

Update to "See-Change Centres, Grey Power and Hope" May 2009

In the three years since this booklet was completed, SEE-Change has become an expanding, grassroots organization in the ACT with a website, a monthly newsletter and activities in a number of parts of Canberra. It has attracted funding support from the ACT government and is involving increasing numbers of residents in a response to a range of social, economic and environmental challenges.

Interest in the SEE-Change Movement is growing, not only in Canberra, but also in other parts of Australia. Those of us involved in its establishment are constantly reappraising, the movement's structure and its purpose. I am writing this postscript to the book in May 2009 to bring the ideas presented in the book up-to-date and to propose, on the basis of some of the lessons learned in the past three years, ways in which new groups as well as groups already established, might consider responding to the challenging times in which we are now all enmeshed.

A rapidly changing world

The global economy has spectacularly collapsed. Unemployment is rising and our political leaders are desperately trying to avoid a repeat of the global depression of the nineteen thirties. President Barack Obama in the United States is vigorously promoting change as he promised to do in his historic election campaign.

The vast majority of climate scientists are becoming frustrated at the slowness of coordinated global action on greenhouse gas emissions. A global tipping point may have been reached as most people now know something about the climate predicament and would like to see coordinated global action. But the climate skeptics are becoming increasingly vocal and commanding growing media interest.

We are experiencing an increase in extreme weather events and in Australia in 2009 have lived through calamitous bushfires, deterioration in our water lifelines and dramatic flooding in the North. The evidence that we are approaching the peak of oil availability (if we have not already passed it)

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is not yet being seriously discussed in Australian society. We are still enmeshed in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the clash between extremists in the Middle East continues unabated. Global expenditure on armaments still takes clear precedence over expenditure on human well-being, and global inequity has increased, not decreased.

In short, the trends described in the book have all continued. I do not want to change the central message of the book, which is that we face a grim future unless we can develop new ways of working together to change the path we are on.

In the next few pages I will suggest how I think the rapidly evolving SEE-Change Movement can assist people living in Canberra and beyond, to respond to the constellation of “wicked problems” that now confront us and could overwhelm the human species.

May 2008 Review of SEE-Change

In May 2008, a group of 18 SEE-Change members and leaders met to discuss progress of SEE-Change in the two years since the 2006 roundtable discussion. They concluded that the name SEE-Change was now well recognized in many parts of the Canberra region; that the profile of the organization had been assisted by a widely publicized bulk buy of solar panels, an active household footprint monitoring program, involvement in cultural events and the holding of numerous local meetings and workshops on issues ranging from food to retrofitting of homes. The need for SEE-Change to work collaboratively with a growing number of groups and organizations that are committed to a sustainable future was re-emphasized

The purposes of the movement that had been proposed at the 2006 Roundtable were seen still to be valid and relevant and it was agreed that SEE-Change exists:

1. To empower people of all ages to explore with others in their locality, the need for change in Society, Economy and Environment.
2. To enable the emergence of supportive local networks of people that are built on respect, friendship and a shared understanding of the challenge of sustainability and the need to take democratic action for change.
3. To help to build a new style of democracy — one in which people in local communities develop a countervailing force to the all pervasive consumerist economy which is seriously endangering the fragile environment on which all humans and living things depend.
4. To assist people to take practical actions in their daily lives which can reduce the size of their ecological footprints.
5. To further develop an organizational framework for SEE-Change which will facilitate expansion of this movement throughout the ACT and beyond.

The SEE-Change steering group which had been a committee of The Nature and Society Forum, agreed to become an incorporated body in its own right and to seek tax exempt status and gift tax exemption from the Australian tax office. It was agreed that the newly incorporated coordinating body would act to provide a membership, financial and promotional framework for SEE-Change groups across the ACT, that share the purposes identified above. The umbrella group would act as facilitator and enabler for the development of new groups and would provide a forum for the exchange of views and activities among the existing groups.

The group agreed that the adoption of the title “SEE-Change” is a declaration by a local group that the group shares with the umbrella body its understanding of purposes and that these purposes imply a set of values that include:

- Peaceful empowerment,
- Respect for difference,
- Friendship and support,
- Social justice,
- Healthy people on a healthy planet
- A sustainable future.

As new SEE-Change groups formed it was agreed that they would be encouraged to develop whatever administrative structure best suited them, but could share the umbrella facilities of the parent body. Membership of one SEE-Change group would entitle the member (who could be an individual, family or corporate member) to involvement in the entire ACT-wide movement.

It was agreed that the activities of local groups would vary with the interests of local communities and members. Each local group would have access to the SEE-Change web site and a monthly newsletter would provide for exchange of information, advertisement of events and commentary on changes under way in the region and across the nation.

The current challenge

Two key problems are fuelling our current predicament: an exponentially growing human population and an economic system that is incompatible with a sustainable future. Humans have now become the dominant mammal on the planet and we are changing the climate in ways that will destroy us as a species unless we can drastically change from “business as usual”.

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in order to achieve this human systems must change. Specifically, humans have become wedded to the acquisition of money, and the things which money can buy. Wealth, control and endless economic growth are currently viewed as manifestations of human success.

Masculine “domination” thinking which emphasizes “winning and losing” must now be joined by feminine “partnerist” thinking and our economy must be part of that transition. Riane Eisler, in her 2008 book “The Real Wealth of Nations” has described this essential transition. We now need to place the health and well-being of humans and the environment on which they depend at the heart of both the local and global economy. In doing so, we will value and protect the things which are central to human existence. If we fail in this, we will be locking in for our children and theirs, a grim future.

We must now develop from the ruins of the current “dog eats dog” economy, a new caring and sharing economy that gives equal weight to feminine and masculine values and makes caring for people and the environment the central driver of all economic activity.

To begin, we need to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to zero very fast. We must change our dependency on fossil fuel combustion for energy supplies to nonpolluting renewable sources of energy. We must pay urgent attention to the ecosystems on which we depend not only for our own food and fibre, but also for a host of functions and activities which are required to support biodiversity and other life forms.

We need urgently to find new ways of living at peace with people who have different views and values from our own and must pay new attention to parenting, the building of mature relationships between adults and a respect for difference.

None of this will happen quickly but it will not begin if we do not begin the process in our own families and local communities. The good news is that around the world, community groups are mobilizing to support each other and lead their governments towards remedial action. The collapse of the modern economy offers exciting new possibilities to reshape the drivers of society, building from the past and incorporating new values into our future.

The Earth Charter and the Well-being Manifesto that are reproduced in this volume, articulate the new values which must now underpin the human world.

We need a new approach to food, a new caring economics, and a global citizenry that recognizes our dependence on each other and on healthy

functioning ecosystems. And we must craft a new, more vibrant democracy that involves all of us in the decisions that will affect our future.

Rising to the challenge

A groundswell of community action, focused particularly on climate change is developing, not only in Australia but across the world. There is growing recognition that unless we, the people insist on it, change from business as usual will not occur. Globalization has resulted in a monoculture of consumerism that is controlled by an elite “monetocracy” (incorporating the banks, international financial agencies, giant corporations and people who stand to benefit in the short term from things staying as they are.)

I was delighted when ACT Greens politician Deb Foskey wrote on the cover of this book, *“When the people lead with vision, governments will follow. Above all, the SEE-Change Centres will show the people of Australia that the path to sustainability is the greatest adventure for the 21st century and we can all join — for our children and the planet.”*

What can ordinary people do?

We can work together in partnership with our neighbors; reduce energy use, generate solar power, retrofit our houses and develop cooperative arrangements for greater sharing and caring. We can take action to reduce our personal footprints and talk about it with our friends and colleagues. We can modify our eating choices and can adapt transport use to the realities and constraints that will progressively be imposed upon us. We can tell the government that we recognize the seriousness of our predicament and that we are taking action in our own communities and we can insist that governments respond and change direction also.

By rediscovering our local neighborhood through “Meet the Street” parties and an exchange of ideas and opportunities, we can create new citizen dialogue and reinvigorate our democracy. We can also embark on bold new experiments in cooperative activity, focusing especially on food, energy, transport and the way we use our money.

The “Transition Towns” movement which began in the United Kingdom is rapidly developing into a global movement as whole townships, cities and regions accept the need for us to make a transition to a new kind of human society. Another movement that is gathering momentum is the “Sustainability Street” movement which began in Victoria, Australia. Both of these movements have ideas and suggestions which will appeal to some SEE-Change groups. They stress that it is important to build bridges to local government

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and provide opportunities for people who are coming to the realization of the need for change, to better inform themselves about new ways of managing their lives.

Most of us are preoccupied with the here and now: the immediate problems of feeding, sheltering and relating to those closest to us. For most of us, the connection between what is happening to us now and what is going on at the regional, national and global levels is not something that we particularly want to consider. But until we see the wider picture, it is difficult for us to make the shifts in our values and our behaviors that are now essential.

Getting started

Let me reiterate a key message of the book: *“The world changes because individuals and small groups set about changing it. The attributes required for being a world changer are concern, vision, persistence and self belief.”*

I would add that every journey begins with the first step. Taking the first step is the most important. The journey is usually more enjoyable if it is begun in the company of others.

The first step in this process is to recognize that there must be another path and that we must find it together. That implies talking with family and friends and neighbors about the issues.

Fortunately, we now have the internet as a marvellous source of information. It, and email are being used progressively by the sustainability movement to link people, engage them, energize them and enable them to work together.

The picture on the front cover of this book shows Charles Duguid teaching his grandson, (my son) to use a saw. My son so respected his grandfather that while still very young, he changed his name from the one we had given him to Charles Duguid Douglas. He also followed his grandfather into the profession of Surgery and now in his forties, teaches ethics to medical students. The cover was intended to reflect my view that retired and young people are vital partners in the transition we must now make. In the three years since SEE-Change began, both younger and older age groups have played important roles in what has developed.

I continue to believe that SEE-Change can involve all age groups and build momentum for a change in societal direction. It has proven to be an excellent venue for young parents as well as for children, school leavers, families and retirees to work towards a better world.

Getting a SEE-Change Group Started

I have often been asked how to get a SEE-Change group started. The most important ingredient in my view is to identify a small critical mass of about 10 individuals who recognize the need for change and are willing to commit time to make it happen. Here are some suggestions that have worked in other places.

1. Bring together a group of 2 or 3 of your friends who share your concern about the direction things are heading. Before you do so consult the SEE-Change website (www.SEE-Change.org.au) and read some copies of the SEE-Change Newsletter that can be downloaded from the website. Discuss with your friends the possibility of enlarging the group to about 9 or 10 people that includes 1 or 2 young people at school or college as well as retirees and people with young families.
2. Once you have a core group of 10 or more people who are willing to help, form yourselves into a loose-knit committee with a Chair and a Secretary and keep records of your discussions and the decisions that you take. Contact Vanessa Morris of Susan Butler at the SEE-Change Office for suggestions and assistance about activities for the group. They may also know of others in your neighborhood who are ready to assist you.
3. Try organizing a block party of people living in your street and tell them what you have in mind and why. Seek out their attitudes to climate change and the current economic situation and discuss with them how we are all going to manage in the coming few years. See what their attitudes are to retrofitting, renewable energy, and changing their food choices to those which incur a lower footprint.
4. Consider holding a public meeting in your local school, club or church hall with a speaker and a discussion about the purposes and practices of SEE-Change Groups. Publicize the meeting around you local networks, email lists, on community notice boards and perhaps in the local paper. Send notices of your meeting to local schools churches and call your friends and invite them to come. Speak to the head teachers of schools in your area and tell them what your are doing and why.
5. At the meeting, seek support for an ongoing group in your area and invite additional volunteers to join the committee and help to plan local activities aimed at drastically educing the carbon and ecological footprints of your local community. Also, invite participants to become members of the SEE-Change Movement by joining online and paying the subscription, 60% of which will be available to your group to help fund local SEE-Change activities.
6. Consider holding meetings and workshops about vegetable gardens, car pooling, babysitting and food cooperatives, solar panels and hot water

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systems, retrofitting houses to make them more energy efficient, cycling, public transport options and so on. Combine such meetings with pleasant social interaction and invite local politicians to come and discuss issues with the group.

7. Send a representative from your group to the umbrella body which meets monthly to coordinate the activities of the various groups with each other and with other activities on sustainability in Canberra.
8. Above all, enjoy the challenge of seeing change.

Additional Recommended Reading

Cork, Steven. Brighter prospects: Enhancing the Resilience of Australia (2009) <http://www.australia21.org.au/pdf/A21%20Brighter%20Prospects%20Report.pdf>

Eisler Riane. The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a caring economics (2008) Berrett Koehler

Gittins, Ross. Gittinomics. Living the good life without money, stress, overwork and joyless consumption (2007) Allen and Unwin.

Hamilton, Clive. Scorcher: The dirty politics of climate change. (2007) Black Inc Agenda

Homer Dixon, Thomas. The upside of down: Catastrophe, creativity and the renewal of civilization. (2006) Island Press.

Madron, Roy. Gaian Democracies. Redefining Globalization and People Power. (2009) <http://gaiandemocracy.net/>

Monbiot, George. Heat. How to stop the planet burning. (2006) Allen Lane 2006.

Monbiot, George. Bring on the Apocalypse. Six arguments for global justice. (2008) Atlantic books.

Spratt, David and Sutton, Philip. Climate code red. The case for emergency action. (2008) Scribe.

Transition Towns. The Transition Handbook: 2009. <http://transitionculture.org/shop/the-transition-handbook/>