

Social Enterprise Launch Pad Program



Scott Creagh and Judy Delbridge, Fairhaven ReCreate

Social Enterprise Launch Pad program participants

By definition, a social enterprise works toward solving a problem in society. But the entrepreneurs at ReCreate, an upcycling workshop on the Central Coast, go a step further – or make that two steps further – by tackling three core issues at once!

Combined goals

With a primary purpose of creating much needed employment opportunities for people living with disability, ReCreate's business model aims to reduce waste by transforming materials such as reclaimed timbers and pallets into beautiful furniture and homeware pieces.

The creative social enterprise also upcycles donated items into freshly imagined fashion, gifts and homewares.

ReCreate is part of the not-for-profit organisation Fairhaven, who offer the benefit tri-factor by offering employment, lifestyle and accommodation services for people living with disability. A real win-win-win scenario.

Everything old is new again

One of the keys to ReCreate's success is the Op Shop, where tons of used goods are donated each year. In some cases, pieces can simply be on-sold or cleaned up a little for resale. The remaining items are surveyed by the creative team who reimagine a new life for each.

This may be an entirely reinvented product or a beautifully upcycled item. The creative leads include Scott Creagh in the furniture workshop and Judy Delbridge who manages all craft and homewares.

"We get some wonderful donations, so the creative process is always fun!" said Ms Delbridge. "It can be a bit of a juggling act to balance the capacity of the team with an item's potential, but that's also what keeps it interesting."

Ms Delbridge said ReCreate tries to do everything possible to reduce landfill and promote a circular economy in which 'everything old is new again'. Every item is hand crafted by people living with various types of disabilities, all with the support by a truly creative crew.

"It's joyful to see how satisfying it is for our team to make the amazing things they do, as well as how well received they are by the public".

Balancing financial and social outcomes

Ms Delbridge said that many disability service organisations do not offer supported employment as it is notoriously difficult to build a sustainable business model in the commercial sector. However, Fairhaven see this as a central philosophy.

“A work environment doesn’t just offer meaning and purpose, it often leads to enriching friendships and relationships that generate community and belonging.”

In order to hit the financial sweet spot, the ReCreate team look for pieces that offer the most engagement with their supported workforce, and don’t require too much overhead in order to be sold at an affordable price through the retail shop in Point Clare.

“We also cut our costs by having no middle man and it helps that the raw materials are essentially free,” said Ms Delbridge.

Expanding production

A new ReCreate website and online shop is due to launch in early 2019 allowing the team to scale up production. This builds on their success with pop up shops in both the Imperial Centre in Gosford and at Erina Fair.

“We’ve also had great success refitting restaurants such as Coast Bar and Grill and Avoca Surf House,” said Ms Delbridge, “and helping fit-out another great social enterprise in our area, Gosford’s Tiny Homes project.”

The team also builds custom made-to-order pieces using upcycled pallets, reclaimed timber and the odd repurposed piece of furniture. Their unique pieces have found their way into homes, events, retail, hospitality and office fit-outs since its inception following the 2016 Launch Pad Program.

The key to success

“Do your business case first!” advises Ms Delbridge. “We learnt the hard way with some of our enterprises, and it is all about striking the balance between viability and impact. But essentially, if you have a good idea, then go for it!

“There are lots of opportunities on the Central Coast and we have had great support from businesses, Council and the public. Now we really can lead the way, limited only by our imagination!”

