

Sustainability and self-reliance no matter where you are!

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Goats for Milk





Gumnut Gossip

By Megg Miller.

'That's so annoying, it must be my fault. I probably did it without thinking', Suni said. 'No, it was likely to be me, you know what I'm like', I chimed in. 'Sorry but I think I might have done it', Lynne confessed. No matter who caused the little transgression we were all vying for ownership. It was just a silly mistake but irritating to us nonetheless. Somehow during the production process we changed the title Kangaroo Island Lifestyle to King Island. Then when the contents page was put together the mistake was further compounded and right out to the flashing lights of the cover. Oops!

Yes, we do know which island is where, but it is easy for tricky mistakes to slip past. We're on island alert now and sincerely apologise to author Pam May and to the McKelveys for the mixup.

'Weather Wisdom', a short piece by Gwen Deem has led to numerous discussions at morning tea. Can we get prior information about likely weather events from nature? Gwen has shared theories locals have passed on and there is sure to be merit in them. As soon as I notice that the ants are building up the earth walls around their holes or hysterically rushing up shed walls I know rain is imminent.

My complaint about Gwen's article is that it's challenging counting standing and sitting bovines as you speed past in a car or try and work out which particular clouds are dominating the skies. Come on readers, I bet you have some great examples to add to the list that Gwen has initiated.

Right now we're interested in how long the heatwave is going to last. Temperatures shot up to the high 30s last week and are likely to stay up for another few days. Phew, we thought we'd escaped the hot weather, but while other parts of Australia are enjoying signs of an early autumn, we're burning up. Gwen, you need to get some tips on predicting heatwaves from your rural soothsayers. There's a

tough challenge.

Emma Savage must know a thing or two about jam making, her piece on using up dud jam surely corresponds with our peak jam production period. Why do I think this? A year ago Suni and I combed the op shops in town for bottles to put her tomato purée in, but not a jar could be found. 'Sorry girls, they're all gone, everyone is doing jam', we were told.

Dud jam and preserves do happen and with the sweet treat ideas Emma has shared it needn't be a catastrophe. Now I think about it there were a lot of steamed puddings made in my childhood and a lot of jam and marmalade bottled. Adding a little glamour to the end use such as the Louise cake is infinitely more appealing than jam tart or marmalade pud.

It's great that wooden pallets are still de rigueur. Robert Millet's report on how his son erected a speedy compost structure using pallets should encourage non-technical gardeners to have a go. Handyman builder Keith Upward has to be happy with the rustic wooden hutch he constructed from a recycled pine pallet. It's terrific! If you have repurposed a pallet we would love to hear about it.

One of the pleasures of publishing *Grass Roots* is the regular contact with people implementing inspiring initiatives and living their dream. The piece on The Bower in Sydney demonstrates what commitment and the belief in a more sustainable world can do. Just imagine if we all had councils that were prepared to consider options to hard waste pick up, and people prepared to donate time to fixing things or showing others that repairs are possible. Hopefully the concept will spread.

There is more to life than just the daily news, it's satisfying to be able to take time out to read *Grass Roots* and restore our faith in humankind.

Our actions can and do count, the development of The Bower is proof of this. Happy achieving. ♻️



Edited by Megg Miller and Jessamy Miller.

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The Bower

By Megg Miller, Euroa, Vic.

Concerned about all the broken and discarded items that are put out as waste and clog up landfill? Wish there was more happening to enable repurposing or to locate people who can fix stuff? Hurrah – there is a great initiative in Sydney that reuses and repurposes goods and it has several new start-ups in other locations.

The Bower in Marrickville is a reuse and repair centre. A social enterprise and environmental charity, it operates from a modest building housing everything from furniture to tools, building materials to books, and bikes to bric-a-brac. A weekly repair cafe operates where people can bring in their dodgy toaster or rickety chair and receive free assistance in repairing them. And the Marrickville Men's Shed is based at The Bower and its members routinely repair furniture that's then offered for sale in The Bower shopfront.

GETTING STARTED

A dream to have a local reuse centre kicked off the idea for The Bower. Five local inner-west residents, dedicated urban scavengers, had met at an Earthworks waste minimisation course and were keen to have a repair and reuse centre in a community setting where household items could be saved from landfill and reused or repurposed.

So, in 1997, these five recycling enthusiasts formed an advisory committee and were successful in winning funding from the NSW Environmental Protection Agency to find a location and employ a coordinator for a reuse centre. The inaugural meeting of The Bower Reuse and Repair Cooperative took place in March 1998 and a constitution adopted and Board of Directors elected.

CUSTOM-BUILT PREMISES

One of the first jobs for the board was to find a building and it was agreed custom-built premises in a community



centre would be ideal. The Addison Road Community Centre in Marrickville was chosen as a suitable location and plans drawn up for a strawbale warehouse that would be a showcase for sustainable building practices.

Strawbales were sourced from Cowra, and two strawbale building consultants were on hand to direct training of the army of local helpers. By the end of 1998, despite battles with wet weather, funding shortfalls and lengthy delays, The Bower was at lock-up stage.

From the outside the building looks quite modest, but step inside and it's a veritable labyrinth. Over time The Bower has grown beyond the initial strawbale building. By 2009 two loft areas had been built, one for books, music and bric-a-brac, the other for the behind the scenes office staff. Solar panels, donated in 2011 by Greenforce Solar, a local ethical solar company, went in to power The Bower. In 2012, an extension made entirely from recycled materials was added to provide a staff kitchen, storage loft and another workshop area.

THE REPAIR CAFE

The cafe was established in 2014, the first official repair cafe in Australia. Guido Verbist joined The Bower in 2013 as general manager, bringing a wealth of experience in the not-for-profit sector, including managing a recycling centre and repair cafe in Belgium. A crowdfunding campaign in 2014 raised enough money for a separate locked area to be constructed to house a fully equipped electrical repairs workshop.

The Mayor opened the Repair Cafe in 2014, and it is run by a mix of volunteers and paid staff. It operates Wednesday afternoons from 1–4pm and people can just turn up with their broken item – small electrical goods, timber furniture and bicycles – and receive free assistance and advice on how to repair it.

The Bower's woodworkers explain in depth corrective measures for timber furniture, while the in-house bike mechanic handles bicycle repairs. The idea is people leave with new skills so they can tackle repairs themselves at home. Electrical items, however, are

repaired by The Bower's electrical technicians and tested fully to ensure they're compliant and safe to use.

COLLECTION AND REHOMING SERVICE

Twelve councils are currently signed up to the Collection and Rehoming Service whereby council staff refer residents to The Bower for collection of unwanted items instead of organising a hard rubbish/council clean-up style collection.

The initial concept was launched in 2006 as an alternative to the bulky waste collection service that councils offer to residents. The free collection of household goods, bikes and building materials offered by The Bower means that items once meant for landfill are now reused.

Responsibility for promoting this service lies with each council and they include The Bower's details in their waste serve booklets and calendars, on council websites and via council publications and newsletters. The Bower also attends council community fairs and festivals to help spread the word to local residents. Over three months at the end of 2015, The Bower responded to 717 enquiries and diverted 34,343.85kg from landfill via the Collection and Rehoming Service.

LOW-COST WORKSHOPS

The regular low-cost workshops teaching tricks of the trade to individuals are another important initiative. They encourage people to repair and reuse items instead of discarding them. The 'Tricks of the Trade' workshops include how to repair and restore timber furni-



ture, introductory upholstery, basic carpentry skills and how to paint furniture. These workshops cost just \$35 each and the series operates three times per year or upon request by a council or corporate business wanting staff or community hands-on activities. The Bower also runs workshops for children during school holidays and visits vacation care centres and libraries to run workshops on behalf of councils.

BUILDING BETTER FUTURES

The Bower doesn't let grass grow under its foundations, new initiatives are being discussed and implemented regularly. One new addition is the purpose built (using recycled materials) Little Free Library. The Little Free Library (www.littlefreelibrary.org) movement aims 'to promote literacy and the love of reading by building free book exchanges worldwide and to build a sense of community as we share

skills, creativity and wisdom across generations'. Efforts are underway to build a 'little' Little Free Library for children.

The other exciting development is the establishment of repair cafes in other areas, to date in Melbourne, Albury-Wodonga and Mullumbimby.

BECOME A MEMBER

As a cooperative and environmental charity The Bower relies on the support of members. Memberships commence on 1 August each year with the annual fee being \$15 or \$10 concession. Members joining after 1 January are eligible to pay half the annual amount for their first year to 31 July.

Contact The Bower on 02-9568-6280 or email: info@bower.org.au. Call in to 34/142 Addison Rd, Marrickville, 2204. Open Monday to Saturday 10am-5pm, Sunday 10am-4pm. ♻️