



## Newsletter

# The Grove - Transition Initiative

#1 - August 2009

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For nearly ten years years my wife and and I have studied peak oil and climate change, and been concerned about their consequences for the planet. The inevitable transition to a low-carbon economy represents change of an unprecedented scale. How are we to respond?

During the week from 16 to 21 August, Brisbane has been host to INTECOL, the *10th International Congress on Ecology*. Leading ecologists from around the world gathered to address the rapid, relentless and permanent extinction of one species after another in our urban landscapes. Several of these scientists spoke to a record capacity audience at a BrisScience lecture on *The Science of Sustaining our Urban Landscapes*. One pointed out that scientists are required to deliver reports to committees, and have little power to influence government policy. Change occurs when local groups of well informed and concerned individuals making their voices heard. *"It's small local groups that make the difference"*.

Our firm belief in the effectiveness of small local groups led us to attending several meetings of **Transition Initiative The Gap** at the home of Chris and Joan Wright. We were attracted by their plans for positive action in the face of rapid change and instability in climate, energy supply and global financial structures.

One of the ideas quoted on the Transition Towns web-site is that *we have used immense amounts of creativity, ingenuity and adaptability on the way up the energy upslope, and that there's no reason for us not to do the same on the downslope. If we collectively plan and act early enough there's every likelihood that we can create a way of living that's significantly more connected, more vibrant and more in touch with our environment, than the oil-addicted treadmill that we find ourselves on today.*

As we connected with other concerned individuals, we discovered a rapidly evolving network of small local groups cooperating and sharing ideas and experience as they set up projects to make a difference in their local communities.

The first of these was the Hillbrook Anglican School Sustainability Day project. I already had an established routine for delivering brochures promoting community activities to 300 local letterboxes in our neighbourhood. I simply diverted my morning exercise walk to spend about 40 minutes delivering 100 Sustainability Day flyers on each of three days. We hope to enlist volunteers who are willing to deliver flyers in their local area in future and would be prepared help avoid duplication by looking after allocation of areas to individuals.

Our next step was to visit as many local schools as possible to introduce the Transition Initiative and let them know about the movie *The Power of Community* being screened in The Gap on 19 August and the Sustainability Day at Hillbrook School on 22 August. Fortunately brochures were available for both events and these were well received by the schools I visited, which were Ferny Grove State School, Ferny Grove State High School, St Andrew's Catholic School, Mitchelton State High School, Patricks Road State School and Ferny Hills State School. Anne and I had already visited Grovely State School to see their impressive community garden.

Most of these schools have various sustainability initiatives under way including -

- Rainwater tanks
- Community Gardens
- Litter -free lunch days
- Active Travel
- Green Team projects
- Paper and Toner recycling

A common response to these visits was “Do you have a web-site?”, suggesting that this was a preferred approach to communication. A simple 'electronic brochure' web-site was established the next day, and the link emailed to the school contacts. It was a start, and it will develop over time.

That led to the next step, researching information that was available on the web about sustainability, climate change and related issues. Within a couple of days our web site had a very full calendar of events and a page full of informative links. There is an enormous amount of energy out there as individuals and groups seek to grapple with the issue of sustainability in our communities. Our aim is to create linkage between these groups to provide a critical mass for sharing of ideas, resources, encouragement, and mutual support.

Sunday 16 August was the Brisbane Transition Hub fortnightly meeting at The State Library of Queensland. Representatives from Transition East (Rolf Kuelsen), Transition Initiative The Gap (Chris and Joan Wright), and Transition Initiative Ferny Grove (John Tennock) met to plan and coordinate activities, and share information and ideas. Such meetings are a key element of the transition movement which aims to support, encourage and link together existing activities and resources, as well as fostering new ones.

Later that afternoon we attended *The Big Melt*, a highly challenging presentation, sponsored by Friends of the Earth – Brisbane, about the amplified effects of climate change being experienced in the Himalayas, right now! Two visiting speakers from Nepal told the story of their experiences with rising temperatures, melting glaciers, bursting glacial lakes, melting permafrost, unreliable water supply and disrupted agricultural production. This is an enormous and imminent catastrophe demanding urgent international attention. It is well worth visiting the web-site at <http://www.thebigmelt.org/>.

One of the points made by the Nepalese presenters was that the whole world delights in the Himalayan scenery, the Nepalese people treasure it as their home, and for many of them their very survival is at stake. This set me thinking about how much we treasure our home environment and inspired me, the next morning, to explore some of our local 'mountain' tops. Even looking down into Ferny Grove from a mere 200 metres elevation evoked an unexpected feeling of protectiveness. It's not the dramatic mountain scenery or our lush bushland, it's about the place we, or the Nepalese people, care about as our home. The experience connected me with their feelings of grief and despair in the face of impending catastrophe.

On Wednesday 19 August, Transition Initiative The Gap screened the inspiring movie *The Power of Community*. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990, Cuba's economy went into a tailspin. With imports of oil cut by more than half – and food by 80 percent – people were desperate. This film tells of the hardships and struggles as well as the community and creativity of the Cuban people during this difficult time. Cubans share how they transitioned from a highly mechanized, industrial agricultural system to one using organic methods of farming and local, urban gardens. The fact that most of the 50 attendees chose to engage in group discussion before heading for the delicious supper testifies to the power of this movie. Web site <http://www.powerofcommunity.org>

At the mature age of 65, 'first time' experiences are pretty rare. I had one when I went to the movies on Friday 21 August. Usually as the credits roll at the end of a movie, folks drag themselves back to the real world and shuffle out of the cinema as disconnected individuals, couples or small groups. This time they all turned to face each other and a spontaneous discussion broke out. What was the movie? *The Age of Stupid* which had its Australian and NZ premiere on 19 August. In this call-to-action movie, Oscar-nominated Pete Postlethwaite (*In The Name of the Father, Brassed Off*) stars as a man living alone in the devastated world of 2055, looking back at archive footage from 2007 and asking: why didn't we stop climate change when we had the chance? The web-site is <http://www.ageofstupid.net/>

The follow-up action web-site is <http://www.notstupid.org/> and one of the recommended actions is to support the Transition Towns movement. It also leads into the United Nations Convention of Climate Change in Copenhagen in December. This is perhaps the most important meeting in human history. It is vital that we all demand that our government votes to support radical change at Copenhagen.

The final major event in August was the Sustainability Day at Hillbrook School, Enoggera on the theme of Enough for Everyone, Forever. The festival atmosphere and full program attracted a large public audience, excellent presenters, valuable workshops, informative displays and interesting market stalls. The program remains a valuable reference resource even after the event and we have retained a copy on our web-site. A few unexpected highlights were -

**ANNETTE MCFARLANE**

**ABC Gardening Presenter**

**Successful Sustainable Gardening**

Whether you are just getting started on the road to a more sustainable lifestyle or well down the path to backyard bliss, Annette McFarlane outlines key factors that are the hallmarks of a successful and sustainable suburban garden.

**GEORGE ALLEN**

**President - Subtropical Fruit Club of Qld**

**Easy to Grow Fruit Trees for Brisbane**

Slide show of fruit trees that grow and

produce well in the Brisbane area, with commentary based on personal experience. To many a lot of these trees would be unknown. You will be surprised how good these fruit are and how well they produce.

**ROBERT STANDISH-WHITE President,  
Kedron Brook Catchment Branch  
Green or Greed?**

A brief overview of pressures on our natural environment, with a focus on the Kedron Brook Catchment, and what you can do to help.

Out of the public support and enthusiasm for this event arose the Enoggera Transition Initiative.

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So that's it for our first newsletter for The Grove Transition Initiative. It's mostly a matter of recording our beginnings than publish news to a wide readership.

Our first goal is to engage with a wide range of people in the area including Ferny Grove, Upper Kedron, Woolshed Grove and the mountain catchments of Cedar Creek and Kedron Brook. As soon as it makes sense to do so we will launch our own local events. Meantime we will continue to work cooperatively with other Transition Initiative groups towards developing greater community resilience and sustainability.

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