

COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM



CASE STUDY

Grassroots Environmental Education Creates The ChildSafe School Program

Grassroots Environmental Education is a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization established in 2000 to address the pervasive influence of chemical toxins and pollutants in our daily lives. Their goal is to reduce or eliminate chemical toxins and pollutants that impact the greatest number of people and those that pose the greatest risk to children. The organization's mission is to educate the public about the links between these common environmental exposures and human health impacts, and to empower individuals to act as catalysts for change within their own communities. Grassroots conducts extensive educational outreach to health care providers, school districts, community groups and both local and state government officials across New York State.

Grassroots' programs, strategies and initiatives cover a wide spectrum of environmental health issues, from ground and surface water pollution to consumer chemical exposures. The organization's work is based on emerging science, and its network of consulting experts. Over the past fifteen years Grassroots has developed a reputation for providing practical, science-based advocacy materials on complex environmental health issues that bridge the gap between scientific research and public understanding.

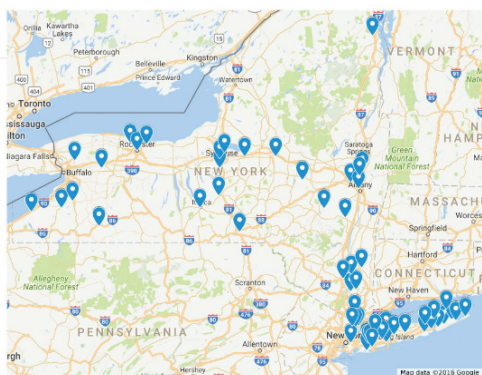
Challenge

It is difficult to comprehend that a school's environmental health has the potential to threaten a child's health, but recent increases in rates of asthma, cancer and other childhood illnesses, as well as learning and behavioral problems, have sparked an increased interest in the environmental health quality of schools. Diesel exhaust from idling school buses, chemical toxins in institutional cleaning products and pesticides used on playing fields – three exposures common to most schools – have come under particular scrutiny.

Over the past decade, New York State has taken steps to address each of these issues. There has been wavering success with room for vast improvements. To generate the gains required for considerable changes engagement focus needs to change from lawmakers to parents and other stakeholders.

Solution

The ChildSafe School Program in New York State was established to engage parents and other stakeholders as catalysts for change in their own school communities. Using science-based educational tools that form the backbone of The ChildSafe School Program, Grassroots aims to reach a minimum of one hundred school districts in New York State with materials, and help adopt at least one child-protective policy in 10% or more of them.



ChildSafe School Resource Guide Recipient Locations

CHALLENGE

- Understand school's environmental health and the impacts it could have on a child's health, learning and behavioral problems

SOLUTION

- Using science-based educational tools that form the backbone of the ChildSafe School Program, Grassroots aimed to reach a minimum of one hundred school districts in New York State

RESULTS

- Grassroots project team distributed a total of 100 Resource Guides, conducted 16 presentations which has laid the foundation for more advancements in schools on environmental health issues
- East Meadow, Sag Harbor and Locust Valley school districts all rejected the proposed new build of synthetic turf fields and made a commitment to providing safe, natural grass playing fields for their students
- East Meadow and Wyandanch High Schools were also recognized for their efforts on safe cleaning products

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Results

Through in-person presentations, webinars, social media, and other communications techniques, the Grassroots project team distributed a total of 100 Resource Guides, conducted 16 presentations which has laid the foundation for more advancements in schools on environmental health issues. Currently, two school districts are working to pass policies and qualify for the Recognition Program, and the school districts of East Meadow, Sag Harbor and Locust Valley all rejected the proposed new build of synthetic turf fields and made a commitment to providing safe, natural grass playing fields for their students. East Meadow and Wyandanch High Schools were also recognized for their efforts on safe cleaning products. As The ChildSafe School Program continues to gain recognition, Grassroots will continue their outreach to parents and stakeholders across the state.



Grassroots Executive Director Patti Wood (right) presents a ChildSafe School award to Montgomery Granger, Facilities Director of Wyandanch Public Schools.



Pictured (L to R): East Meadow custodian Bob Callan, administrative assistant Sandy Sanger, Patti Wood, Patrick Pizzo, and Grassroots' Policy Director Lauren Hughes

Online Media:

ChildSafe School Website

- <http://www.thechildsafeschool.org>

ChildSafe School Webcast Series Archives

- <http://www.thechildsafeschool.org/webcasts.html>

TESTIMONIAL

"School is a child's second home, a place where they spend many hours of their important developmental years, up to eight hours a day, five days a week. Research has shown that chronic exposure to low levels of chemical toxins commonly found in both indoor and outdoor school environments can cause acute and long-term health problems, potentially impacting a child's ability to learn, socialize and participate in normal school activities."

"The underlying purpose of The ChildSafe School is to educate all stakeholders in the school community about the links between common environmental exposures present in schools, safer and cost effective alternatives and the shaping and implementation of protective policies. The NYSP21 funding enabled us to expand this successful and vital program on Long Island and share resources across the state."

- Patti Wood,
Executive Director,
Grassroots Environmental Education

NYSP21 PARTNERS

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