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EnAct to Live Green

by Zaher Karp

With the buzz about living green and sustainability, making a positive impact on the environment may seem like a daunting task. But an area group offers a unique approach to help Dane County reduce its footprint on the environment.

EnAct is a local outreach program formed by the Madison Environmental Group, a sustainability-consulting firm that works with organizations to improve their impact on their surrounding communities and the environment. According to MEG president Sonya Newenhouse, the program was launched in 2003 to create a lasting impression on the environment and "encourage people to improve the way they live [by taking] a greater and more committed step towards greener living and sustainability."



Photo by Nicole Craig

Former EnAct intern Colleen Christensen helped distribute materials at their booth.

The organization moves toward its mission of "greener living" by creating Environmental Action Teams — a group of seven to ten people from a single neighborhood or organization committed to sustainable living. Newenhouse describes the group as an "action-oriented book club," where teams are introduced to the program by MEG staff. Volunteer leaders go through the organization's guidebook with chapters highlighting different conservation efforts such as transportation, food and water. The team members then meet every two weeks with a volunteer discussion leader to cover issues such as low flow showerheads or using rain barrels.

To ensure the team is moving toward the intended green result, participants complete surveys before and after their initiatives. Erin Schneider, EnAct program manager, notes, "Seeing the difference, before and after, really allows you to reconnect yourself with your own environment. Over 8-12 weeks, people are seeing the impact, for example, if they haven't recycled much and they're beginning to work on trash reduction."

EnAct is designed for flexibility. "It's not an ordered regimen," says Newenhouse. "Our goal is to foster the program as a vehicle for conservation." Though teams may be formed within neighborhoods or even small families, groups of young professionals have met through area organizations — such as Madison MAGNET — to pair with EnAct in their workplaces.

Each year, households participating in EnAct showed an average of 1.5 less tons of carbon dioxide emitted, over 12,000 fewer gallons of water used, nearly a 200 pound reduction of garbage, 1,400 fewer miles driven and over \$300 saved.

September 22, 2008 marks World Car-Free Day. EnAct will be hosting events for the public September 19 through 26. For more information, click [here](#).

In the coming weeks, Forté Madison will meet two area Environmental Action Teams and learn about their experiences with EnAct. To learn more about EnAct, visit their Web site [here](#).