

ENACT

FOR EMPOWERING NEIGHBORS TO GO GREEN TOGETHER

BY DENIS COLLINS

How would you like to learn how to make your house more environmentally friendly, save money, and make new friends in the process?" asked my friend Laurie Joiner back in 1998. And so began the exhilarating experience of being part of the inaugural environmental action team in Madison. In 2003, the program was officially launched as EnAct, with a mission to build environmentally sustainable communities one household at a time.

More than 400 households in Madison, Cross Plains, DeForest, Racine, Mazomanie, and elsewhere have completed the EnAct program over the last four years, when the organization started tracking data. The results are impressive: an average yearly per-house savings of \$251, and a total annual reduction of 30.2 tons of solid waste, 159,629 kilowatt-hours of electricity, 3.25 million gallons of water, 9,522 therms of natural gas, and 319 tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

Our team of six households included some of the founding members of Sustain Dane, a countywide environmental group. We were guided by Gandhi's inspiration: "We must be the change we wish to see in the world."

Once a month, for eight months, we enjoyed a potluck meal at one of our homes before getting down to business. Our experiences ran the gamut. Born in the Bronx, growing up in a high-density New Jersey suburb, I was an ad hoc conservationist. Whenever I saw green space I wondered why someone didn't build a baseball field on it. My conservation efforts were limited to making sure that recyclables were placed in the correct trash receptacle . . . most of the time. At the other end of the range, Laurie's husband was an ardent environmentalist. Everyone else fell somewhere on the continuum between us.

Our homework assignment for the second meeting was to benchmark our own environmental footprint for a before-and-after measurement. This meant documenting the weight of our weekly trash, the number of miles we drove each week, and the average shower length per family member.

At each subsequent EnAct meeting we discussed small improvements made in our lifestyle since the previous meeting (fixing a leaky faucet, reducing the thermostat temperature setting); reviewed potential action steps in the assigned chapter of the participant guide; and committed to making one more small, environmentally friendly change before our next get-together.

We quickly developed into an environmental support network, where dreams could be expressed and tribulations received a sympathetic hearing. I had always wondered why people, including myself,







threw away magazines once they had read them. After our recycling discussion, I started donating my son's weekly *Sports Illustrated* to the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County.

At the end of eight months, we were composting more, driving less, replacing incandescent and halogen light bulbs with compact fluorescents, buying Energy Star appliances, improving our weather stripping and insulation, and installing low-flow showerheads and faucet aerators.



Get Into the Act!

The EnAct program provides practical advice in six areas:

-  **SOLID-WASTE REDUCTION**
-  **ENERGY REDUCTION**
-  **WATER REDUCTION**
-  **WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**
-  **ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION**
-  **HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOODS**

The 90-plus-page participant guide, which can be downloaded free from the EnAct website, offers a host of recommendations, including instructions for building a backyard compost pile, forms to reduce junk mail at junkbusters.com, and information on local places to recycle cell phones, eyeglasses, sneakers, and other items.

For more information, call (608) 204-2888 or visit enactwi.org.

—D.C.

Some of us went on to create EnAct teams on our own blocks or at work. When one couple moved away, they organized an EnAct team to develop friendships with their new neighbors. Nine years later, I'm reminded of our team when I turn off the water as I brush my teeth—a small step I'd never considered before EnAct.

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