

# SWIG awards 2015: Communication category

## eco action games

### water saving theme



**eco action games is a social business with a mission to help people become more sustainable through fun and games. We invent, produce and sell water-themed, multi-generational games that educate and engender water saving behavioural changes through interaction and play.**

We run 'eco action playgrounds', which consist of giant versions of our games in: schools, company offices, community groups, festivals and museums to inspire learning in informal and relaxed settings. Our games include water saving versions of: snakes and ladders, twister, trumps, bingo and play your cards right; all well known, traditional games that people are generally familiar with as they have played them as children and/or now play with their children.

Our company's mission is to provide education, engagement and positive behaviour change in the area of water, and other resources such as energy and fuel, consumption. We believe the failure of past environmental messaging and behavioural change programmes has been a result of the focus on 'doom and gloom' and 'misery messaging'. This approach has blatantly not empowered or engaged the wider public to any great extent. Hence, we are tackling the twin challenges of education and engagement, and the resulting behavioural changes we need for a sustainable future, from a different angle. Our informative games provide positive framing and playful encouragement for promoting water saving messages, across generations. They work because they provide fun and entertainment as well as interesting, bite-sized snippets of useful information about what people can do to reduce their water use. Our games unify people of all ages and are a pleasurable way of discovering what water saving actions are possible and easy to adopt into daily life.

We have hosted eco action playgrounds in a variety of impressive settings, such as: the Science Museum, Natural History Museum, the Tate Britain, St Pauls Cathedral, Houses of Parliament, the Horniman Museum, Lambeth County Show, and most recently in Stockholm at the internationally renowned World Water Week conference.

World Water Week 2015 gathered over 3000 delegates from 143 countries to discuss water and development issues and to present research findings. We were lucky enough to receive sponsorship from Arup to create a water themed playground for the event. In total, our water playground was visited by over 250 local Swedish school children and hundreds of delegates. We gave out over 750 packs of water themed trumps and played games with people concerned about water sustainability from all corners of the world. We estimate we spoke to over 1000 people about water saving behaviour and proved that games are an effective tool to entertain and educate people of all ages, as well as acting as a conversation starter to discuss water issues in more depth. Not bad for one week's work!

In 2014 we popped up our watery games at the Brockwell Park Lido Fun Palace. Fun Palaces are a national movement who believe "creativity in the community can save the world". We hosted our water themed playground next to the Lido itself, where other watery fun was being had with real life mermaids and kayaks. The Fun Palace movement, like us, believe in "radical fun" as a channel for learning and positive change. A report of the event, plus an evaluation of the water savings we engendered on the day, can be found on the website: [ecoactiongames.org.uk/reports](http://ecoactiongames.org.uk/reports)

We evaluate our techniques closely through the use of questionnaires before and after our events and also follow up some months later to see how many actions, explored through our events, have been adopted. We partnered with Manchester University to help validate our research into how effective a games-centric approach is to help improve eco education and engender behavioural changes. As part of our research with the university, we jointly ran a number of playground events to test the games as a communication and behavioural change tool with undergraduate students. A report, jointly authored with the University, was published in 2015 and is also available through our website on the Reports page.



In 2014/15 we were contracted by Thames Water to run a schools water project on their behalf, to provide education and engagement of water issues to pupils, staff and the wider school community of 20 schools. This project was with 20 London schools. With primary schools we conducted an assembly for the whole school then worked with the 'eco-team', to train them on how to run and facilitate their water-themed playgrounds in their own classes. In secondary schools we undertook a more informal session which gave the students the skills to facilitate their own water-playgrounds either with their peer groups, primary schools or in volunteering settings within their Duke of Edinburgh Awards. The idea was to encourage the children to continue spreading their newly learnt water saving behaviours beyond the school gates to their family units and wider communities.

At the end of the project we re-surveyed the children to ascertain the effectiveness of the approach as an education and engagement tool. The full evaluation report is attached in a draft form to this entry, but some of the highlights are described below.

Impressively, a high percentage of children had played the games in each school, with over 70% being the average. In one school over 80% of the children that had played the games stated that they had learnt new ways to save water as a result of playing, and 94% agreed with the statement 'I now understand why water is precious'. Additionally, 92% thought it important to use water wisely after they had engaged in the project, a very positive result as it doubles the 46% who stated that they hadn't thought about personal water saving before the project started.

We then asked the children if they had shared the water saving messages they had learnt with their parents and found an average of 67% had shared the learning.

- The number of children who would report a dripping tap rose by 13%**
- The number of children who now have shorter showers increased on average by 15%**
- 63% agreed they would now swap a long deep bath for short 4 minute showers**
- 89% of children claimed they only now flush the 3Ps (pee, poo and paper) down the toilet**

We also surveyed the parents before and after the project to understand how much of the information had been shared by the children, and whether it had resulted in families becoming interested in water saving, the results were promising.

- 71% received a 4 minute shower timer as a result of participating in project**
- 39% claimed they sent off for further water saving equipment as a result of the project**

We also wanted to assess the influence of the children on their parents with regards to water saving behaviours. We asked them how far they agreed with the following statements:

- 81% of parents said that their children had shared the water saving message with them**
- 75% learnt new ways to save water since the project started**
- 69% of families try to save water where they didn't before**
- 76% agree they have showers not baths**

<sup>1</sup> We are due to publish the full evaluation of the first schools project in October, attached to this entry is the draft Word version of this report. We will be able to supply the full designed version by mid-October for the final judging.