PRIMARY SCHOOL PLANT TREES

Ballarat's youngest environmental leaders have taken action that will have an inter-generational community impact. Twenty pupils from St Patrick's Parish Primary School Ballarat planted productive fruit trees with Food is Free Inc. volunteers, at the organisation's Green Space for Schools Tree Day held on Friday, July 26.

They were one of many groups of students from schools around the region that participated in planting on the nationally recognised day. Small hands planting small trees that made a big statement on the importance of caring for our environment, the power of grassroots community, connecting with food and giving back to community.

THE CO-ORDINATOR

Ballarat-based company Fifteen Trees co-ordinated the tree planting at the Food is Free Green space, purchasing trees from Avalon Nursery with funds donated by Harrison Funerals. The company, started by Colleen Fillipa in 2009 in Ballarat, encourages corporates to fund the planting of trees by community groups in their local area. Fifteen Trees has facilitated the planting of 134,460 trees since 2009.

"The company gets to see photos of where their trees have been planted so it gives them a bit of a connection to the community and where the trees have gone," Ms Filippa said.

"There is a whole host of benefits to planting trees. Trees take carbon out of the atmosphere, keep our soils, rivers and creeks healthy, have a cooling effect on our urban environment, produce flowers for the bees and fruit for us."

Planet Ark research shows a five per cent increase in tree cover can reduce nearby daytime temperatures by 2.3 degrees. A large healthy tree can take in up to 93 kg of carbon dioxide and 1.4 kg of air pollution a year.

Urban and Environmental Planner Dr Tony Matthews said in a statement trees may be the most cost effective and positive urban intervention available.

THE YOUNG LEADERS

For St Patrick's Parish Primary School grade four environmental captains Olivia and Noah, Friday's excursion was the first time they had planted a tree. Both said they had fun with the planting and would do it again in the future. "I have learnt it takes a lot of hard work and it is very messy. It is a process. You have to be patient," Noah said.

The excursion was part of the school's healthy living program that included a focus on sustainability.

St Patrick's Parish Primary School teacher Kathy Finn said the pupils would take back their knowledge and share it with their classmates and the community.

THE VOLUNTEERS

Planet Ark research has found 70 per cent of Australians believe individual actions can have an impact on global environmental issues like climate change. Tree planting is a climate change action that does not have to wait for politics. Food is Free volunteers show individuals can make a tangible impact by growing trees themselves for community.

Anyone can access the Food is Free Green Space which grows produce for sharing and functions as an educational space. Food is Free chair Bec Djordjevic said she wanted the pupils to be able to come back in 10 or 15 years time and pick fruit from the trees they planted. "This goes far beyond just planting a tree," she said. "That tree will now feed the community in the future and they have had a part to play in that. It is about getting the kids on board to lead the future. How good would it be if on National Tree Day next year all the kids went and planted one in their backyard and it becomes this tradition that all kids plant something on National Tree Day."

A number of planting events were scheduled in Ballarat and the region for National Tree Day, held on Sunday, July 28. Visit treeday.planetark.org/find-a-site/ for details for 2020.

Article courtesy of the Ballarat Courier, text by Rochelle Kirkham and photos by Kate Healy.

Photos:

1. *St Patrick's Parish Primary School pupils Declan (Grade 6), Harry (Grade 1) and Abraham (Grade 2) plant trees at the Food Is Free Green Space..*
2. *St Patrick's Parish Primary School pupils Isabella (Grade 6), Tahliska (Grade 1), George (Grade 3) and Isaac (Prep).*
3. *St Patrick's Parish Primary School pupils Noah (Grade 4), Olivia (Grade 4), Fifteen Trees founder Colleen Filippa and Hannah (Grade 4).*
4. *St Patrick's Parish Primary School pupils Romy (Grade 1), Elizabeth (Grade 5), Isabella (Prep) and Anna (Grade 5).*