

THE BIG FIX

Blue Mountains • Lithgow • Hawkesbury • Penrith

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Changing the Story

Restoring Nature's Hydraulic Pulse



Willow Warriors on the Nepean River. Photo by Kelvin Montague

How many of us would choose to pave our driveways if we knew it was interfering with nature's hydraulic pulse? How many of us understand the role of swamps, ponds, lagoons and the meandering of rivers and creeks in holding water in what is the driest occupied continent on the globe?

Water. It is the substance of life. We would panic if taps ran dry in our homes. It is equally concerning when a landscape runs dry.

'Nature is not a place to visit. It is home.' So writes Pulitzer Prize winning poet, Gary Snyder. It is also true that we are not simply in a landscape; we are 'of it', part of a common living being. This has particular resonance in our region, where our cities share space with a World Heritage National Park and the rivers and tributaries that make up the massive Hawkesbury-Nepean water catchment.

In the undisturbed natural environment, 85% of water falling during a rainstorm is collected and filtered by creeks, swamps and wetlands. However, land clearing, industry

and a lack of understanding of these features compromises this system. In urban areas, where soil and vegetation are replaced with impervious surfaces, storm water is directed into large drains that bypass natural collection processes almost completely. Water rushes from high country to low, dragging with it sediment and pollutants, and leaving dry earth behind. Rushing water erodes riverbanks and flushes out the small creatures and microscopic plants that also play a role in filtering water and holding it in the landscape.

A dry landscape is a landscape prone to bushfire. And the demise of water quality spells the demise of a vital tourism industry, not to mention the health and beauty of the home in which people live.

Addressing this issue takes action across government areas, as water does not flow according to administrative

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Changing the story

Welcome to the first regional edition of The Big Fix. We're a not-for-profit organisation working to grow a collaborative, solutions-focused culture, and the stories in this magazine reflect some of the best of what's happening in Lithgow, Blue Mountains, Penrith and the Hawkesbury.

Our bioregion is connected by four important rivers - the Colo, Coffs River, the Hawkesbury and the Nepean. We're also connected by our shared histories and our collaborative efforts to tackle major issues like homelessness, with the award winning Heading Home - Ending Homelessness Here! program.

In this edition, you can read stories about how individuals, community groups, not-for-profit organisations, businesses, education and research bodies, and government, are working individually and collaboratively to come up with solutions to the many challenges facing our world.

The stories have been produced by some of our most talented storytellers and we'd like to say a big thank you to Create NSW for their support. It helps fund quality storytelling in our region.

If you'd like to share these stories more widely, you can find them on our website and social media, where we also post a Daily Solutions Digest of stories from around the world. To ensure you never miss our quarterly editions, you can subscribe to receive magazines by post or by email.

To continue to grow a creative solutions storytelling community in our region we're running a number of workshops over coming months. If you've ever wanted to become a citizen journalist, now's your chance! Look forward to hearing from you for our second regional edition coming out in September.

Lis Bastian
Editor



Create NSW
Arts, Screen & Culture

Workshop program

Cartooning and Creative Thinking - Visual Storytelling

A picture paints a thousand words. Find out how to distill a story and use humour to engage audiences with news.
Blackheath - Saturday 22 July 2017 (10am - 4pm)
Penrith - Sunday 23 July 2017 (10am - 4pm)

The Big Fix - Solutions Storytelling

A workshop to explore how to craft and share compelling solutions media.
Blackheath - Saturday 29 July 2017 (10am - 4pm)
Penrith - Sunday 30 July 2017 (10am - 4pm)

Changing the Story - Youth Cafe

A workshop and network for young adults to explore how to use a range of storytelling techniques and technologies to engage, inspire and empower.
Blackheath - Saturday 12th August (10am - 4pm)
Penrith - Sunday 13th August (10am - 4pm)

Bookings to Lis on 0407 437 553 or
email lis@thebigfix.org

www.thebigfix.org

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boundaries, and what happens upstream affects water quality below.

Water flows from Lithgow in the west, through the Blue Mountains and down into Penrith and the Hawkesbury. Across these local government boundaries, community volunteers are working to restore nature's plumbing. The results are heartening but there is no room for complacency. Those who make this their home can support these efforts by arming themselves with knowledge, monitoring the landscape as they would monitor their home, reporting when things don't look right and participating in regeneration projects where they can.

Upstream: a natural sponge

The temperate highland peat swamps surrounding Lithgow formed over thousands of years, as water seeped into pervious sandstone, was trapped in claystone layers and then gradually released through cracks. Peat formed on the surface and acts as a natural sponge. Surrounding plant life depends on this slow seepage of water, collecting and processing water as well.

Introduced animals, land clearing, fertilisers and weeds have destroyed most of these swamps, and today Lithgow has been home to two coal-fired power generation plants that use water from the catchment. Longwall coal mining is also present. Unlike room and post mining, where pillars are left to hold cavities, this technology uses a supporting spring to ensure a higher yield. When the spring is removed after extraction the ground collapses, fracturing the fragile sandstone required for the swamps. The mines also discharge wastewater containing sediment and heavy metals.

The Lithgow Environment Group (LEG) has been monitoring water quality in streams and rivers for years. It also watches the health of swamps. Findings of heavy metals and sediment in the water, that was confirmed by Water Scientist Dr Ian Wright, provided evidence to take action. The Wallerawang Power Station was required to put in a desalination plant to treat half of the water discharged from the Springvale and Angus Place Mines. But the Station and the plant have been decommissioned since then. The pressure for better practices continues. A proposal on the table at the time of going to press is the installation of a desalination plant at the remaining Point Piper Power Station, and the piping of mine wastewater to the plant to replace fresh water taken from the Colo River.

Julie Favell, Natural Areas Project Officer with the Lithgow Environment Group, says communities should not be lulled into believing that industry self-regulation is enough. She urges local people to remain alert to signs that indicate there are problems with our most valuable resource. This is their home. The personal responsibility lies here.

A Water Sensitive City

Further downstream Blue Mountains City Council is adopting an ambitious Water Sensitive City Strategy designed to mitigate the impacts of urban runoff on the downstream World Heritage National Park, earning the thumbs up from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Green rooftop harvesting of rainwater at the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre is a world first initiative. At Echo Point, stormwater harvesting allows the water to flow into a 150,000-litre

Restoring Nature's Hydraulic Pulse (cont'd)

tank that services nearby toilets visited by close to 3.5 million tourists annually.

Geoffrey Smith, Environmental Scientist at Blue Mountains City Council, explains that capturing water and directing it toward multiple uses mimics Mother Nature. Other approaches to ensure water remains in the landscape include restoring the natural 'chain of pools' by creating check dams, and stabilising banks with bales of coconut mulch at strategic points in creeks; building raingarden bio-filtration systems at key nodes throughout the catchment; replacing concrete kerbs and guttering with grass swales; encouraging the uptake of slow drip water tanks in homes; and the installation of permeable driveways and carparks.

Inspired youth

Lower in the catchment, young volunteers are restoring wetlands. Jade Paton, a recipient of the Young Landcare Leader Award, was introduced to wetland management as a Green Army participant, and assigned to the Hawkesbury Region in 2016.

She considers herself lucky that Robin Woods of the Hawkesbury Environmental Movement (HEN) was the project's host. "You cannot help but fall in love and learn to value the wetlands, if you have spent time with Robin," she says. "They are important carbon sinks, reduce the risk of flooding and act as filters. They are also an important habitat for birds."

Much of the work involved removing weeds and when the project came to an end the group couldn't bear to walk away. "We had become attached to our sites and felt a responsibility to continue protecting them."

During a team-building exercise the group dubbed themselves the Wetland Warriors and the name stuck. Participants now carry on as volunteers. Along with maintaining wetlands they educate the public and landowners about their value. They also work to attract more volunteers to ensure ongoing regeneration continues.

Several of the warriors have found industry-related jobs and one is starting university because she wants to learn more about saving the environment.

Harnessing the adventure brigade

Jeff Cottrell wasn't a 'Greenie'. He was just a man who wanted to paddle his canoe on the Colo River through Wollemi National Park, north of the Blue Mountains. He discovered he could gain access if he became part of a weed eradication team.

Friends of the Colo was formed in 2000 to control weeds interfering with the natural ecosystems in Wollemi National Park and the Colo Catchment. Volunteers combine the excitement of bush walking, whitewater rafting and flatwater kayaking with weed control.

One of the most invasive riparian (riverbank) weeds is black willow. The willow uses more water than other riparian native vegetation. Leaf drop sucks oxygen out of rivers and kills fish. Black willows also crowd out natural vegetation required by native birds. Their fine dandelion-like seeds can blow over 60 kilometres in the wind, spreading in leap frog fashion from areas bordering the World Heritage area and into the National Park.

Between 2000 and 2003, Friends of the Colo treated over 3,000 trees, using a bioactive poison. The trees die and break down. Borers enter the wood. Cockatoos chase the grubs and pull the trunks and branches apart.

"Nature finishes the job, leaving piles of willow mulch," says Jeff. "The natural vegetation grows in to fill the spot."

Jeff uses his skills as a whitewater paddler and trip leader to manage the risk when mapping and treating willows in remote environments. Volunteers take photos and GPS readings to monitor patterns that lead to nearby seed sources or black willow galleries on areas outside the Park.

Black Willow is under control in the Colo Catchment. Other weeds are being treated and work has spread to the Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers, and Hawkesbury Floodplain with the help of volunteers from organisations such as the Springwood Bushwalking Club.

A travelling branch of the group, known as the Willow Warriors is replicating this approach in other whitewater rivers between Sydney and the Victorian border. The intent is to create buffer zones around national parks and in this way provide cost effective remote area weed control.

Jeffery believes volunteers who are part of the outdoor adventure community can bring a variety of skills to conservation efforts. As a computer consultant he has spent his working life looking at process and applies this knowledge to systematically addressing weed control.

He is now a convert to the conservation movement, and speaks of how a love of outdoor recreation translates into a passion to protect the environments that adventurers seek to enjoy.

It is this passion that is evident in the work of the Lithgow Environment Group, the Blue Mountains Conservation Society, the dedicated environment team at Blue Mountains City Council, the Hawkesbury Environment Network, the Friends of the Colo, and both the Wetland and the Willow Warriors. It is a passion for the importance of water to be shared.



Carne Creek Swamp, Newnes State Forest. Under threat with long-wall mining. Photo by Julie Favell

Boomerang Bags

Imagine an initiative that helps to reduce the devastating environmental impact of plastic while also building community, teaching new skills and upcycling materials. Boomerang Bags is doing all that and more, and it's arrived in the Mountains.

Boomerang Bags first began on the Gold Coast in 2013. It addresses the problem of plastics at a grassroots level by engaging communities of volunteers to make cloth shopping bags out of upcycled materials. The bags are placed in stores for shoppers to 'borrow and bring back'. It's sparked so much excitement that there are now over 260 Boomerang Bag communities worldwide with around 80,000 bags in circulation.

The problem that Boomerang Bags is addressing is a big one. Plastics are a huge cause for concern from the very beginning of their production, as they are made from non-renewable resources such as crude oil, gas and coal. Despite the fact that plastic bags can be recycled, only 3% actually are. The rest pollute our environment and some eventually enter our food chain. According to Clean Up Australia, we are throwing away over 7,000 plastic bags a minute, and worldwide plastic bags contribute to around 3.5 million tons of waste each year.

But there is something we can do about this huge problem. We can stop using plastic bags and use reusable cloth bags instead. And Boomerang Bags is here to help.

Boomerang Bags Blackheath started in late 2016, closely followed by Boomerang Bags Blue Mountains, with regular working bees in Blackheath, Katoomba, Hazelbrook and Springwood. The initiative has been met with huge enthusiasm by local residents.

Anna Ingham began Boomerang Bags Blackheath after joining, and learning from, a Sydney group. She thought it would work really well in Blackheath and began collecting materials and sewing machines. "The world knows us for our beautiful environment so reducing plastic is a good thing to promote," Anna points out. The Blackheath group meets in the Blackheath Community Op Shop,

giving them the opportunity to reuse materials that the shop is not able to sell. "Our aim is to recycle as much of their waste as

possible." Anna also finds that being in the Op Shop gives them lots of opportunities for sharing the project with shoppers as they pass through. There is a growing sense of community and friendship as a result of the project. They have now made over 200 bags and are aiming to make 400 before launching in Blackheath's local supermarket in August.

Boomerang Bags Blue Mountains began as the result of Trish Adams, Liz Smith and members of the Springwood Chamber of Commerce connecting up. They launched their Facebook page in March this year and have had a number of successful sewing bees, making over 250 bags. People have not only been involved by attending sewing bees, but also by donating huge amounts of materials in the form of threads, fabrics (including old curtains and linens for up-cycling), and screen printing inks. The group are aiming to make 200 bags for each of the three townships before launching in a few smaller shops.

What is striking about Boomerang Bags is that it is achieving so much more than just reducing plastics. "People are sharing skills and meeting new friends, getting out and not being isolated", says Liz Smith, who coordinates the Hazelbrook sewing bees through Mountains Outreach Community Services (MOCS), who are temporarily auspicing the project. "There is such a wide age range, so many generations of people who are interested," says Rachel Hall, who coordinates

the Springwood bees. If you're keen to get involved there are many jobs – ironing, cutting, pinning, printing, sourcing fabrics and threads, making cups of tea and snacks, and just cheering volunteers on!

Too find out more contact Anna Ingham on 0404 483 720, Liz Smith on 47586811, or visit each group's Facebook page. Other groups can be found via www.boomerangbags.org



Photo by Margaret Ryan

What is striking about Boomerang Bags is that it is achieving so much more than just reducing plastics. "People are sharing skills and meeting new friends, getting out and not being isolated".

Meredith McKay

Breaking News: Council Motion to phase out single-use plastic

As people get more and more concerned about the damaging amounts of plastic waste in our environment, and entering our food supply, communities have begun to take action. Now Blue Mountains Councillor, Kerry Brown, has demonstrated that Blue Mountains City Council is listening and is prepared to do something about it.

“There are no practical barriers to eradicating single-use plastics. It is a matter of will,” said Kerry. “I think our community has the will and Council must support that.”

At the Council Meeting in late June, Kerry will move that Council urge the State Government to follow the lead of South Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory and the ACT and legislate against the use of single-use lightweight plastic bags of less than 35 microns.



Councillor Kerry Brown at the Blue Mountains Food Co-op

She's also moving that Council invite Coles and Woolworth to run a 12-month pilot program in the Blue Mountains, replacing its free lightweight plastic bags with priced multi-use bags.

Kerry's Notice of Motion also asks Council to phase out single-use plastics in its own operations.

It acknowledges the community's efforts to cut back on single-use plastic in the Mountains.

“Blue Mountains Food Co-op has really led the way and demonstrated 36-years of leadership on this,” she said. “They've sold unpackaged food, which customers have happily decanted into their own multi-use brown paper bags, and recycled jars, for almost four decades. Despite the big supermarkets' expansion into healthy foods and organics, the Co-op has continued to grow and thrive, showing that many people are very keen to shop without creating unnecessary plastic waste.”

Since 2013, too, Marina Brown and her volunteers have worked with major events like Winter Magic and the Leura Harvest Festival to reduce the amount of waste they produce. They've introduced recycling and composting, and encouraged

food stallholders to avoid using single-use plastic and polystyrene.

In May 2016 The World Heritage Institute launched its Low Carbon Living Rating Scheme which includes single-use plastic in its audit of participating businesses.

Then, in October 2016, Blackheath became the first town in the world in which all shop-front businesses agreed to phase out plastic straws. According to Lis Bastian from The Big Fix, who organised the phase-out, “this was made possible because we got sponsorship and used the buying power of all the businesses to source affordable paper straws. We've also been running a campaign to encourage people to rediscover the joy of drinking without a straw altogether! When the phase-out is complete, we'll be saving around 40,000 plastic straws a month from landfill and from entering our waterways via our stormwater system.”

In the same month, the Combined Chambers of Commerce in the Blue Mountains launched an initiative to promote businesses trading without single-use plastic bags. This was endorsed by Slow Food Blue Mountains and participating Village Chambers.

Soon after, George Vergotis from the Blackheath & District Chamber of Commerce, reported that the Combined Chambers were interested in following Blackheath's lead to phase out plastic

straws.

This year, Boomerang Bags initiatives have popped up in Blackheath, Katoomba, Hazelbrook and Springwood. Volunteers have been sewing cloth bags in regular working bees and these will be distributed to local businesses for customers to borrow and return when they forget to bring their own (hence 'boomerang'). Nearly 500 bags have been produced, with lots more on the way, and will be distributed soon.

Recently, Integrated Dental Health in Katoomba became the first recycling point in the Blue Mountains for dental waste that can't normally be recycled in Council's waste collection. Items like toothbrushes, toothpaste tubes and caps, floss and floss containers, and plastic dental picks and their containers. These will be collected from Integrated Dental Health and turned into playground equipment.

“I'm confident this Notice of Motion will be supported by Council,” said Kerry. “Together with the community we can put serious pressure on big supermarkets and State decision makers to say no to single-use plastic.”

Heading Home - Ending Homelessness Here!



Sleep site. Photo courtesy of Wentworth Community Housing

It's a lovely word, home. When it's cold outside, you can put another log on the fire. Stressful day at work? Hug your partner or kids.

But for many, 'home' is anything but safe, warm and dry - cold, hunger and insecurity are nightly companions.

Just ask Bill Temple. A few months short of his 65th birthday, he lost his job when the business he'd been working for closed up and moved. Unemployed, he was soon living in the grandstand at Windsor Sports Ground.

"The people around the oval were really nice, always giving me food, always giving me clothing."

Then a visiting support worker contacted Bill and helped arrange accommodation for him. "The day I did get the keys was great, because I was out of the rain and the wind blowin', not

having to worry about someone stealing my stuff."

Surveys and briefings

A recent survey found hundreds of people like Bill sleeping rough in Penrith, Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains. The survey formed part of the award-winning project 'Heading Home - Ending Homeless Here!', which aims not just to service homelessness, but to stop it in its tracks. Over three days in November, a team of 75 volunteers set out in the hours before dawn to locate rough sleepers, talk to them about their homelessness and register them for further help.

"We found 140 people, but this is an underestimate of the problem," says Jenny Ranft, Community Services Manager with Wentworth Community Housing.

Jenny and project officer Jo Robinson took the results to local community briefings and the media. "The briefings are a really good way of mobilising community support and we got good media coverage thanks to ambassadors like ex-Panther Mark Geyer and bipartisan support from all levels of government."

Partnerships

The Heading Home project took out the 2017 Zest Award for Exceptional Community Partnership in February for its novel approach to partnerships.

"We were thrilled about that," says Jenny. "They were looking for solutions to problems being solved by partnerships that go beyond the usual suspects."

Wentworth's project partners include the Mercy Foundation,



Volunteers looking for homeless people. Photo courtesy of Wentworth Community Housing

which provided \$50,000 for the project, Platform Youth Services and Mission Australia, but Jenny and Jo also contacted real estate agents and mortgage brokers.

“Real estate agents may seem an unusual partner, but they can play a crucial role by putting tenants in touch with us when the tenancy first appear at risk,” said Jenny.

“Jo pounded the pavement to contact agencies in the region and present them with a business case showing that evictions will cost you this much, then you have vacancy rates etc. It’s better to take preventative action. Once people got it, they became the most willing advocates.”

Mythbusting

The Heading Home project has already placed 28 of the rough sleepers identified in the survey in longer-term housing, but it’s not just these that the project had in its sights.

“We want to bust the myths about homelessness, what kinds of people are homeless and why they are homeless”, Jenny says.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), homelessness is not just “rooflessness”. The ABS Census provides a snapshot of homelessness, with the most recent available statistics (2011) reporting more than 105,000 Australians homeless on Census night (28,200 in NSW), with 60% under 35 and 44% female.

Only 6% (6800) were rough sleepers, and many of these were women and children. The largest homeless groups were found in temporary accommodation, boarding houses, emergency shelters or couch surfing with friends or relatives.

The ABS Census also found fewer than 10% of homeless people suffer mental or substance abuse issues. Jenny agrees. “While we don’t have exact numbers for our region, it’s usually financial reasons due to loss of job, health or family separation.”

New approaches

“Meeting the demand for housing to end homelessness calls for new approaches,” says Jenny.



Sleep site. Photo courtesy of Wentworth Community Housing

“We expect we’re going to be assisting 900 people in this calendar year who are either homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. So we did some blue-sky thinking and prioritised three of the best ideas.

“One was for a tiny homes pilot project. At our community briefings, these were far and away the most popular solution. You can accommodate more people on a piece of land without moving to medium-density living.

“We want to try this in our region. It’s not a silver bullet, but we think it can work for some people who can’t live in crowded boarding houses. We are closely watching the State’s first tiny home development for homeless people, now nearing completion in Gosford.”

The second solution is for a secondary dwellings expo. “The expo would bring the experts together - like bushfire authorities, town planners, mortgage brokers and builders - to help people navigate the regulations and see if this is something they’d like to invest in, especially in the Blue Mountains where council plans already allow for secondary dwellings.”

The third idea calls for a housing locator. “We need someone who knows how to speak ‘real estate’, to work with agencies and tap into the secondary housing market - vacant weekends, underperforming investment properties and so on.”

Ending homelessness

Wentworth Community Housing is now looking for funds to implement these ideas. In the meantime, Jenny says everyone can help end homelessness.

“Look at the way you think about homeless people. Is it OK that people are homeless? We can’t ignore the problem and just accept it as a part of modern society.

“So people can change their mindset, learn how to recognise the signs of homelessness - it could be a child who stops bringing their lunch, or a family not paying their childcare fees - and then connect them to the available services using our Right Door helpline on 1800 760 071.”

And Bill Temple? He now lives independently, looking after himself and playing golf. “No one should be sleeping on the street. Not able to have a shower, not able to keep warm and dry. It’s terrible”.

Brendan Atkins



Bill Temple picks up his keys. Photo courtesy of Wentworth Community Housing

Wyn Jones and The Great Western Walk



Lennox Bridge. Photo by Wyn Jones

In our rather cynical age, people frequently ask: “Is there really anything left to explore or discover ... hasn't it all been done before?”

Spend some time with Blackheath ecologist Wyn Jones and you'll soon have your answer ... you'll begin to feel the welling up of curiosity, excitement and anticipation that must have driven explorers, from the beginning of time, to head out into the unknown.

Wyn's no stranger to new discoveries. In 1994, when David Noble was canyoning and discovered the ancient living fossil species, the Wollemi Pine, he brought back a branch to show Wyn and together they returned to the relic grove of prehistoric rainforest in the Wollemi Park to learn more about it. Wyn's also discovered the only seven locations of the very rare Dwarf Mountain Pine, which only exists on the escarpment between Wentworth Falls and Katoomba.

Wyn's enthusiasm for the natural world, and all that's still left to explore, particularly in the Blue Mountains, is completely and utterly infectious. You'll soon be itching to pull on your boots and head out into the bush, ready to be blown away by its mysteries and the mind-bending journeys that can be made into 'Deep Time'. Go with Wyn to Perry's Lookdown in Blackheath, for example, and he'll direct your attention to Mount Banks Wall, where he can identify the geological layers going back 290 million

years (about 5.5% of earth time from its formation around 4.5 billion years ago).

Heading out into the bush is what Wyn does frequently. He's a renowned bushwalker and believes that walking is the only way to truly explore. According to Wyn: “If you walk, you have time to engage, instead of seeing everything in a blur. You take in places at a deeper level and have a much more connected experience with the landscape, and people, both past and present.”

Four years ago, fellow ecologist Dr David Goldney asked him to get involved in a massive project - creating the Great Western Walk across the World Heritage Listed Blue Mountains, from Emu Ford on the Nepean River at Emu Plains, to Bathurst, Australian's first inland European settlement. It's a 200km walk that loosely follows Cox's Road, the first inland European road (or bush track really), which was commissioned by Governor Macquarie and built by William Cox over 6 months from 1814 to 1815.

As a passionate ecologist, geologist, naturalist, artist and lover of history, Wyn saw this as a great opportunity to make the bush, and both its natural and cultural history, accessible to everyone.

It is hoped that The Great Western Walk will launch in 2018. Dame Marie Bashir AD, CVO has become the patron, brochures are being produced, and the Cox's Road Dreaming Guide Book, which was produced in 2015 by David Goldney and Greening Bathurst, and won the 2017 Chifley Heritage Award in May, is already being widely distributed.

Its sub-title is, aptly, 'History With Your Boots On.'

The 100 page book, accompanied by eight maps, was produced by over 60 people and provides information about 116 sites and their natural and cultural significance. It

brings together stories of the three Aboriginal nations (the Darug, Gundungurra and Wiradjuri) who first walked this land, and who used the Blue Mountains ridge as a meeting ground; the stories of the Europeans; and the stories of the flora and fauna of the region.

For the project, Wyn contributed his photographs, wrote articles, and helped to create maps of the geology and the plant communities along Cox's Road. By comparing these maps you can see how the underlying geology of an area influences the species that survive there.

The Guide Book includes a chart that shows at what altitude you can find each of the 17 dominant eucalyptus species between the base of Mt York and the Nepean River. This year, Wyn's also been recording the times that each eucalypt along the road flowers, with the yellow bloodwood starting the season in Spring. The Blue Mountains received its World Heritage Listing predominantly because of being home to 96 species of eucalypts which make up 13% of all gums in Australia.

At Springwood, 10 to 12 dominant eucalypts grow near the old Cox's Rd and the Guide Book highly recommends taking the time to walk the Reserve track to get a 'feel' for what this country looked like in 1814.

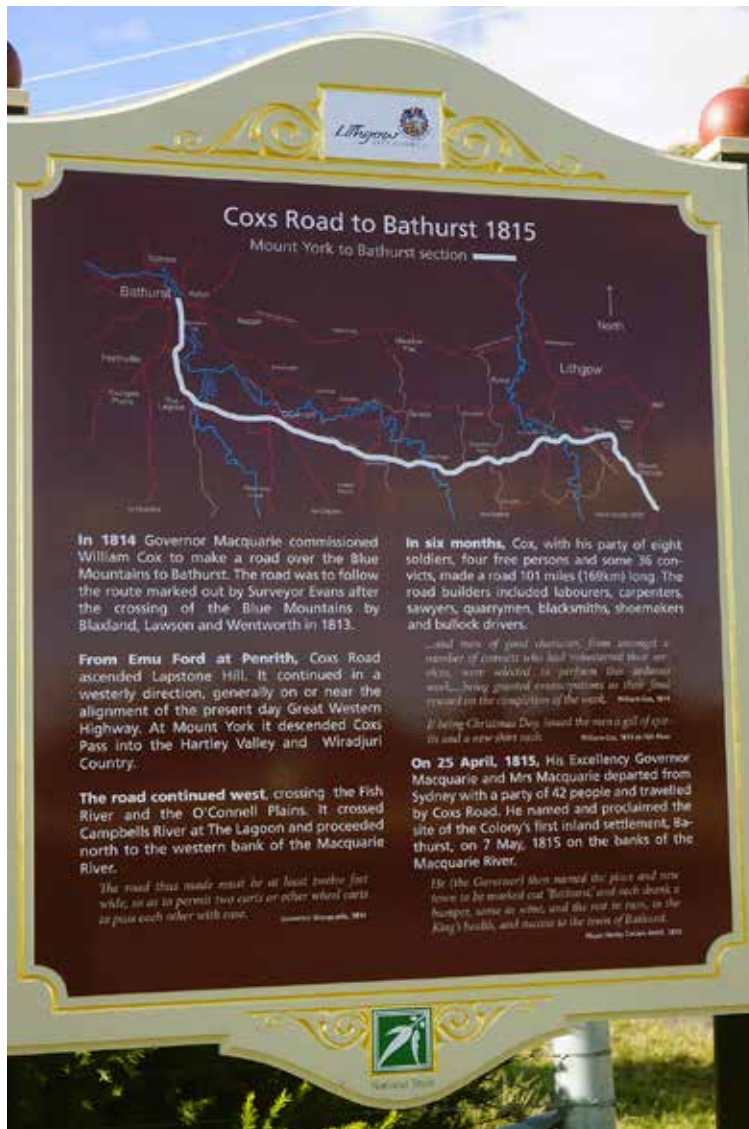
Excitingly, because of his walking and re-walking of the 'track', Wyn's also discovered “500 m of the original road that no-one's found before! It was in incredible condition because it hasn't

been driven or ridden on, just walked on by horses and cattle”.

There are many fascinating notes that accompany each of the sites in the Guide Book, as it takes you back and forth on a journey through time and space.

The magnificent Lennox Bridge, for example, is Australia’s oldest surviving bridge and was the first scientifically designed stone-arch bridge on the Australian mainland, built by a team of 20 convicts under the personal tutelage of David Lennox, who trained in Scotland under Thomas Telford, the father of civil engineering.

The Glenbrook Lagoon became an important camping site for explorers, road builders, soldiers, bullockies, vice-regal parties, police, squatters, new settlers, goldminers, and convicts. The author muses that it must have been an important place for Aboriginal people too, although no archaeological work has been undertaken there yet. It’s an extraordinary haven of biodiversity, with four native fish, three frog species, two native turtles and three other reptile species, 46 native bird species and 18 mammal species. There’s an intriguing discussion in this section



Signage by Lithgow City Council and National Trust. Photo by Wyn Jones

about why early naturalists didn’t record hearing the sound of frogs. When the author was there, he “was greeted with the raucous croaking of at least five species”. He imagines there could have been a dozen or more species in 1815, which would have been deafening!

The Great Western Walk is planning to start from the new Green Bridge being built on the Nepean River. This will be one of the largest pedestrian/cycling bridges in Australia with a 200 m uninterrupted span and a full width of 257 m. It is expected to open in 2018.

While the whole Walk takes about two weeks for those of moderate fitness, it has been designed to cater for all levels of ability and interest, with people being able to dip in and out at various sections using assisted transport. According to Wyn, “an 80 year old walked most of the way along Cox’s Rd between Mt York and the Great Divide”. The Walk takes roughly one week from Emu Plains to Mt York and then a week from Mt York to Bathurst.

The route traverses wilderness, urban, village and rural environments; it travels across sandstone and granite country; it includes panoramic views and both east-flowing and west-flowing rivers; as well as hanging swamps, waterfalls and what were once swampy meadows, where Aboriginals sourced the grasses they ground up for food.



Cox’s Road. Photo by Wyn Jones

Wyn believes the Walk will attract international attention and give a much-needed boost to local economies, with the growth of B&Bs and other tourism operations.

It’s impossible to not get really excited by Wyn’s vision - a vision in which 10,000 people a year take the time to slow down and reconnect with nature, history, culture and local communities - and ultimately, of course, themselves, and their place on this little layer of ‘Deep Time’.

All that’s left to complete the project is to put up signage, clear pathways, create legal access routes through privately-owned land west of Mt York, and get council support to maintain tracks. With a committee representing a broad range of community groups from Bathurst to Penrith, and including Wyn Jones, none of these obstacles feel insurmountable!

You can find out more at www.coxsroaddreaming.org.au

Occupying Thompson Square and saving St Albans Common



Occupation Tent at Thompsons Square. Photo by The Big Fix

There is something so extraordinary happening in the Hawkesbury that I'm amazed global media isn't shouting the story from the rooftops. From the Occupation of Thompson Square, to the saving of St Albans Commons, communities are saying enough's enough, and rising up to protect their historically significant communal spaces.

It is winter, temperatures have plummeted, but each day, and all through the night, community volunteers, in a small tent in Windsor, continue their 24-hour, seven-day-a-week vigil to protect Thompson Square, Australia's oldest public square.

It's impossible to overstate how important this is! On the 23 July 2017, the Occupation will have been ongoing for four years. FOUR YEARS!!!! Four years of people dragging themselves out of bed in the middle of the night to go and sit in a tent on the side of a busy road, day in and day out, because they care about their town's history, and their community's future. That's hundreds of volunteers filling 84 shifts a week!

It's the longest continuous occupation of a heritage site in Australia's history, and it reflects the awakening of communities around the world who have begun to realise what's at stake if they don't act now.

As Joni Mitchell once sang, "Don't it always seem to go / That you don't know what you've got / Till it's gone / They paved paradise / And put up a parking lot."

Well, the people of the Hawkesbury know what they've got, and they're fighting hard to protect it. To date, around 40,000 other people have also signed their names on a petition to support them.

The catalyst for the Occupation of Thompson Square was the decision by the Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) in 2011 to replace the historic Windsor Bridge (built in 1874). Community Action for Windsor Bridge (CAWB) started in the same year and, over the last 5 and a half years, has won volunteer and heritage

awards for the work it's been doing.

The RMS's decision to demolish the bridge has been condemned by heritage groups nationally. The new bridge would destroy the heritage precinct with a wide concrete structure and change the grade of Thompson Square to make it unsuitable for community activities.

John Lindop, who's manned two shifts a week at the Occupation Tent with his wife, since 2013, is passionate about the Square:

"If we demolish this, where do people go?" he asks.

The Square has been the focal point of many community activities, like Cinema in the Square, concerts and wool-bombing events, and on Sundays people flock to the area. It's an important public space in the heart of Windsor.

CAWB say that replacing the bridge would also not address the increasing road congestion that's causing traffic chaos.

The community is after a long-term transport solution that also protects the heritage assets of the town. They'd like the historic Windsor Bridge renovated for light and local traffic, and a bypass bridge built for heavy traffic further along the river, where the flood impacts on it would also be less severe.

Why occupy Thompson Square?

This area has been the 'food basket' for both aboriginal and European settlements. According to Hawkesbury councillor and CAWB member, Peter Reynolds (Hawkesbury Gazette, 16 Jan, 2017), it is an important archaeological site. "Only 12 inches under the dirt beneath the CAWB tent are Aboriginal artefacts found to be 6,000 years old."

Built in 1795, Windsor is also the third oldest place of British settlement on the Australian mainland, and the oldest rural township in Australia. Peter Reynolds points out that Thompson Square is the only streetscape you can stand in, in this country,

built under the reign of the Georgian kings. Because of the opportunities given to ex-convicts in the area, and the fact that Governor Lachlan Macquarie named George St after the King, and the Square next to it after an ex-convict, giving them equal status, Windsor is also considered to be the home of the “Fair Go”.

There are many lessons we can learn from its history.

It's so easy to forget, for example, how crucially important it is to protect fertile farmland. On two occasions, in the early days of the colony (1806 and 1810), Sydney was saved from starvation with food provided by the farmers of the Hawkesbury and transported to Sydney via the river.

History shows us how people have survived and thrived in the face of many challenges over hundreds of years. When we study our history, we learn how to grow the resilience we need to survive into the future.

Kate Mackaness, a former local school teacher, is passionate about the rich history of Thompson Square:

“When you stand in Thompson Square you're looking out over the oldest continuously cultivated agricultural land in the nation.”

Kate took me up the original Georgian staircase in the Macquarie Arms. Built in 1815, it's the oldest mainland pub in Australia. We looked out through the same old glass that Governor Macquarie himself would have looked out of.

“The wondrous thing about seeing it from here is that you can see it through an 18th century lens. You can imagine how soul-sick, hungry, lonely and desperate they must have been for a landscape that was familiar to the one they had left behind. Back then, this was the furthest point from the centre of the known universe (London). It was populated by ex-cons, and yet they built the most extraordinary buildings. Francis Greenway was an ex-convict but he became Australia's first government architect and built St Matthew's Anglican Church here.”

“This is such an important place in our history. If we lose this it's gone forever!”

As we talk, Kate waves at the passing truckies. “They're all on our side”, she says.

The Occupation Tent has become a de facto tourist information centre and I'm given a historic walking tour guide for

the town.

Kate talks about how “heritage tourists spend more and stay longer than any other tourists. A well-managed heritage precinct outperforms comparable business outcomes and real estate values go up.” It's so obviously in the town's interests to protect this precinct.

“It is impossible to contemplate losing ... the price is too high,” she says.

Studying history trains us in long-term, not just short-term thinking.

The Occupation has brought the community together - that's one of the important roles of public squares. It's generated dialogue on the long-term future of the Hawkesbury, and its power has been in the one-on-one conversations that continue to remind people of their rights to have a say in how their community is shaped into the future.

Rivers can connect and rivers can divide us. While politics are divided over the Hawkesbury, the community is connected like never before.

“We're all the richer for it,” says Kate.

The RMS say they hope to start construction on the bridge in 2018 and complete it in 2019.

To find out more about CAWB, visit www.cawb.com.au

Saving St Albans Common

North of Windsor, and tucked away in a place described by locals as ‘The Forgotten Valley’, the tiny village of St Albans, with a population of 305 (2011 census including its surrounding area, recently took on the NSW State Government and won, in a battle to save its Common. It also drew attention to a much larger battle, the one to stop the potential privatisation of all Crown Land in NSW, including travelling stock routes and coastal reserves.

Historically, St Albans was one of Australia's earliest settlements and, like Windsor, critical to the fledgling Colony's food security.

Eventually, settlers and emancipated convicts arrived. The former convicts were usually only given small holdings of less than 20 acres.



Kate Mackaness looking out over Windsor Bridge. Photo by The Big Fix



Because this wasn't enough land to graze animals all year round, a group of locals started a petition to have land set aside as a common, for all commoners to share.

In 1853 the St Albans Common, comprising 2567 acres, was granted by Queen Victoria for the inhabitants of the Macdonald River. The grant was in perpetuity. It included a significant wetland and a lake which is prime habitat for birds and marine life.

Today, it is the oldest continuing working common in Australia and is responsible for ensuring farming can be viable for local people with small landholdings. It also allows public activities like Rural Fire Service training programs, and a recreational fishing competition which helps aid in carp reduction. As one of the most pristine bushlands around Sydney, it is a well-managed buffer for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area.

According to Commoner, Vera Zaccari: "There is a lot of voluntary work done by the Commoners to manage weed infestation and look after this ecologically sensitive area; the people in the valley see themselves as custodians for the greater good, and parts of the Common are healthier than some areas in the surrounding national park."

There are currently 130 commons trusts in NSW that manage land used by commoners, but not all are as active as St Albans Common Trust, which has responsibly managed the land for over 160 years. The Common has made it financially viable to graze stock, and been a lifeblood for stock needing respite from drought, fire and flood. It is clearly an integral part of the small St Albans community, with well over a third of the community being Commoners, and is another example of communal land being preserved for the common good.

In late October 2016, the Commoners were alerted to a new Crown Land Management Bill being rushed through the NSW Legislative Council to repeal several Acts (including public reserves, stock routes, Crown Lands, etc). According to Vera Zaccari: "It's aim was to increase the inventory of Crown Land in NSW and to remove all protections that ensured Crown Land remained public. This Bill, if passed, would have meant the extinction of the St Albans Common and all Commons across the State."

The community was outraged, particularly with the speed with which the new Bill was being pushed through parliament.

"It is extraordinary that it did not attract more public attention. And, extraordinary that it was slipped in at the end of the Parliamentary session," said Vera.

At an emergency meeting that united the community, a Community Action Group was formed to insist on the St Albans Common retaining its existing ownership and management by the local people.

From that night, an intense, highly professional and tightly run eight-day campaign was coordinated to call on the government to defer the Bill. The community rallied together and lobbied cross-benchers, blitzed the media and spread their story about deferring the Bill to save the Common. They even collected 6,000 signatures in three days, and delivered these to parliament.

The legislation passed, with amendments removing Commons from the Crown Land Management Act 2016. "We had 'fee simple' title to the land, granted in perpetuity. People had deeds in the bank with their names on them. We argued that the government couldn't just come in and take what wasn't theirs," said Vera.

In February 2017, the government again proposed repealing the Commons Management Act 1989 so that it could dispense with Commoners and replace elected trustees with ministerial appointed trustees. One hundred and nineteen submissions were lodged objecting to the proposal, mostly from St Albans. On April 21, a press release from the Minister for Lands and Forestry indicated the voices of St Albans had been heard and it was decided to not "change current arrangements".

"Fortunately, we won our battle", said Vera, "but the bigger battle for protecting public land in the rest of NSW now needs to be fought for each site."

One thing's for certain, the people of the Hawkesbury can clearly show us how to do it.

To find out more about St Albans visit www.stalbansnsw.com.au

Peter Baldwin and DebateGraph



Peter Baldwin. Photo by Berndt Selldeim

The first time I meet Peter Baldwin we are at the Blackheath Philosophy Forum. It's Saturday afternoon, on the lingering tail of a golden Blackheath autumn, and the community hall is packed. It's thrilling, in a way, that hundreds of people are willing to give their weekend afternoons to a debate on the value of The Enlightenment – that profound seventeenth and eighteenth century transformation that saw a seismic shift in the central ideas of Western thought and culture, an opening up to scientific values and methodologies, and a rejection of the dominance of religious superstition. This shift, however, was not only in philosophical, scientific and religious thinking, but also in the openness and scope of dialogue, and it is this, our capacity for fearless critical debate, which is at issue for Baldwin in his discussion with fellow panellist, Ted Sadler, today.

We are still living through the reverberations of this movement, and part of Baldwin's argument is that we need to actively preserve The Enlightenment's legacy: that we must protect the right of critique in the face of attempts to stymie debate. A capacity to freely interrogate issues, to see which ideas might sink or swim on the merits of those ideas, rather than by enslavement to tradition or a need to prop up the status quo, is as fundamental to human advancement as is scientific and industrial mastery. A major interest of Baldwin since leaving federal politics has been the development of DebateGraph, a software application that provides a way to map out the positions that have purchase on an issue under debate, in order that decisions might be made with the most nuanced understanding possible.

This graph finds its most pithy distillation in the above remark from the nineteenth century philosopher and political economist,

“He who knows only his own side of a case, knows little of that”.
John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill: if we know only one side of a discussion, then regardless of how extensive that knowledge may be, we remain ignorant. In an age of shrinking broadcast media, ‘fake news’ and sound-bite politics, this provides us with an important reminder that, regardless of our opinions, we need to broaden the knowledge base that forms those opinions.

In line with this desire to be representative of diverse positions, speakers on The Enlightenment at the Blackheath Philosophy Forum have voiced views ranging from Frankfurt School Neo-Marxist critique through to the kind of staunch defence of the values of scientific advancement and the freedom to voice ideas that Baldwin himself offers. Baldwin has firsthand experience of the importance of open, critical discussion. As an outspoken activist in the 1970s, he spoke out against the corruption of the right-wing of the Labor party, and for his efforts was savagely bashed. Ironically, the images of his bruised face, which dominated the press after the incident, significantly increased reformist pressure on the party.

Prior to Baldwin's entry into federal politics, he was working on computer software. He was, he says, ‘frustrated with the quality of a lot of political debate’. At the time:

“philosophy academics were working on how you can graph or display the structure of argumentation ... Say you've got some disputed issue, you can put forward a proposition and you can mount arguments in support and opposition, and they in turn depend on premises, and each of those premises in turn might depend on other premises, so you get this kind of tree hierarchy of argument, a map ... I thought it would be interesting to see if you could put that on the web, so that

such a structure could be built up collaboratively, so that people who take different viewpoints on a contentious issue can contribute to the structure, and you can juxtapose the different points of view, and show how they're derived, and what premises they depend on."

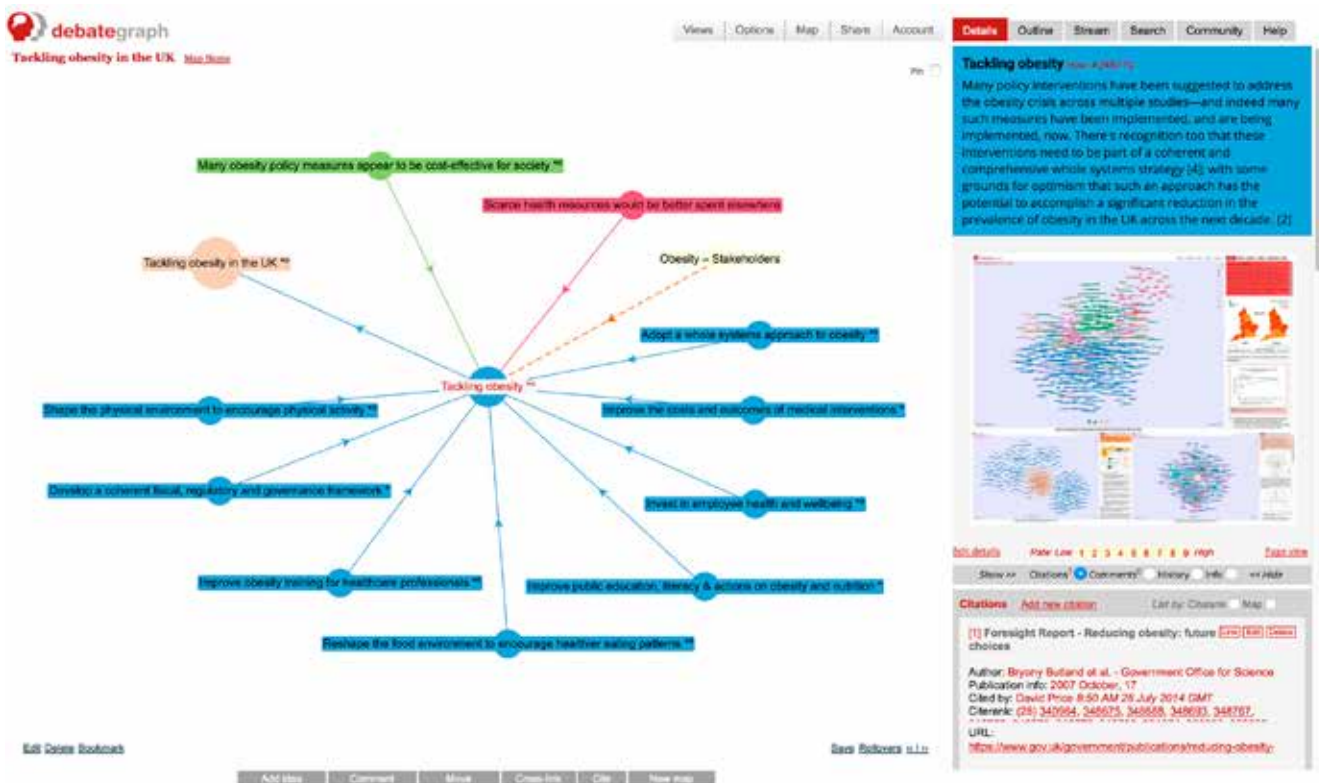
An important element of this is not only that differing aspects of each issue are brought to light, but how each issue 'connects with broader conceptual and philosophical issues', allowing 'the relationships, the dependencies' to be illustrated. Our ideas, rely not only on certain experiences, facts and arguments, but these arguments themselves rely on philosophical and ideological positions which are themselves open to debate. Thus, regardless of any position one might occupy on specific issues under debate, be they Baldwin's opinions on free speech, or Trump's American isolationism, rendering the line of dependencies on which such positions rely is a fascinating and vital project.

Peter Baldwin spent several decades in politics, including

six years as a parliamentarian during the Hawke/Keating administration, and if there is any place where a quantification of relevant positions on an issue would seem vital, it's in the mire of federal politics, where even the most well-intentioned can quickly find themselves in crocodile country i.e. when you're up to your ears in crocodiles, you soon forget you came in to drain the swamp. It borders on a utopian dream to imagine our politicians discarding sound-bite politics and the interests of corporate lobby groups, in favour of drawing from, and contributing to, an ever-evolving pool of ideas. It is not, though, impossible – we can, indeed, we must, demand more of our political representatives.

Debategraph has been used in a number of international projects involving the European Union, the CNN Amanpour Program, the UK Foreign Office, the United States government and, most recently, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. We can only hope to see this kind of approach taken up more broadly in the social and political spheres of Australian life.

Berndt Sellheim



Blackheath Philosophy Forum

Interested in the Enlightenment debate? Blackheath Philosophy Forum will be using DebateGraph for a detailed online follow-up to the series of talks delivered in April and May this year. The plan is to produce a visual graph titled 'Politics and Civilization' in which academics, political figures and forum members can collaborate in a detailed exploration of the contemporary relevance of the Enlightenment.

If you are interested you can register on the site at <http://blackheathphilosophy.org/polciv>

The paradoxes of time travel

Nicholas Smith, Professor of Philosophy, Sydney University
Saturday June 24 at 4 pm

Bridges between the body and its mind

Karola Stolz, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Macquarie University
Saturday July 8 at 4 pm

Biodiversity and triage

Mark Colyvan, Professor of Philosophy, Sydney University
Saturday July 22 at 4pm

All forums are at Blackheath Community Hall

What taboo? Talking about death and dying



Kerrie Noonan. Photo by Tina FiveAsh (www.tinafiveash.com)

Let's talk about death. It's not the most popular of conversation-starters, but it is perhaps the most important. After all, we will all die; every single one of us will take that journey that every living thing before us has taken.

Yet despite this inevitability, we are, on the whole, woefully under-prepared for our own deaths and the deaths of our loved ones. We don't know what our options are in terms of where and how we die, we don't know what our options are with respect to caring for the dead, and we don't know what our options are when it comes to burying the dead.

This lack of 'death literacy' is something that Kerrie Noonan is trying to change. As co-founder of The GroundSwell Project and Dying To Know Day – and a psychologist who works in palliative care, Noonan has dedicated much of her career to helping people better understand and deal with death.

Noonan was inspired by movements in the UK and India, which use the creative arts to explore and inform people about all aspects of death and dying.

"This is about applying the evidence from health and using the arts as a creative way to meld messages and ideas and thoughts about end-of-life planning, death literacy, and how we can change the way that we do death and dying in the community," Noonan says. "Our vision is that big broad vision where everyone knows what to do when someone's dying or grieving."

The GroundSwell Project was set up seven years ago. Two years later, Dying To Know Day, or D2KDay for short, was launched on August 8. The idea was to encourage communities and individuals to organise their own events around the theme of death literacy. Since its inception, there have been nearly 300 events held under the Dying To Know Day banner. They range from tea, cake and chat in someone's lounge room to a town-hall event for over 200.

"The events are usually a combination of head, heart and

getting hands on; getting involved in some kind of aspect of death and dying," Noonan says. For example, at The GroundSwell Project's first conference on death literacy, a presenter brought along one of the cooling beds that she provides to enable a family to care for the body of their loved one at home for up to five days after death.

"It was a performance of the work that she does at the end of life, she worked with a family in front of us, and there was a 'dead body' – an actor – who was there, and she performed the rituals and the work she does with families," Noonan says. "Part of death literacy is being involved, being in there, and we always try and build that element into the work."

One event that The GroundSwell Project itself has run at venues around the country is its 10 Things To Know Before You Go workshop, which introduces people to the many different aspects of what Noonan calls the 'death system', and how to plan and prepare for death.

"We get bogged down a bit in palliative care and the health system, but in fact that is just one little silo amongst others in the death system," she explains.

"It's about understanding, for example, what your rights are around who can care for a body at home, how does that happen, can you organise your own funeral, what does that mean in terms of what supports can you access in your community?"

But Noonan says it's one thing to know these things, it's another thing entirely to put them into practice. Which is why many GroundSwell and Dying To Know Day events bring together people with first-hand experience, to share what they've learned with people eager to understand the real options and challenges.

"For example, not many people would naturally know what to do with a dead body unless they've seen someone do it before, so a lot of the people are now saying to themselves 'I've done this before, this is the knowledge I can share in my community,'" she says.

Noonan says people coming to events generally fit into one of two categories. They're either trying to understand and make sense of an experience that they have been through with the death of someone, and part of that understanding is sharing their experiences with other people.

"Then there are people who are there to plan, who are facing their own terminal illness, or maybe have a chronic illness and see that it would be wise, because of an experience they've had in their life, to get on and plan," she says.

It's often said that talking about death is taboo, but this perception is not only untrue, it's also potentially harmful, because it excuses society – and often prevents individuals – from asking questions and understanding our options around dying and death.

Initiatives like The GroundSwell Project and Dying To Know Day tackle that myth head-on, and show very clearly by their growing popularity and attendance that people do in fact want to talk about death.

Maybe death isn't such a conversation-killer after all.

Bianca Nogrady

Diary of a Compost Hub Champion



Simone, Mac and Tav making a deposit at the Compost Hub

The most important thing that years of growing veggies in my backyard has taught me is that if I don't feed the soil, the soil can't feed me. Things finally came to a head last summer when everything I planted stopped growing at micro-veg stage. Suddenly I had a bonsai crop, not the abundant garden I'd been hoping for!

Wanting to create the healthiest food I could for my family, I realised it was time to start adding more compost - partly because it feeds the soil, but also because it helps retain moisture. It was time to stop "mining" my soil and put something back.

I can't quite express how delighted I was, then, when I heard that Blue Mountains City Council was trialing Compost Hubs in the community! I think I was one of the first people to register, I was so excited!

Becoming a Compost Hub Champion ticks so many boxes for me! It's a way to make enough compost for my vegetable garden; it's an excuse to meet neighbours I haven't met before; and it's a way to connect regularly with friends. Perhaps even more than anything else, it's also created more reasons to catch up with my mum, Heidi, who now lives in a block of units nearby!

She was the first person I asked to join my Compost Hub as a Compost Contributor, and she was almost as delighted as I was.

Lately she's felt the frustration of having moved from a house and garden into a unit. As she said, "I've been used to saving my food scraps and this is a great way of contributing a little. I like putting them back into the earth. People in the villages used to do that all the time. No-one ever came to collect rubbish."

Reducing rubbish is, of course, Blue Mountains City Council's main focus with this Trial. In Council's recent waste audit, it appears that more than 26% of waste collected from our garbage bins, MORE THAN A QUARTER, is food waste.

As well as knocking on my neighbours' doors (which took some courage!), and leaving brochures in their letterboxes inviting them to join the Hub, I also posted what I was doing on Facebook. That had an immediate response. I was thrilled when

Simone contacted me straight away and asked to join in.

She's doing it because with her current living situation (time and space) she can't set up a proper working compost. "I love the community-minded solution of a Compost Hub. It's so innovative," she messaged me on Facebook. "I also love that it's less landfill pumping methane gas into the atmosphere. Feels like a mindful and conscious thing to do for our children and future generations."

Yesterday, at the end of week one of the Trial, she dropped in her first bucket of food scraps with her sons Mac and Tav. "The kids love the concept, as do I! It's easy and efficient. The compost bin is great and fits into our small sink, and because you live near the school it's very convenient."

Antonia, who also signed up to join the Compost Hub as soon as she heard about it, has never made compost before. She works in the city and spends a lot of time travelling. "I'm looking forward to learning how to make compost, so maybe I'll feel more confident to do it in the future," she said. "In the meantime, I don't have to feel so bad about throwing food out."

It turns out that Blue Mountains City Council has a Compost Hub at its Katoomba office. Staff food scraps are composted too!

Well, so far so good! One week down, lots of conversations and a compost filling with food waste.

The Compost Hub Trial runs until July this year.

If the Trial is successful and prevents a substantial amount of food waste going to landfill, Council will look at extending the program. I'll also see if we can do it on a larger scale for the Blackheath Community Farm.

So, all of you out there who aren't composting your scraps, contact me if you're near Blackheath, via 0407437553 or lis@thebigfix.org. Otherwise, visit Blue Mountains City Council's website, or ring them on 4780500 to sign up for a Hub near you! (bmcc.nsw.gov.au/composthub)

Lis Bastian

Sanctuary



Teja Brooks Pribac in the microsanctuary. Photo by V. Leto

It's mid 2007. We've been vegans for a while and have begun to inch into activism in the area of animal rights, but feel a need to do more. We've read a moving story about a pig named Burr, rescued and now living at Edgar's Mission, a sanctuary in Victoria begun by ex-equestrian Pam Ahern. We have to drive down to Melbourne on other business and decide to pay the sanctuary a visit.

It's inspirational, the beginning of something, though at that point we've no idea what. Over a hundred farm animals (now, ten years later, there are over 450!) rescued by Pam and others or brought to the Mission by caring members of the public. Disabled animals, injured animals, neglected or abused animals, animals found wandering lost on country roads, animals from industrial and domestic settings whose 'productive' time (milk, eggs) has come to an end, escapees, fugitives. Cows, sheep, ducks, hens, roosters, goats, and of course pigs: the Mission is named after the remarkable Edgar Allen Pig. You could say he was its co-founder.

Jump to 2012. We've been living in the Blue Mountains since 2008, in a brick house near the railway station. After some medical developments I decide to retire from the university and to concentrate on full-time work of a different kind. My wife, tired of the noise from next door, begins, late one night, to look at real estate in the area. She finds a tiny farm on the edge of town, only a couple of acres.

It's love at first visit. Price-wise it's virtually a house-swap. There's an acre of grass. We buy a second-hand ride-on mower. Three weeks after moving in a friend alerts us to the plight of two sheep in need of rescue, asks if we might take them. Henry and Jonathan. The ride-on mower never gets used. A year later another friend asks if she can bring an orphaned lamb, 'in excess of requirements' at an experimental farm and about to be euthanased. My wife hand-raises him. So now, with Charlie the dog, we are six. And then, another year later, we're alerted to the plight of a young black sheep who's been living in a swamp below an abandoned brick-yard and whose feet have rotted as a consequence. He needs

a place where he can be temporarily quarantined. The feet heal beautifully. Temporary becomes permanent. How could we let him go? He learns to turn door-knobs with his mouth, breaks over and again into the feed-room, becomes the trickster of the pack.

We are now full. Grass management becomes a continual concern. But still the animals keep coming. An elderly nanny-goat who's keeper has died, two kids (Ned and Kelly) who are found wandering through the bush. Another sheep, who's reached the end of her breeding life and

whom we've guilted the farmer into letting us re-house rather than killing her as he was about to do. And so on. We've no room for them ourselves, but a sanctuary at Sunny Corner takes some, another, at Kurrajong, though bursting at the seams, takes others. Others go to private paddocks where they can live out their lives in comfort and safety.

We had no idea, at first, that such places were there but they dot the landscape (there are sanctuaries in the Hunter, down near Canberra, outside Cooma, up on the north coast, ...) a network of kindness, surviving on selfless dedication and shoe-strings. Sanctuaries for recovering wildlife, sanctuaries for farm animals, chicken sanctuaries, horse sanctuaries, pig sanctuaries. Some are lucky enough to have managed charity status; others survive on whatever their human-animal guardians can earn.

For simplicity's sake I've begun to call our little ex-farm a microsanctuary. That might be over-stating it. It is what it is. Word seems to get around among the animals themselves. We've found ourselves looking out for rabbits, raising orphaned ducklings, adopted by a flock of wild wood ducks. If our experience demonstrates anything it's that even the smallest spaces

"... a network of kindness, surviving on selfless dedication and shoe-strings. Sanctuaries for recovering wildlife, sanctuaries for farm animals, chicken sanctuaries, horse sanctuaries, pig sanctuaries." David Brooks

can become havens for animals who need them. And there is no end to need. It's not for everyone – you take on the care of these animals for their lifetimes, and doing it properly, taking into account their

biological, social and psychological needs, can be a steep learning curve – but there are a lot of people out there who could do it, and a lot of spare sheds, spare acres and half-acres of grass. And, as we have found, a lot of good people who can guide you, if you're prepared to take such a thing on.

It's collaborative. Unexpectedly self-sustaining. When times get tough we have only to step down into the yard and look around us, or sit on the back steps, talk to the sheep. The solutions seem to find themselves.

David Brooks

Toooolo .. If I had a hammer



Justin Morrissey. Photo by The Big Fix

Remember when NASA launched the Hubble and the astronauts had everything they needed EXCEPT a crowbar? That's the philosophy driving Justin Morrissey and the Katoomba Toooolo: if you are out there doing a creative project, you should be able to get your hands on any tool you need.

Toooolo is a Library of Things, with everything owned by the collective who are creating a sharing community and activating the space in Froma Lane, Katoomba.

Justin has always had his own makerspace, most recently in the Queensland TAFE Creative Arts & Entertainment building in Brisbane. After moving to the Mountains, he felt isolated from a 'making community'. He tried the Men's Shed, but wanted a space that was also accessible to women. A space that would connect the local creative community, and save them money and time.

Toooolo aims to encompass all creative practice, and to have tools to support all types of creative projects. It runs safety workshops, which are mostly attended by women, and teaches members how to use tools. Under construction is a metadata schema, basically an app, so that anyone can plug into a Toooolo inventory. It will track borrowing and bookings, sending automatic notifications when an item is overdue.

There are more than 350 tested and tagged items on offer – check out the inventory on the website at www.tooolo.com.au. Frequent user Simon Hearn has borrowed everything from a mitre saw box to a whipper snipper to an electric kiln – expensive items that aren't used often enough for him to justify buying his own, but are essential for completing his projects. Kelly Heylen borrowed everything she needed from Toooolo to fit out her new business, Platform Gallery in Katoomba.

The most popular items are the PA system and the audio-visual gear. Are you putting on a show? Toooolo can lend you the video gear to record it for posterity, or set up a home recording studio and then sell the DVD of it. For your other needs, there are chainsaws, lawnmowers, marquees, camping gear - all of it donated and maintained by Toooolo volunteers. Hire-length is worked out on a case-by-case basis.

The aim is to spend 2.5% of Toooolo's annual income on buying new tools. If you have tools you'd like to donate, visit the website to see the wishlist.

As well as 'things', Toooolo provides studio space for artists. Currently there are three studios available for \$55 per week. Toooolo extends an open invitation to all artists to drop in and find out how Toooolo can facilitate their projects.

Justin believes we need a shift in consciousness about sharing and we need to grow a sharing economy - something that is already happening in Denmark, for example.

Danish Makerspaces provide accommodation, with the elderly and kindergartens all in one space. Older people, no longer socially isolated, know how to use tools and how to raise children; younger people have an intergenerational community to live and raise a family in - it's a perfect match.

There is one other Tool Library in Australia, in Brunswick, which is part-funded by Moreland Council.

DIY Toooolo

To set up your own Toooolo, Justin advises having a core group of at least five people who are committed to coming in every week to open up, do tool maintenance, run fundraisers etc. The other vital ingredient is a financial strategy. Toooolo started with enough capital to cover one year's rent, the insurance and all the legal and online costs of setting up a not-for-profit company.

The goal is to become self-sustaining within two years. That would require 150 members. With 64 members and more coming in every week, Justin is hopeful that Toooolo will reach 75 members by the halfway point, July 23rd 2017, and 150 by the end of Year 2.

If Justin had a hammer (and he does) he'd be building a Toooolo in every town and suburb across Australia.

"Community solutions tend to drive change, so it's up to us to create in the community the changes we'd like to see in the wider world," he says.

Carla Billinghamurst

Sensory Concerts



Photo by Third Space Media

Sometimes things happen that are so eminently sensible that you just have to say, “Of course! That’s exactly what needed to happen!”

Despite how obvious these things seem, it doesn’t mean that the journey to arrive there was simple or easy. We rarely see the agony behind the ecstasy!

Bullaburra pianist, Grace Kim, knows more than most about the hard, and often tortuous, work behind any seemingly effortless performance. She’s a piano teacher at the Conservatorium of Music and has performed internationally with major symphony orchestras, winning numerous national and international competitions. She is also the founding Artistic Director of Mountains Concerts and the Blue Mountains Opera Festival.

Recently, however, she may have taken on one of her biggest challenges - one in which she found herself performing in uncharted territory.

In April 2017, she teamed up with equally renowned musicians, violinist Rebecca Chan and cellist Elizabeth Neville, to perform three unique classical music concerts at the Lower Mountains Anglican Parish Church in Glenbrook.

The venue had been chosen because it offered a range of listening spaces for audience members with sensory needs, including a sound-proofed crying room, with a glass wall and an audio feed, so that people could freely move around and make noise, while still seeing and hearing the concert.

From experiences within her own family, Grace had become acutely aware of the difficulties faced by people with sensory issues who often get overwhelmed in normal concert situations. As a parent, she also knew how hard it is for any parent to take their child to a concert other than the Wiggles.

“You don’t want to have your child disrupt the performance!” she said, echoing the anxiety of parents around the world who opt out of going to live shows while their children are young.

Instead of just traditional seating, audience members in these concerts had various choices, from giant foam crash mats to textured options and ordinary chairs with room to move around them. There were also two break-out rooms. The goal was to create a “relaxed, chilled out, multi-layered experience,” she said.

In the year leading up to the concert, Grace had discussions with psychologist Jane Wearn, and occupational therapist, Josey

Sharpe, who specialise in sensory processing disorders. They helped to create an environment in which everyone could control how they calmed down enough to listen to the concert.

“We wanted them to get to the place where they could engage with the music more quickly and we wanted it to be less stressful for everyone. Kids listen in different ways and here they could move around and listen. We wanted to create a space where people were happy to relax and not be judged,” said Grace.

The concert wasn’t, however, just for children. It was a neurodiverse audience of all ages and included carers who were able to see their clients in a different way: “as someone more than their disability”. One carer, of a very intellectually disabled client, said that the client had never spoken, but during the concert said ‘thank you’ in every pause.

Grace specifically designed the musical program for this audience and included repetitive patterns and other engaging musical elements within the classical music format. She wanted to present a concert that was the highest quality in every way. “You

don’t need to be a music literate. You know when it’s good. You feel it.”

One of the most important challenges in the year leading up to the performance was to overcome

the need for lots of “bums on seats” to make the concert financially viable. They wanted to do three smaller concerts which gave everyone room to move around so that no-one would feel overwhelmed by being too close to anyone else. To facilitate this, Grace applied for and received funding from the Blue Mountains City of the Arts Trust and the Great Walk Foundation.

During the concerts, the main challenge for the musicians was actually playing complex pieces without being distracted by so much audience movement. “The three sessions were different because of the group dynamics. Fortunately, the calibre of the performers was so high that we were able to adapt, modify and revise on the spot to take that into account.”

While the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, the most powerful moment was in the first concert. The three musicians looked out at their noisy active audience, took a deep breath and started playing. “As soon as we started playing it was instantly dead quiet. As soon as we finished the noise started again.” Easy!

“The best art always seems effortless”

Stephen Sondheim

Ian Milliss and the Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation

Linden resident Ian Milliss, who began making art in the late 60s, has always pushed the boundaries of what it means to be an artist, leaning more towards being an artist as public intellectual, than artist as craftsman. His goal has been to challenge the thinking behind systems that lead to rising inequality, increasing environmental degradation and looming climate catastrophe.

Using the creativity and the communication skills of an artist, and the reflection and research skills of an historian, he's explored how we can adapt to our rapidly changing world, at the same time as reimagining the future to create a better alternative.

In 2013 Ian collaborated with artist Lucas Ihlein to produce an exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW about innovative Australian farmer and designer P.A. Yeomans and the Keyline farming system he developed to help regenerate the Australian landscape. By exhibiting Yeomans' work at the Gallery, Ian and Lucas were demonstrating that the intelligent design of landscapes can also be considered as an artistic act.

"I think of people who are generating cultural change as artists," says Ian. "The real meaning of art is to create media that helps you understand the world and understand the way the world is changing all the time. People have the meaning of art mixed up with the forms art has taken in the past. We need to rethink the world and how it works. We need to discuss that."

Reimagining the future

Four years ago, Ian participated in Cementa13 - an innovative arts festival in Kandos, a country town in Central NSW, which had lost its main industry, the cement works.

He created a poster for Kandos that "imagined a resilient forward-looking town that had turned its problems into opportunities" (Futurelands 2). It was a vision of Kandos that included renewable energy and the adaptive reuse of the cement works. In Ian's vision, the cement works had become a diving training centre and a climbing school, surrounded by a botanical garden which was leading the world's research into plant adaptation to climate change.

Ian imagined that plywood bicycles would be manufactured in Kandos and would be freely available on racks in every street.

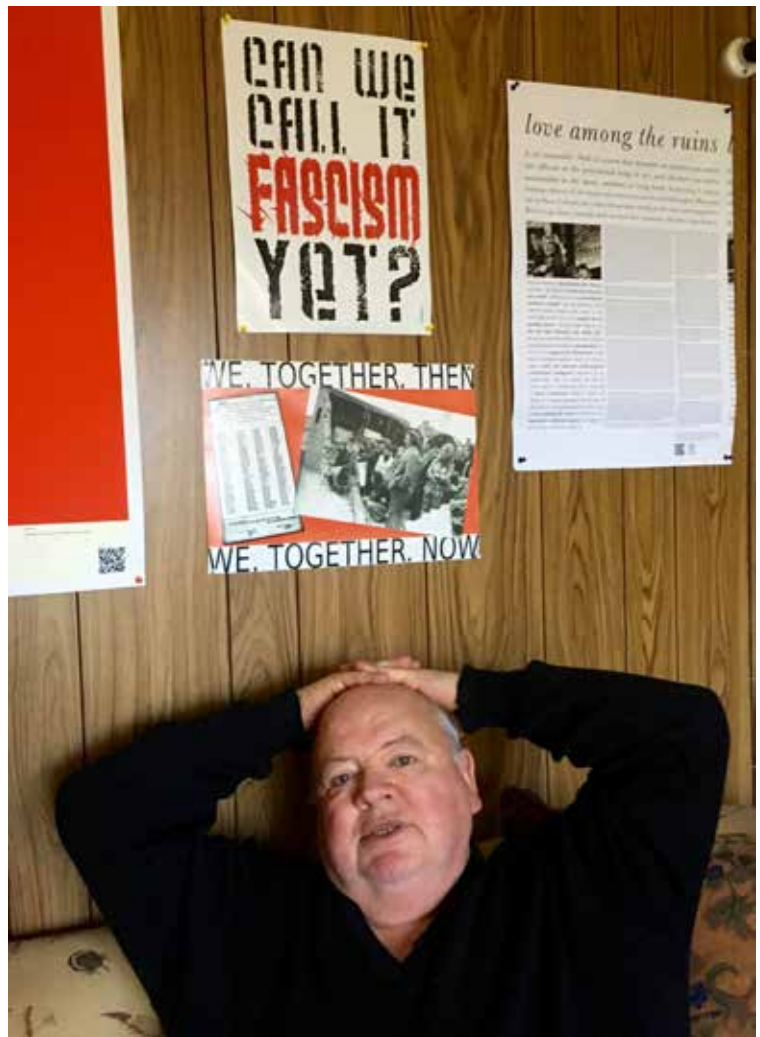
Central to the vision was the Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation and Innovation, which modelled future possibilities and produced graduates who were leaders in the international mobilisation against climate disaster.

Making dreams a reality

The poster was a fiction, but now some of its ideas are becoming a reality.

Today, around half a dozen artists refer to themselves as the Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation. One of these, artist Gilbert Grace, decided to create the bikes Ian had imagined. Rather than making them out of plywood, however, he decided to 'grow' biological bikes. These would be made of bamboo and hemp. This led him to a land art residency on Marloo, the Kandos property where Stuart Andrews is developing the Natural Sequence Farming techniques of his father Peter Andrews. Their goal is to trial a crop of hemp, which is a soil conditioner, and can be an integral part of land regeneration.

In the meantime, Gilbert helped build a hempcrete wall in Kandos for the Cementa festival.



Ian Milliss. Photo by The Big Fix

"Sugar vs the Reef"

Ian is involved in another project led by artists Kim Williams and Lucas Ihlein - the "Sugar vs the Reef" project. Since 2015, the artists have been working with sugar cane farmer Simon Mattsson to create a series of public events to "catalyse positive transformations in the sugar cane industry" (Futurelands 2).

They will create a sugar cane and sunflowers land installation, accompanied by events like Sunset in the Sunflowers, to educate the public about soil health, agricultural economics and labour histories.

Mattsson has experimented with interplanting mutually beneficial sunflowers and sugar cane to model how farmers could move away from traditional monocultures. These monocultures are polluting and unsustainable, but interplanting sunflowers reduces the need for pesticides and herbicides. He's working with the artists to tell this story to the public, in the hope that eventually agri-'cultural' practices will change.

Ian's next project, with Lucas Ihlein and Diego Bonetto, is to look at the notion of the 'commons' and 'commoning'; and how communities need to reclaim access to land, water, air, public spaces, and even intellectual property.

According to Ian, "as soon as you imagine a different future, all sorts of things follow, like political and legal changes, for example."

"If you behave as if it exists, then suddenly, in 10 years' time, someone will say, isn't that a great idea, why don't we do it."

Welcome to **KANDOS**



The Kandos Solar Thermal Plants are the largest solar thermal plants in the southern hemisphere. Since the recent world wide ban on all fossil fuels these innovative plants have been the model for the many solar thermal plants now being built throughout Australia.



Kandos University, with its ground breaking School of Cultural Adaptation and Innovation, is one the most prestigious education institutions in the country. Its courses on climate change, memetics and informatics are now turning out graduates who are the new leaders in the international mobilisation against climate disaster.



The Cement Works Botanical Garden is leading the world in research into plant adaptation to climate change.



and while you are there you can go diving at the diving training centre inside the old silo or climbing on a wide range of structures at the many climbing school sites .



Getting around Kandos is easy, just grab one of the plywood bicycles to be found in racks in every street. The bicycles are free for use by all residents and visitors

The lightweight plywood bicycles are designed and manufactured in Kandos and if you want to take one home they are available for purchase at all local coffee shops!



Life-changing technologies

For many people with disability, life would be easier if their surroundings were designed to include their needs. Buildings, public transport and other infrastructure are slowly becoming more accessible, but there is a long way to go. Technology, and the internet, on the other hand, are rapidly making it easier for people with disability to gain independence and connect to the world around them.

Anthony Mahr is blind and lives in Katoomba. He runs a small business online, taking bookings and doing his accounts using a screen reader. "Technology has helped me with my business. I can read all my documents and take appointments," he said.

Other technologies also work to make the world more accessible for Anthony. "I use something called Pen Friend for labelling things. It has sticky dots that I can put on a can of tomatoes, for example, so that I know what is there. I also have talking scales in the kitchen that help me with cooking".

Anthony says that "at school, I relied on Braille and on other people to scan things and look them up. Now I can do these sorts of things myself".

Several technology makers have made strong commitments to accessibility. Apple prioritises making their iPads available to everyone, with Sarah Herrlinger, their Senior Manager for Global Accessibility Policy and Initiatives, telling TechCrunch that this "supports a vision of an inclusive world where opportunity and access to information are barrier-free, empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve their goals".

Fran Priol, from Wentworth Falls, is also blind, gradually losing her sight as she got older. At 85, she has found that an iPad has opened up her world and connected her again to what she loves. "Using the accessibility settings, I have made the text as large as possible, on a big screen tablet, so I can read the news for the first time in fifteen years," she said.

"I play games, like Yatzee, on the tablet and I listen to stories using audio books from the library. I even talk to Siri (the iPad virtual assistant) and ask her questions about the weather or the date and to find me phone numbers."

Fran works with Anne O'Grady, a specialist in accessibility for people with disability and older people, who provides in-home training and support in using different technologies. "It's really good. I wouldn't have anything if I hadn't met Anne," said Fran.

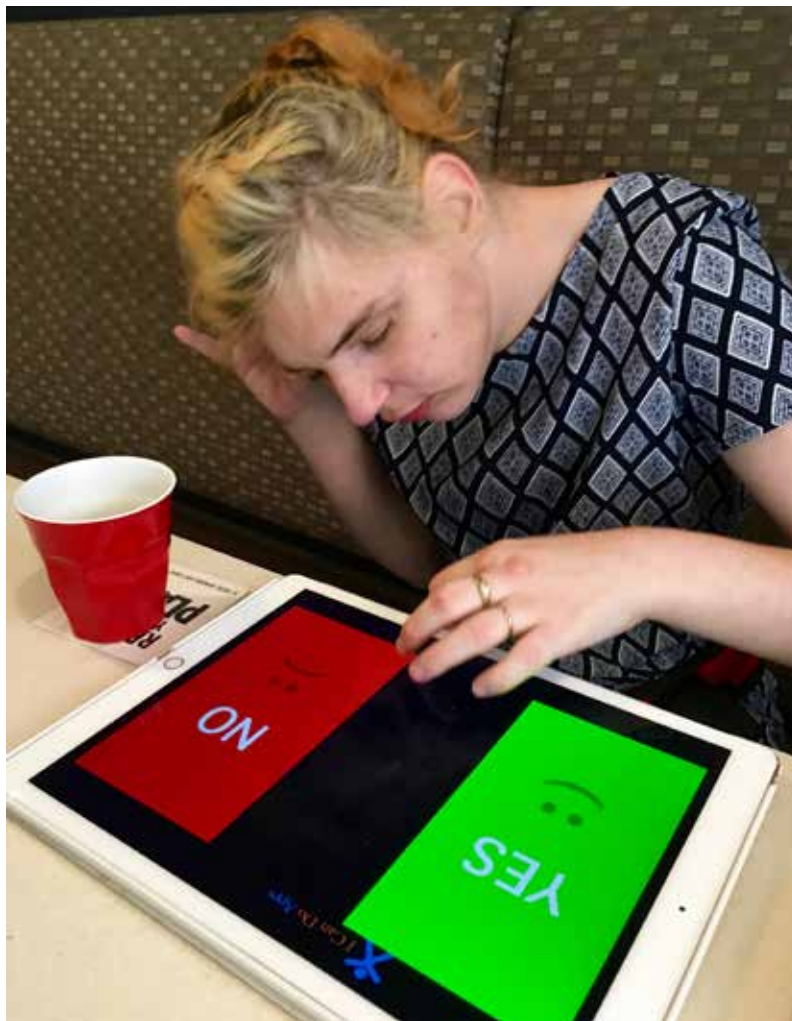
Michelle Sutton is an autistic woman, living in Katoomba, who runs a small business from home. She has found a wide variety of technologies improve accessibility for her and help her arrange her work to suit her disability.

"If I have to get into the city for a meeting, and I'm having a particularly sensory sensitive week, in the past I would have postponed the meeting, but now I can still go. I use noise cancelling headphones and sunglasses to help me with sound and sight, and I use an app on my phone that helps me manage the train trip so I don't have to try to read timetables. Another app tells me the route to walk from the station to the meeting."

"This means I don't get overloaded or lost and I can still have energy for the meeting when I arrive. All these have absolutely made a huge difference to me," said Michelle.

"Also having information available online now about things like running your own small business makes being a sole trader accessible to me, which in turn makes earning regular income accessible because I can choose my own hours that fit in with my needs and body rhythms."

Terri Rule is a young woman, living in Penrith, who likes going



Terri Rule. Photo by The Big Fix

to the pub, wearing dresses and has strong opinions about what she wants her disability support workers to do. She is blind, has a brain injury and, until recently, had few ways of communicating.

"As her family members, we knew how capable and clever she was, and that she could communicate, but there were no devices that we could find that Terri could use," said Cheryl McDonnell, Terri's mother.

Terri started using a tablet, with a decision-making app, that would give her different options in specific circumstances. "She started with simple things, like what do you want for breakfast and what do you want to wear today. If she's having a conversation with someone, we can change it over to conversation choices," said Cheryl.

"The tablet also provides her with the education that she never received, because she was assumed to have a profound intellectual disability. School was basically babysitting."

"I can download audio books so Terri can experience literature, and all kinds of topics that build her understanding and experiences of the world," said Cheryl.

"The technology has relaxed something in her and she is now communicating more verbally. She will come and find me to let me know that she wants something. She never did this before."

Technologies, such as tablets and smart phones, can be life changing. By making applications and hardware accessible, and easy to use, many people with disability, and older people, can find it easier to work, communicate and participate in ordinary life, just like everyone else.

El Gibbs

Jeenee Make a Difference Program - free mobile plan and 24/7 HELP Service for 10 readers of The Big Fix

The Big Fix has partnered with Jeenee Mobile to offer free services to 10 people living with disability, or becoming increasingly frail. Jeenee is a multi-award winning social enterprise whose core purpose is to donate services that provide the benefits of mobile technology to those who need them most.

Each donated service provides 12 months free-of-charge access to a Mobile Plan and a 24/7 HELP service (valued at \$455). The 24/7 help line can be accessed via a simple mobile app, connected to a dedicated Australian-based team, who will help with whatever is needed. The team can even locate clients using the GPS on their phone and tell family and friends where they are, or send emergency services to their location. It's a great back up if anything goes wrong, big or small, and can be used as many times as needed.

Jeenee Mobile believes technology can bring independence, and helps everyone be connected, engaged and included. To date, Jeenee has donated more than 280 services to people living with disabilities throughout Australia.



To apply

Individuals can nominate themselves, or someone they know, who may benefit from the program. To apply, simply go to and provide:

- a short statement about how the service would benefit you or the person you are nominating
- your contact details or the details of the person you are nominating
- proof of eligibility (such as a letter from a service provider, or pension card details)

Applications close midnight 31 August 2017 and recipients will be notified by 15 September, 2017. All applications will be assessed by Jeenee Mobile and all decisions will be final. Jeenee operates on the Optus 4G network. The program includes the provision of the donated services only. Recipients must provide their own handsets. The Jeenee Mobile 24/7 HELP service is provided via an iOS (Apple) or Android application, access to which will be provided to eligible recipients.

How you can Make a Difference

Every Australian can help make more donated services available for people living with disability simply by purchasing one of Jeenee's award winning SIM Pack Plans. For more information ring 1300 054 631.



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Jeremy Way, General Manager of Jeenee Mobile

"I believe that people are equal and should have equal opportunities. We are obliged to look after the most vulnerable. The older I get the more it bugs me that people are excluded because they don't have a voice. Let's give them a voice! The more active and engaged people with disability can be, the more they'll be accepted as individuals in their own right and differences can begin to disappear."

Jeremy's grandparents founded the Spastic Centre of NSW in 1945 (now the Cerebral Palsy Alliance) and his mother has been CEO of the not-for-profit Community Connections Australia for 30 years. Jeenee was originally set up within Community Connections, but now operates independently as a social enterprise to raise funds to support its mission.





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Ian Dalkin - Stop Laughing This is Serious

Communicating clearly and creatively is central to any enterprise. As one of the creative directors of The Big Fix, I'm committed to using my many years of experience to develop multimedia communication strategies to grow audiences for clients keen to make the world a better place. Stop Laughing This is Serious provides the following services: campaign design, website development and support, cartooning & animation, design & layout, and troubleshooting when technology is not doing what you want it to do!
See www.stoplaughing.com.au or call 0434575470



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Craig Karlson - Blackheath Mitre 10

Craig Karlson is the weekend manager at Blackheath Mitre 10. A true gentleman, he's known to everyone in town after 15 years of providing assistance to the public, and because of his performances in the Rhododendron Revue, the Blackheath Theatre Company and as escort/bodyguard for the Rhodo Princess in the parade each year. At home he's a steampunk 'maker' who loves to turn junk into art, and at work he loves to turn problems into solutions. The thing he's proudest of is his perseverance. Mitre 10 is a proudly family-owned and operated hardware store. Its owners, Shirley and Bill Hume, no longer work weekends but can occasionally be seen helping behind the counter. Rob Hume now runs the store, supported by great staff, like Craig. Rohan runs Blackheath Timber next door. The store has a long history of generously supporting the local community.



www.aardvarkstraws.com

Thank you Aardvark and Green Pack!

Thank you to our generous sponsors Aardvark Paper Straws, and their Australian distributor Green Pack for helping Blackheath become the first town in the world in which all the shopfront businesses agreed to phase out plastic straws.



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If you'd like to be part of The Big Fix, contact Lis on 0407 437 553