



TOWN TALK

with Marnie



Access all areas at Eco enterprises

G'day and welcome.

Last week, I had the privilege of visiting The Eco Store and The Eco Café and meeting two of the 30 dedicated staff members at Shepparton Access. I found a place that is warm, welcoming and safe — for the 90 participants.

I'm always excited by good ideas — particularly when they are well executed and result in benefits to all involved. You'll laugh, I know, but when I said goodbye and got into my car, I was thinking, "God's in his heaven, and all is well with this small part of the world".

Shepparton Access, a not-for-profit organisation, has been active in our community for almost 30 years. Its overall focus is to provide employment opportunities for adults with disability. To assist participants, it offers an astonishing list of day programs ranging from continuing education to increasing life skills to promoting health and wellbeing — and preparing for work. Sport and leisure activities are also available. Then, when a participant is ready for a job, social enterprise and employment co-ordinator Adam Neumann liaises with the potential employer and the participant on an ongoing basis.

It was apparent to me that this is where Adam's real reward comes; when a former participant is successfully holding down a job and the employer is more than satisfied. He gave me some examples with a great deal of enthusiasm.

How is this funded?

Shepparton Access receives some funding from the Federal Government through the NDIS, which is insufficient to run the organisation. So, it needs to make additional money. Social enterprise initiatives are the answer. Eco Park, The Eco Store and The Eco Café are providing additional funds and offering the participants experience in many fields.

Eco Park

Here, fruit and vegetables are grown and sold in the store or used for food prepared for the café; pumpkin soup is very popular at the moment. There is also a cottage where craft items are produced for the store. Eco Park, which is in partnership with St Luke's Catholic Primary School, also offers opportunities for work experience in several fields.

Eco Store

If you haven't visited the store on Wyndham St, I strongly recommend you do so soon. In my opinion, it is predominantly a gift store because the hampers are unique and



Adam Neumann and Damon on Crazy Hair Day at the café.



Chevy is the 'MasterChef' behind the jelly slices.



The Eco Store team. Amy, Geoff, Nathanael, Heath and Eliza.

varied — from bath salts and bombs to chutneys and sauces. If you see one suitable for a Christmas gift, buy early because they are enormously popular a little later in the year. However, if you simply enjoy a good chutney, relish or sauce, you won't find a range like this one anywhere else in the city. And, they also have craft lines, made by the participants, including pottery.

I just cooked ham and cheese toasties for lunch. They include a relish entitled 'Nan's Tomato Relish'. It's truly yummy and homemade in Shepp Access' kitchen. And remember, when you make a purchase, you are not just a customer; you're a vital part of a social enterprise dedicated to making a difference in our community.

The Eco Store is opposite Lovell's Newsagency on Wyndham St and is open from

9am to 4pm.

The Eco Café

Treat yourself and a friend or two to coffee at the café. But don't leave without trying the cakes and slices. There are slices here that you won't find anywhere else because when someone has a good idea, it becomes a reality. For example, clinker slice was an idea made from a participant's favourite sweets. I haven't tried it yet, but I have been told it is outstanding. The slices are all homemade.

Of course, there are also sandwiches, toasties and, right now, a particularly good pumpkin soup. Once again, the café and the store give participants an opportunity to try their hands at retailing, handling money and hospitality. This is, frequently, a lively place, filled with conversation and laughter. The communication between



Gemma shows off freshly picked cauliflower.



Amy made these beautiful bath bombs.

The beauty of all this

Are you beginning to understand why I found Shepparton Access so inspirational? Everything works together to assist the participants, raise necessary funds and give the customers great value.

Shepparton Access is a place where participants come and feel welcome, safe and accepted — a place where they feel valued and a place where they belong. The team aspires to cultivate an environment that fosters community understanding, compassion and acceptance of others with a difference.

Can you help?

Flavorite Tatura assists whenever possible with donations of tomatoes for the sauces and relish — and householders bring in fruit or veg they have in excess. There is also a small team of gentlemen who frequent the Resident's Workshop at Kensington Gardens, who make wooden boxes for the hampers. Graeme is the head 'box builder', and he keeps count. Just right now, they are heading towards their 10,000th box. These aren't boxes you would throw away. I can think of several uses for them, including helping to keep the pantry tidy. They certainly add value to the hampers.

If you would like to support or donate to Shepparton Access, why not give the team a call on 5831 6140?

And please don't forget to visit the store and café. Balancing the budget is not easy for the staff at Shepparton Access, and every bit helps.

I want to thank Adam Neumann and Joanne Zampaglione for the time and assistance they offered — because this was one of those occasions when I loved my work. One of my correspondents this week suggested I "keep up the good work for all of Shepp". This time, I am hoping Shepparton Access has done just that and that you are as enriched as I am by this story.

God's in his heaven, and all is well with this small part of the world.

Long-delayed family gathering

I had postponed a family party, which fell due when my husband was still unwell — and I resembled a washed-out rag. So, this time, we were celebrating five birthdays, with another five scheduled for a September gathering and, thankfully, just three in October. I keep trying to figure out why our parties are so very loud, particularly as no-one appears to be shouting. But, on Sunday, I realised there

were four lively conversations happening at once. Our sons were talking about AI, another group was discussing our eldest grandson (who wasn't present due to a rehearsal for the school musical) and his workload. Three or four were talking about Richmond's performance this year, and little Willow explained how she happened to be dancing at Disneyland.

I took two Panadol — and counted my blessings.

Nice — and nonsensical

I received a number of nice text messages this week, including a special one from Annette. Thanks so much, Annette. Keep up the crafting, and I'm happy that you're enjoying Town Talk. There was another special one regarding Peter Schoots (Mewo Restorations) and his remarkable work, plus a couple of people looking for *The Repair Shop*.

But then there was some nonsense. I'll try to keep it short. Roger was a "bit worried" about me talking to the flowers. I replied that if the King can talk to trees, surely I can talk to daffodils. He then wanted to know if I could help with his broccoli, which "needs a good scolding along with the rest of the failed lot". I suggested he do it himself and tell them to "try or die" — because I've got my hands full with a large may bush. I have yet to hear the results.

See what I mean! Nonsense — but fun! It doesn't take a lot to amuse me. The failed broccoli certainly did!

Now, for anyone else looking for *The Repair Shop*. I watch it on Lifestyle Channel (Foxtel), so I searched for options. The ABC no longer has it available online, but my search revealed that interested people can find it on YouTube. There is a way you can watch YouTube on your television, but I don't know what that is. One of our boys does it for me when I request it. Perhaps you have a useful boy?

Dreams don't have deadlines

I saw this on the back of a contestant's jacket on television recently, and I wanted to share it with you. We must hold on to our dreams and not let them die. I've let a couple go of recent times, and the lady's jacket restored them.

Keep well, and may it be easy, my friends.

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