

Kitchen Table Conversations

August 2015

During June/July 2015, people across Canberra engaged in [Kitchen Table Conversations](#).



Questions the groups discussed included:

- *What is important to you?*
- *What are your hopes for the future?*
- *What are your concerns?*
- *What needs to change?*
- *How can we make change happen?*

The following reports provide an overview of what was discussed in each of the conversations that took place.

Conversations in Casey:

What is important to you

- Community connection.
- Food security (There is a need to be able to grow our own food in case of wars or disasters overseas. How safe is food from overseas? Can we trust food suppliers who are predominantly interested in profit?).
- Homelessness.
- Animal cruelty.
- Food waste.
- The use of animals to test cosmetics.
- People in public housing or rental properties have no way to improve the environmental rating of their houses eg with insulation or double glazing (so they freeze in winter).
- The isolation of elderly people in nursing homes. This leads to mental health problems.
- Marriage equality.
- 'People in my street seem nice but I hardly ever get to see them'.
- Global warming.
- The government misrepresents its citizens. Even though we vote for politicians we don't have much of a say in what they do.
- Science isn't communicated effectively to ordinary people eg people don't understand the seriousness of global warming.

Taking specific actions to support change

Principles

- If we grow our own food we will see the effects of climate change more clearly and want to do something about it.

Individual

- Treat homeless people with kindness and respect when we meet them on the street.
- Tackle social justice and environmental issues locally.
- Get food directly from producers so we can find out if it is produced ethically and in an environmentally sustainable way eg from farmers' markets.
- Have a party and invite everyone from the street, so people in the street can begin to help each other more.
- Young people spend time with elderly people in nursing homes, listen to them and help them out.
- Challenge people when they argue against marriage equality.
- Explain to people why you are a vegan and ask them what they think about veganism.

Community

- Better use of green spaces in Canberra. Neighbours could take down fences and grow food communally between their houses. Unused playgrounds could be converted to community gardens.
- Set up a register where food companies are rated on issues like animal cruelty, ethical behaviour.

Conversations in Lyneham:

What's important to you? What issue is important for our future?

- A cultural change – that does not place economic growth at the centre, but places people above economics.
- A life change – resigning from jobs that go against our values.
- Social sustainability and sustainability of life – commercial enterprise and economic growth is the central driver at the expense of sustainability.
- How to make change happen – what systems can we have to replace the current systems and how do we make the change happen? What should they systems be?
- Not working in a system that treats people (asylum seekers) so poorly – how is our treatment of asylum seekers today affecting future generations and how they will treat different people?
- Inequality – how can we influence politics so inequality is not entrenched in our society like in us?

- Corporate culture – changing corporate culture so it matches the beliefs of those working in that corporate business.
- Individual ownership – individuals having responsibility and control to change things. How do we shift the systems to shift the culture?
- How to make the change outside of the political system – cultural change of the political system.
- Media – how do we influence the media? How do we decouple media and politics? How do we decouple the corporatisation of the media and politics?
- Energy efficiency systems – why in this day and age is it so difficult to get house building systems and sustainable buildings implemented?
- Removing barriers – how do we remove barriers so things are easy to do and easy to access so people don't feel things are too hard to implement?
- Accessing community and community groups – it's wonderful engaging with like-minded people and how we help society build communities is important.
- How do we bring the non-converted along to sustainability – vulnerable people are often not in a position to be worrying about broad sustainability and it's more a matter of survival. How we get them involved and engaged is important for ensuring equality.
- A national story – how do we create an inclusive equal national story, an Australian cultural narrative? A story that does get mainstream play in our media (ISIS is the biggest threat to Australia's national security and yet there are many other news items that are just as important). How do we hold the media to account?

What changes are needed? How can we make change happen?

- We need to change from reality TV and a focus on issues that are not important or real issues, to issues that are actually important. Too much time is spent in much of the media on issues that don't really matter. Media lets things run so people don't focus on genuine issues.
- We need to change culture. Media is not the ultimate issue. They reflect players and political issues. Until we change culture and who we vote for, we won't change the media. The media confirms the points of view of 'us' and 'them', particularly as people engage with the media that best reconfirms their views. We need to find a way for a mass ecological movement with a set of principles that are broader than self interest, that holds politicians to account and shifts values away from the size of homes and cars.
- ACTION: Support Mandela Day to go global. Mandela Day is a day in Africa when everyone does things for others. It could be a day a year, a day a month or a day a week.
- ACTION: Publish in MX (and other similar free newspapers handed out at public transport stations for everyone to read) on a weekly basis a column or page once a week to educate the community to enable more informed conversations to take place. The content for these articles would be put together by a panel who assesses content.
- We need to inform better and engage the community, but is that asking too much and does everyone need to be part of the debate? Much good policy doesn't progress as it becomes political. And we don't need buy-in from everybody. Many things in the ACT that have set it as a leader in sustainability did not have buy-in from everybody. It was an effective campaign led by volunteers in the community that enabled politicians to then step up and commit.
- The barrier to change is change itself. People make it harder than it needs to be.

- We need to find influencers, but we can't leave others behind. We have to be smart about it. 'The water can bare the boat but it can also swallow it'. We need a mix of influencers, supporters, followers and others.
- People need to work in the environment that best suits them, at all levels – national, local and mass movement.
- We need to model the world we want into the future.
- We need to create leaders and work out how to create new leaders, but by also doing our small bits we never know your impact.
- ACTION: Walk the talk.
- If we want change, real change, then we need conversations and deeper engagement. We need to create conversations and engage people people in one-on-one conversations. Although resource intensive, engaging people one-on-one and share stories, particularly with those that have firsthand experience, it can shift people's point of view.
- ACTION: Start a conversation with others. Talk to neighbours, post on facebook and remember storytelling and expressing what is meaningful to others is important. A gentle conversation that builds trust can then allow you to test other's held beliefs.
- ACTION: Run positive campaigns and reinforcement to support politicians and tell them they've done the right thing. Support our leaders. Write letters to editor. Have enough positive conversations and have everyone 'sharing the love'.
- ACTION: Propagate different leadership and get over negative and exemplify how people are leading in every day life.