



Samaira - Environmental action at high school

What was your goal and what did you want to achieve?

This year I really wanted to make a change at my high school, mainly because in high school there aren't as many things you can do that are hands-on like you do in primary school. For me personally it was a big shock, the transition from getting grubby in school gardens to then just going to explicit learning on worksheets.

There weren't many engaging activities on environmental action at my school and I really wanted to create something accessible to all year levels. I wanted it to be active so that's where the idea of a school garden came from. Because I thought if you're out there actually building something then you're going to learn about it.

My first step was joining my student representative council which we call Synergy.

Within Synergy we have four portfolio groups and the one I joined was wellbeing, which also focused on environmental wellbeing. In there I joined a smaller group of four and we were able to start proposing ideas to the higher council.

Within our group we started reaching out to different networks and started brainstorming how the project was going to work.

Who else did you work with?

We are working with the teacher who tried to do the garden before, which we're very fortunate to be working together, because we've combined our learning and her experience.

She's also a STEM teacher so her students are brainstorming a hydroponic system for the garden bed that we're planning to build. If we didn't meet her we wouldn't have the support and the networking that we have now.

My home group teacher was very supportive, especially in the early stages because I didn't come up with this project idea straight away. I went through a lot of trial and error and it obviously got very frustrating. I felt like, I might as well just do something really simple and get it done.

I was losing motivation but my home group teacher talked me through it and she helped me brainstorm.

You can't do this alone. Without the four people I have in my group and the teachers and all of that support, I would not have been able to even have my voice heard.

What did you find challenging?

I feel like I faced a lot but I was able to work around them, there were learning curves! The first and main one was when we were picking out a place to put the garden bed.

My high school is the first vertical high school in South Australia and that means that all of the space around it that we thought we could use for a garden is all public property. We looked at putting it inside the building but that wasn't going to work, so the only two options we had were a terrace or a balcony.

We started thinking about the terrace but it has really high walls so there's no sunlight and we found out when we were planning that a couple of years ago someone had tried to do a similar project and it had failed because there was no lighting and no water drainage system.

We decided to relocate to the balcony because there was already a built-in concrete garden bed and behind it is an open nook-space we can use. We have planned it out and we've made floor plans but we haven't actually started building the garden bed.

How have you shared your work?

We are a very online based school so a lot of our platforms were used to get the message out. We had a lot of older year levels very keen to be a part of this project. We used a lot of branding and word of mouth.

What did you enjoy most?

I have really enjoyed immersing myself into the school community because my first year of being in high school was really daunting.

I think this experience was really good for coming back into the community and coming in with a really loud noise, like I came with a bang into high school! I really made a name for myself. The environment is something I'm very passionate about and the fact that I was able to open this up for other people as well is something that makes me feel really good about myself.

Next steps?

This project is going to be something that is going to continue on for the next few years, hopefully I'll still be a part of it. If not, I feel very confident that I've left a very good base for older kids to take care of it.

Your advice to other students?

Network, a lot! You need to network a lot with people, it's not just about making friends. I think it's mainly understanding who are the right people to work with you and who are the right people to go to when you need help.

There's a really big difference between people that will stick with you through the whole thing and people who are just there for a bit and move on.

This case study was transcribed from an interview. These are Samaira's words and opinions.