

Kitchen Packs: 2017-2021

The aim of the Kitchen Starter Pack Project was to provide a socially beneficial recycling outlet for used kitchenware, by refurbishing members' donated items and assembling packs of essentials for those moving from supported accommodation to their own home. The project began with a small pilot, supported by the Glebe Society's Management Committee, towards the end of 2017. We have now delivered a total of 80 packs to Elsie Women's Refuge and Rainbow Lodge for their clients who move into social or community housing. Elsie and Rainbow Lodge staff and clients have expressed their gratitude to the Glebe Society.

We could not have reached the milestone of 80 packs without the generous support of so many, especially the Glebe Society members and members of the broader community who donated used kitchenware, the Pyrmont, Ultimo and Glebe (PUG) Men's Shed for custom-made cutting boards and Sewing For Good for handmade tea towels. The project also needed funds to purchase new jugs and toasters, as well as other items for which we expected occasional shortfalls in recycled donations. The City of Sydney's start-up grant was much appreciated. Before the grant kicked in, and after it ended, the Glebe Community Op Shop and individual Glebe Society members made cash donations to sustain the project. These donations were supplemented by a raffle and cake stall run by the Community Development Sub-Committee in 2019-20. We couldn't run these fund-raising activities in 2020-21, but the Glebe Society's decision to supplement donations to ensure we had a total budget of \$1,000 was critical in allowing the project to continue over the last year. We had to make some hard decisions to keep within this total budget – most especially excluding toasters from the packs. Two members generously donated new toasters for all packs, and the project benefitted from Harvey Norman Broadway's discount on electrical purchases.

The project also depended heavily on the efforts of a small band of people who worked to deliver it. They include Janice Challinor who, from the outset, has been active in all aspects of its operation, and Jan Macindoe and Sue Hearn who, respectively, took on responsibility for liaison with members and liaison with Elsie and Rainbow Lodge in 2020. We secured access to St Helen's Kitchen towards the end of 2019, which gave the project storage space for stock and a venue for its work. Those who came along to help clean and refurbish donated items and assemble the packs made an invaluable contribution to the project.

It is thanks to these many and varied contributors that the Kitchen Pack Project has been a great success. Sadly though, we have made the tough call to wind it up. This was precipitated by my decision to step down from the coordinator role. But the project was also facing more fundamental problems. First, our access to St Helen's ceased with the emergence of Covid and, because the venue does not meet the conditions for a Covid-Safe Plan, our return in the near future is unlikely. Without a suitable project venue, a new coordinator would need to store stock and do much of the cleaning, refurbishing and packing. Second, and more fundamental, was the sharp decline in kitchenware donations. To cover the widespread shortfall, the project has become heavily reliant on donations by a small group of op-shoppers. This was not the intent of the project; nor is it a sustainable model, given the scarcity of op-shops in close proximity to us and the increase in op-shop prices. Our decision to close the project is, more than anything, a recognition that we have exhausted our members' supply of surplus kitchenware. But we should all be proud of what we have achieved. Perhaps, in better times, someone might want to revive the project. If so, Elsie and Rainbow Lodge most certainly would applaud.

Diane Hutchinson

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