaming green.

Isabela - Sathya Sai College 36:59

Thank you so much for the opportunity. Jeremy, I wish you all the best what an amazing project.

Jeremy Melder 37:04

Thank you so much. Thank you for being part of the Beaming Green podcast. The music for this podcast is produced by Dave Weir. Now we need more people to get on board and raise awareness about sustainability and climate change. The more of us that are shining the light on these issues for

more governments and business leaders. Listen. We would love you to subscribe to our podcast and share and engage in social media so that we can get some traction lets to support one another and envision a brighter future. Thanks for listening. II. See you next time.