

## **Transition Streets Banyule: a growth story**

### **Main Concepts**

For connecting with people locally we need:

Transition Streets and Neighbourhood or suburb-based Transition groups

The local govt area based Transition group can provide circles of support for these groups

Transition Hub Australia can provide circles of support for the Transition groups.

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Like most Transition groups, Transition Banyule identifies with one local government area. This makes sense. Local Council is our natural ally in re-imagining and re-building our world, starting with where we live.

But for a resident it is not so easy to connect with 120,000 people in your entire local government area. It is easier to connect with 3000 people who live in your suburb. And easier still to connect with 7 or 8 people in a Transition Streets group.

Transition Banyule has been going for 8 years now and we are still going strong so I think these two aspects of the way we do things might be useful to other groups.

That is –

- 1) we encourage people to start a new group based on a suburb or postcode. And
- 2) we encourage the Transition Streets program.

Let me tell you the story of how, when we were just getting going, we held a meeting in Macleod to get a group started there, and how that just didn't quite work out the way we thought it would.

By January 2010 we had recruited our initiating group. We held a big public

meeting in March 2010, ran an Open Space day on the topic of Food in May, held workshops on fruit tree planting and wicking beds at various venues and all of this activity brought publicity in the local paper and more people on our e-list.

Now here's a useful tip. When people sign up to our e-list we always ask for their *suburb* or postcode.

Around April 2010 we noticed a considerable number of people on our e-list from postcode 3081. That is three suburbs around Heidelberg West. So we emailed those people and invited them to a Saturday morning cuppa at Lauren's house.

About 5 people came.

Three of them were us.

The same thing happened the following month.

Then one of the people said 'instead of sitting around waiting for people to turn up, let's weed each other's gardens'. So that happened a couple of times. Then it faded.

Meanwhile we looked at the map, and decided to run a meeting in Macleod. I'll just explain that the Banyule area is bounded by Darebin Creek on the west, and the Yarra River to the east, with a railway running down the middle like a spine. Macleod is roughly in the middle of this map.

We didn't know anyone in Macleod. We hired the hall, promoted the meeting everywhere, ran an evening meeting to get people excited about the Saturday Open Space day "Towards a Sustainable Neighbourhood".

There was room in the hall for 30-40 people.

Twelve people turned up.

And seven of them were our organising team.

You could say – not great attendance.

But in the transition movement we always say “whoever comes are the right people”. And indeed they were. None of the people who came were from Macleod. But it is that meeting that kicked off Transition 3081 – a completely different part of Banyule.

How did *that* happen?

Well - one of the people who did turn up was Anne, who lived in Heidelberg Heights, postcode 3081, and had been to those early weeding sessions. And one of the open space topics was on “starting a neighbourhood group”. So the outcome of the day was Anne feeling inspired to re-start that little group in postcode 3081. That was November 2010.

The very next month about 20 people slaved away digging out pittosporum at Mike and Yennie’s place, to make room for a veggie garden. Digging out half a dozen such tenacious plants is a very bonding experience. Followed of course by crowding into their kitchen for a pot-luck lunch.

Transition 3081 has been going ever since, nearly seven years, with a monthly veggie swap at Olympic Village shopping centre, and numerous other activities.

So – you never know what will come out of an Open Space Day.

One year later Robin and Paul, who *do* live in Macleod – and who are here at this conference - felt inspired to start a veggie swap. With encouragement and support from Transition Banyule, they were able to take off and fly. And so Sustainable Macleod was born.

But not from our 2010 meeting there.

Check out their website, Macleod Organic Community Garden. They have turned a dead tennis court at a local school into an incredibly productive community garden. <http://www.mocg.club/thegarden/>

As for Transition Banyule, the next time we held a public meeting in Macleod was four and a half years later when we launched Transition Streets – our latest big project.

You invite some neighbours to join you in working towards a more sustainable way of living, you agree to have seven meetings, using this wonderful workbook. It has a beginning chapter when you have great fun filling in the OZ Green questionnaire that help you figure out “How many earths would be needed if everyone on the planet enjoyed your standard of living?”

You laugh together at stupid questions like “have you had a bath every day this week, if yes, score 14” and you discuss the relative greenhouse gas harm of flying overseas compared with holidaying somewhere in Australia by road or rail.

It’s a good conversation starter. Then you have sessions on each of the main topics – Water, Energy, Food, Transport, Consumption & Waste. The final session is “Where to from here?”

We had nine groups in 2015 and about 6 groups in 2016. Most groups came up with lots of great ideas on how to cut down on fossil fuel consumption, and how to encourage each other. Some groups decided they liked getting together once a month for a shared meal and agreed to keep meeting. One street started a monthly picnic in the park when you bring stuff you don’t

need anymore and do a general swap around. And have fun. And build community. And we are sure going to need that as the world faces an uncertain future with climate change.

Because the Transition Streets program brings together people who live near to each other, it encourages *ongoing connections* between those people. That is its great strength.

At the same time, being part of a bigger program can enable people to enjoy the sense of achievement in actually creating a much more ambitious goal than would seem possible if you tried to do it alone. A goal like getting the whole world off fossil fuel, for example.

Transition Newcastle is the group that wrote the entire workbook, inspired by the original one developed in the UK. Then some of us in Melbourne worked with them to write the national version. Four people from Transition Newcastle are at this conference. The workbook can be downloaded from their website, where there are two versions – the Newcastle version and the national version.

<http://transitionnewcastle.org.au/transition-streets-workbooks/>

The idea is spreading by word of mouth. Late last year Transition groups in Geelong started some Transition Streets groups. And recently a Transition Streets group started in Brighton, another one in North Fitzroy.

Meanwhile, unbeknown to me, a group called See-Change in Canberra obtained funding to run the program there. They re-wrote it in plain english and had seeding grants to fund each group with a practical project at the end <http://www.see-change.org.au/transition-streets-canberra/>

How do any of us know about any of these projects?

Only from word of mouth.

That is why I think we need a virtual hub for the movement in Australia.

And that is what we are looking at in the next session.

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Mary Stringer

*Convenor, Transition Banyule*

*Speech delivered Wed 6 September*

*at the 2017 Sustainable Communities National Summit*

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Links:

<http://www.see-change.org.au/transition-streets-canberra/>

<http://transitionnewcastle.org.au/transition-streets-workbooks/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Transition-Streets-Geelong-1117948551640326/>

<http://www.mocg.club/thegarden/>

<https://transitionbanyule.org.au/>

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