Sustainable Living's champions of change
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Since 2002, groups of adult learners across NZ have been gathering knowledge of what everyday actions (at or beyond their home) make reduced environmental impact compared to their previous habits and practices. Sustainable Living Education Trust publishes learning and tutor materials on CD, and maintains a public website. Armed with practical know how, learners take immediate action where they are able, discuss progress at weekly sessions and plan significant actions for the future - such as house size and location changes, appliance and insulation purchases, or travel planning. The educational methods developed do result in behaviour change for most participants, and as a next step it will be possible to quantify impacts, in a new research collaboration with Professors R & B Vale at Victoria University Wellington.

Media case studies have resulted (e.g. a Christchurch Press illustrated series), featuring dozens of champions of change emerging from the classes. This may be helping to normalise more-sustainable lifestyle choices. The 'evening class' approach has compared favourably with overseas change-motivation practice, in published peer-reviewed research papers (a collaboration with Landcare Research, summarised in Chapter 16 at www.hatched.net.nz), and until recent change of NZ Government the courses had spread into 26 council areas, reaching 2,000 people a year.

In 2009-10 Sustainable Living was challenged by loss of Ministry of Education funding for high-school based community classes, which led to closure of many community education outlets, and will be affected further in 2010-2011 by cuts in tertiary funding for tutored and assessed Polytechnic short courses. This is forcing delivery into user-pays for salaried participants and/or council subsidy for those on lower incomes. Will new group delivery routes be required, perhaps without paid tutors but catalysed by Transition Town groups, or will this social group learning approach be superceeded by individual learning, via the web?