There are three legs to my existence as stay-at-home mother of three young children—places I go for nearly everything I need. Being a mother with ideals weaving through and around emphasis on sustainability, community and learning, it is easy to trace them all back to my favorite resources: Google, Goodwill Thrift Shops and my Families for Conscious Living/FCL Community Group.

It feels like I can do anything when I sit in my home in front of a Google search box, but I realize it’s little more than a pretentious leap toward omnipotence. It has also given me two of my most revered and wellused software programs. The Google-designed photo editing software, Picasa, and their Desktop search engine have been much-loved (and free!) blessings to me amidst the Microsoft pit of despair, expense and breakdowns. The information easily accessed is also invaluable for all sorts of “educational experiences.” Once when I was trying peacefully discuss seatbelts with my children, I found myself trying to argue about why they simply can't hold onto their little sister while I drive. Feeling wordless for the seven- and four-yearold’s maturity level, I put the conversation on hold until we reached the internet at home and Googled. It took about ten minutes of various crash demo videos and the pictures of roadside crashes to end the discussion. A picture is always worth a thousand words.
Goodwill Thrift Shops are another widespread recycling and model of community-based sustainability that have been changing the way people buy things for many, many years. Shopping at Goodwill Stores brings me and my kids back to the dime stores of the 70s and 80s where you could buy old-fashioned surprise grab bags for $1. There is always an excited anticipation about what great deal or valuable find you’ll discover today. With a working list of needs for my house and family in hand, regular visits produce most of the things I need at about 25% the cost of new. I consider it recycling, as I am always exchanging a bag full of unwanted items, clothing and gifts before I go in to purchase other people’s unwanted items. Our used purchases prevent hundreds of new items from entering the waste stream each year. We can also feel good that our purchases support my local disabled community members who work there, and the various enterprises Goodwill creates in the community.

Families for Conscious Living is a national “by parents, for parents” non-profit organization that has been around a little more than a decade. I, and a circle of enthusiastic moms, run the Connecticut branch of around 100 families online and in-person. We have a modest website (www.fclct.org), but the real action happens inside our discussion forums. Similar to the boards found elsewhere in natural parenting groups on the internet, our discussion board is organized by topics, and accompanied by calendars of events listing our many local and growing groups. It’s always a struggle to live isolated from other families, especially when you’re attempting to raise them outside the mainstream commercial culture standards. But I have a secret weapon, and it has only been possible in the modern age of the internet: my FCL Community Group.

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