

by Cindy Baxter

*As interest in the environment grows among the young, many of them are learning that what they do makes a difference.*



A GROUP OF Whakatane High School students protests against tropical rainforest timber being used in decking for a new school building. Their pressure results in the rainforest timber being replaced with New Zealand pine.

Wairarapa College student Fiona Beardslee, 14, calls a public meeting to discuss regular cleanups of local beaches and lakes.

The beach cleanups are now a part of community life. Once a month, teams co-ordinated by the schoolgirl clear litter from the Wairarapa coastline and lake shores.

Three university students, Kate and Megan Graeme and David Holland, spend their holidays surveying the presence of wild ginger in the Coromandel, presenting the local council with a comprehensive report and map to help eradicate the noxious plant.

These students are just some of many young people today who are acting to clean up the environment, encouraging their peers and parents to follow suit. But just how widespread is this concern among children? Are young people today taking more notice of environmental issues than their parents?

Tropical Rainforest activist Ange Palmer spent last year taking the New Zealand Forest Education Roadshow to 130 schools around the country, alerting students to the rainforest issue.

The focus of the group was on the older students, in the sixth and seventh form.

"Children, especially of the age group dealt with by the Roadshow, are well aware that theirs is the future. They are worried about what is to be handed down to them by us, and therefore they have a strong instinct to understand what is going on," she says in her final report.

"Putting energy into young people is surely our best investment for Earth."

The presentation started on global environmental problems, and came right back to the local situation. The Roadshow, although working with some of the teachers, focused on the children themselves.

"I think that when the kids looked at us, in our jeans and basketball boots, speaking to them in their own language, a lot of them realised that it's 'cool' to be interested in the environment," she says. Fiona Beardslee agrees. "I think that kids are much more prepared to do something about their environment today."