

Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022

Consolidating the long term sustainability

Introduction

From its inception in 1999, The Bower's vision is to establish a social enterprise that promotes waste avoidance via economically sustainable initiatives such as reuse and repair of preloved goods and educational programs.

This vision initially manifested itself in The Bower's second hand store in a straw bale warehouse built with salvaged building materials, and this vision is still twenty years later the driving force behind the popular Collection and Rehoming Service, educational workshops, repair services and sales of preowned and upcycled goods in our stores.

The Bower remains committed to its original objectives:

- Reducing waste going to landfill
- Providing goods at affordable prices
- Creating employment and training opportunities
- Promoting reuse and upcycling of preloved goods.

The Bower's organisational and management values are:

- We operate from integrity
- We encourage initiative
- We advocate transparency
- We preform ethically
- We administer equitable treatment

The triple bottom line continues to be the framework against which we assess our progress. Our social impact reports reflect our environmental, social and financial sustainable achievements.

The 2015-17 strategic plan outlined the Bower's commitment to

- Its 3 pillar organisational model based on
 - Creating a sustainable economy
 - Education of the community
 - Partnering with Councils
- Sharing its unique organisational and business model with other communities
- Developing a long term sustainable business plan

This new strategic plan describes the next steps the organisation will take over the next 5 years to consolidate the growth and long term sustainability of the organisation.

Strategic priorities

Our 3-pillar organisational model has proven to be a strong model: our customers like it, the local communities want it and the society needs it.

The 3 pillars will remain, as they have been in the past, the reference and inspiration for the further development and growth of our organisation.

1. Sustainable economy

Strategic priority: Making buying preowned goods the new normal

The main challenge for The Bower's further growth is to make buying preowned goods the new normal. This is not only essential for a sustainable economy but it is also crucial to secure the additional revenue required to invest in infrastructure and resources.

The following features will be introduced and developed in long term programs or strategies

a. Scaling Sales

The response to the growing influx of donated goods is scaling sales. The opening of the Parramatta store has given us invaluable experience which will help us open additional shopfronts North, South and East of the inner city. Similarly our trials with an online store, market stalls and manufacturing of high end quality goods have given us templates which we can roll out on a large scale.

The ultimate objective will be to extend our reach beyond our current audience of committed and disadvantaged groups to the general public. A marketing campaign "to make buying preowned goods the new normal" will be launched to that effect. This should look into rebranding the Bower and into seeking sector wide support in response to the oversupply of preowned goods.

b. Diversification

Diversifying our revenue streams will make us less dependent on sales and again helps us to build a long term sustainable organisational model.

New and existing portfolios will be further developed:

- Our House to Home programs is a perfect platform to create a market for a portion of the surplus household goods by establishing long term service agreements with housing associations and government departments
- A ReLY market for salvaged building material via the deconstruction of houses and defitting of buildings is largely untouched.
- In-house paid repair services for electronic appliances, timber and metal goods which are still in its infancy
- Manufacturing new and bespoke goods from salvaged material puts circular economy in practice which has huge potential.
- Franchising the Bower's organisational model is gaining momentum because of our growing public profile and will be investigated

- Corporate sponsoring is probably the lowest hanging fruit for the Bower to capitalise on given our growing reach and network.
- Social investment opportunities are opening up for us and will be explored as a solution for capital investment for future infrastructure requirements.
- Fundraising opportunities via high donors and speaking engagements are also opening up and will be explored
- Workshops and council services can be further expanded – see other chapters

c. Advocacy

The Bower has deliberately kept a low profile when it comes to advocating our vision and objectives despite that we are seen as a leader and pioneer in reuse and repair. However the growing interest for waste management solutions creates opportunities which we can no longer ignore and should use to our benefit.

The following issues have been identified as important to support and to advance our objectives – they do exist elsewhere and could be introduced in Australia:

- Tax break for repairs – The Swedish model
- Funding mechanism to redirect surplus household goods to disadvantaged groups - The UK model
- Re-use quality mark including energy efficiency quota for appliances - The UK/Belgian/Swedish models
- Right-to repair legislation specifically for electronic appliances - The USA model
- Free re-certification of goods without original certificate such as toys and child restraints - The Inner West Council model
- Promote circular economy and source reduction as opposed to waste for energy – The environmental movement
- EPA to introduce funding for reuse and repair of household goods in its Waste less recycle more programs from 2021 onwards - The Belgian model
- Fully fledged employment and training programs in the reuse sector - The Belgian/Swedish/Dutch model
- Installation of Federation of Reuse centres to share best practice for reuse centres including quality standards for collection trucks, insurance, integrated software for data, storage and sales of reused goods amongst other services. - The UK/Belgian/Dutch models

Successfully introducing the above objectives requires a dedicated voice. Ideally we would like to do this in partnership with existing networks but without compromising our vision and objectives. However this has proven to be very difficult and we will consider building a network with like-minded organisations.

d. Infrastructure

Without adequate infrastructure we will not be able to meet the growing needs and expectation for reuse and repair of preloved goods.

Infrastructure requirements will largely come down to space for storages, display, sales, repair, workshops, administration all of which are becoming highly expensive on the rental market including in the Addison Road Community Centre.

In order to guarantee the continuation of our operations after December 1, 2021, when our Marrickville lease comes to an end, we have to step up our efforts to introduce a distribution centre. This centre will serve as a triage, repair and transfer station which will cater for our shopfronts North, West, South and East of the Inner West and as a host for the back office services, including customer service, administration and bookkeeping. It should also be able to host a new store in case we have to vacate the Marrickville premise.

We will explore the following scenarios in order of priority:

- Aligning ourselves with Reverse Garbage – given our joint interests and problems
- Securing our presence in Marrickville for the long term
- Seeking public funding to relocate and jointly accommodate Reverse Garbage and the Bower.
- Seeking private funding to relocate and jointly accommodate Reverse Garbage and the Bower.

2. Educating communities

Strategic priority: Create awareness via knowledge transfer

Working with local communities and sharing our skills and experiences has been essential to create awareness about waste avoidance and for the success of The Bower. Community engagement and social inclusion will not only remain a vital building block of our organisational model but has plenty of growth potential.

Following knowledge transfer initiatives will be further developed or introduced:

- Expand our repair café services by including new topics such as clothing repair
- Expand our tricks of the trade series of workshops by including new topics such as DIY Home, Welding, Tiny Houses, Upcycled style, Electronics and women only courses
- Introduce women only and community sheds
- Expand our rent a bench program including online chat room
- Introduce a Bower reuse school and certificate to train and learn about reuse and repair and to ultimately introduce new players and consignors in the sustainable retail sector.
- Touring with exhibition pieces
- School curriculums offer opportunities to introduce workshops and projects for schools.
- Introduce to corporates our workshops either as teambuilding exercises or as after school care programs for employees' kids
- Invest in enlarging our pool of workshop and repair cafe facilitators

Following programs will be introduced to promote our knowledge transfer initiatives:

- New messages and visual content as part of the rebranding program
- Integrated strategy for social media as part of a CRM program
- Focus groups and surveys to assess how to reach specific communities and audiences
- Dedicated budget and resources to invest strategically
- Develop bespoke programs as service provider and build long terms partnerships
- Promote staff for speaking engagements and media appearances

3. Partnerships with councils

Strategic priority: Provide Councils unique quality services for a fair price

Long-term arrangements with Councils not only provide us ongoing access to household goods, but will also give us financial stability and confidence to invest in the further expansion of our organisational and business model.

Thanks to our Collection and Rehoming Service the Bower has been able to establish a solid and reliable reputation with councils and it's time to capitalise on this. The objective is to do this via the introduction of a fair price for a quality service, developing customised services and long term partnership.

The following initiatives will be introduced to meet these objectives:

- Assessment of economic value of our CRS program by KPMG
- Introduce revised CRS program, fees and long term partnerships
- Develop customised waste avoidance services such as "Pop up Drive thru recycling days" and "Emergence collections" in partnership with waste recovery service providers
- Develop customised environmental education programs for their residents via workshops, content for their websites and newsletters and presence at local events
- Explore opportunities for government funding via programs such as the current EPA Illegal Dumping and Community Recycling Centres programs
- Establish an ongoing evaluation and survey mechanism to assess impact and quality of our services
- Explore new business models to introduce our services to more councils via
 - o Introduction of a franchise system via local residents or
 - o Partner with organisations who work with councils such as RoCs and Garage Sale Trail or
 - o Investment by councils in a the Bower presence in their LGA