

Conference Report

Students and Doctors for the Environment: iDEA 2012

April 13th – 15th 2012

CERES Community Environment Park, Melbourne



CERES Community Environment Park agriculture

Many medical students enter their course believing they will be able to make a difference to the lives of others. Rarely is this more apparent than at a student conference concerned about the health impacts of climate change. This was iDEA, a conference for medical students, organised by medical students. Only three years on from its inception, iDEA continues to inspire and engage an ever expanding body of medical students, interns and residents. From across Australia, medical students travelled to the picturesque CERES community

environment park in Melbourne, an urban farm that was once a wasteland. In these surrounds, the personal stories of our times were shared and recounted. From the activists who have pushed for a sustainable future, to human rights advocates speaking out for those without a voice and to leaders, young and old, sharing their pathway to creating a positive difference. These stories, with the science and passion behind them, formed a collection for all delegates to take home and expand upon, to use as a backbone for their own current and future story.

Right from the start, delegates were asked to look back and reflect upon their interest in health and the environment. Through an optional first day workshop, delegates explored methods of sharing their interest in sustainable living to encourage others to get involved. This later proved to be both a learning and teaching experience, as delegates were subsequently requested to become the group leaders for the workshop sessions on the following two days.

Saturday heralded the official start to iDEA 2012, with a stimulating opening on the pathway towards sustainability by Professor Ian Lowe. From utilizing different technologies and influencing policies, Professor Lowe expressed what actions were needed to mitigate further rises in carbon emissions. Dr Marion Carey then discussed the impacts of climate change from a public health perspective. These speakers



Students enjoying some free time

were followed by workshops throughout the day, which created an interactive atmosphere, and gave students from different states the chance to intermingle. In these sessions, small groups were encouraged to share their personal experiences, choices and outcomes regarding their interest in health and the environment.

Over lunch, students wandered around CERES, sampling and buying the onsite produce, and marvelling at the horticultural achievements. In the afternoon Professor Kingsley Faulkner the Chair of DEA, gave a broad overview of the science behind climate change. A



Lunch at CERES

particularly interesting comparison was made between the time it took people to accept the link between lung cancer and smoking (despite the evidence and lives lost in the interim), and the current problem of people unwilling to accept the science behind climate change. However, with the latter, the effects will be devastating and much more widespread. As the afternoon faded into evening, students were invited to get to know Melbourne and their peers better over wine, cheese and nibbles at a welcoming bar called the Aviary.

The last day of iDEA commenced with Elizabeth O'Shea discussing humans rights, or lack thereof, in Australia. As the only Western democracy without a human rights act, Australia has less credibility and subsequently may experience greater legal isolation on an international level by countries that do support human rights. Professor Peter Doherty brought a personal aspect to the potential effects of climate change, through pictures of his very cute grandson. While many people consider themselves better off than their grandparents, Professor Doherty is concerned about the number of people who believe that the lives of their (potential) children and grandchildren will be much worse than their own, due to the effects of climate change.

For our final speaker, we had the pleasure of listening to Ellen Sandell, national director of the Australian Youth Climate Coalition. She reminded us that if we don't take action on climate change now, we won't be able to avoid two degrees of warming. Her inspiring story of transition, from a student unsure of what to study at university to one of Australia's key commentators on climate change, demonstrates how each of us have the potential to become leaders.



Ellen Sandell speaking at the iDEA conference

A treat for those able to stay on into the evening was a dinner and tour around the Steve Irwin ship, (of Sea Shepherd fame) which was docked in Melbourne. This was conducted by Merryn Redenbach, a member of DEA and the doctor for the Sea Shepherd campaign. Finally delegates returned home, taking with them motivation and skills to be advocates in their words and in their actions for a cleaner, healthier future.

Thanks must go to Anna Norris, the conference convenor whose efforts resulted in a very well organised and inspirational conference.



iDEA Delegates

Melissa Franks

Photo's courtesy of Phoebe Hone