



SEASON 1, EPISODE 7

Shaping Australia's Design Identity and Community Action for Electrify 2515

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SPEAKERS

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Trent Jansen 00:10

So I was really keen to tell Australian stories, Australian myths, these stories that we tell ourselves about who we are, but that connected indigenous and non-indigenous cultures across our post-colonial history, and these seemed like the perfect stories because they'd been generating these connections since those very early years and were hopefully some, perhaps some way of breaking down some barriers between those communities and giving us some shared Australian cultural heritage, some myths that we share, which most Australian myths are white myths or pre-colonial or post-colonial indigenous myths, but there aren't many that crossed that boundary, these were a group of myths that I found that did, so I started making work about these creatures with permission and very involved consultation.

Robyn Johnson 01:09

Hi, I'm Robyn Johnson, and welcome to Wollongong, Let's Get Salty! For 20 years I've advised industry and business in environmental management, with leaders from community, environment and industry will deep dive issues that impact us all and discuss how we as a community can take action to move towards a sustainable future.

Robyn Johnson 01:31

Welcome back, today I have with me, designer, Trent Jansen, a deep thinker and advocate for sustainability both in his personal life and through his expression of design, and I'm super excited about this chat. We've found ourselves here because we are collaborating on the Electrify 2515 project. Welcome!

Trent Jansen 02:00

Thanks, thanks for having me.

Robyn Johnson 02:03

So, what attracted me to do this podcast, was your both passion for environmental activism, but also the way that you articulate that through your work. Let's start this conversation with why you work in what you do with design and your passion for that.

Trent Jansen 02:23

I mean, I've always really been into design, as a kid my mum really motivated us to paint and make things, so I've always been a maker of stuff, I guess, and she's a painter herself, and you know, really has a passion for creative endeavours. So it's, it's something that she naturally wanted us to be involved with, and I think it was just a way for her to get us involved in something that was both educational and positive for us to learn, but something that was fun, and something that she liked to. So yeah, I guess we started painting when we were kids very young, and my dad's a very technical guy, very technically minded. He's a diesel mechanic, but can fix anything, so he had a workshop and we always just used to tinker in his workshop and make crazy bikes, and used to sculpt timber in his workshop when I was a kid too.

So, I've always made stuff, and when I was a kid, I was interested in architecture, and then later in high school, got interested in graphic design. So, I went to university to be a graphic designer, and just stumbled upon object design through a course that I was doing at university, it was something I was told about and was told was challenging and difficult, so I kind of like the challenge, so I thought I'd give it a crack, and was introduced by a lecturer Karina Clarke at UNSW, what was then the College of Fine Arts, to this new Dutch design, then which was called Droog, which is the Dutch word for dry, where people say Droog, but it's kinda I'm Dutch, so I'm trying to say it the right way. And I just, I loved it, it's dry in that it has a dry sense of humour, really ironic, very funny, but in a really flat kind of way. And I just liked that you could combine this sort of sense of personality and humour and irony with design and develop these ideas that were kind of, like really richly symbolic, and yeah, that really presented ideas, they were vehicles for ideas, vessels for communication, rather than, chairs and lights.

And I guess at this point in time, were the early days, and we were starting to discuss sustainability and design, very different to now there was no sort of talk of climate change, but just resource sustainability, being efficient and effective with the resources that you're using. And it was clear to everyone, it's been clear to everyone, I think, for decades that we don't need any more functional things, we've got all the functional things we could ever possibly need. But the function of these things went beyond, a chair to sit on that's comfortable and ergonomic, the function becomes communication. So you communicate your politics, or your history, your ideas, your feelings through these objects. So in some ways, it's like conceptual art, it's a communicative tool rather than a functional thing.

I love this stuff, you know, it just really excited me, and from then on, it's all I wanted to do, I just wanted to be an object designer, and it's an incredibly stupidly difficult path in Australia, especially because it's just, there's just, no work in it really, there are no jobs, so far as a kind of standard employment situation is concerned. So, most people who do it work for themselves and develop commercial collections and then sell that stuff. But I was never interested in commercial work, because it doesn't have the heart and that kind of focus of communication that conceptual work does. So you know, you're basically designing stuff for selling it, and I wasn't that interested in selling stuff, I wanted to do stuff to make work that was communicating my politics. So, I kind of continued to do that work and have done ever since.

I think over the years, you know, I've sort of been doing this nearly 20 years now. I guess I've only ever done the work that I want to do because it's the work that I'm passionate about. And I guess it's also the work that I feel ethically aligned with, I'm not cool with making stuff for the sake of selling it, there has to be more to it than that for me. So, I've kind of developed this identity, I suppose, within the industry for that kind of work. So, I work with galleries both here and abroad, I've got a gallery in Sydney, Galley Sally Dan-Cuthbert in Rushcutters Bay, and then I have a gallery in America and China and one in Italy, and so I can sort of have some focus on doing this work and have some places to put it, to get it to the world, it's still not an easy way to pay the bills, but it's something I do because I love it and I think it's important.

I've sort of always supplemented this work, and both intellectually and conceptually, as well as financially with lecturing. So, I've always lectured at the University of New South Wales and Wollongong for a time

and others, but I'm on staff at UNSW Art and Design, and have been now for about five years, and it's a really great way of taking care of those interests, my understanding and my skills and knowledge development, that helps my practice, whilst also being able to teach students. But the work that I've ended up doing is really environmentally and socially focused. So, there's always some narrative that underpins the work that really communicates my politics in some way to my audience, and I guess that's where I've ended up through this kind of career trajectory over the years.

Robyn Johnson 07:42

Can we talk about some examples of your work?

Trent Jansen 07:46

Sure, yeah, do you want me to run through a few, should we start with sustainability or you want to do kind of social?

Robyn Johnson 07:51

Well, let's talk about transformative design, so that kind of reusing objects.

Trent Jansen 07:57

Yeah, I think it makes sense to start there, because that's where I kind of began, when I was at university, this is in the early 2000s, there was this real focus in the way that we were taught and the way that lots of designers were working on sustainability, it was clear that designers are responsible for a lot of the resource use internationally, and industrial designers, we've been responsible for environmental impact in the way that we produce things forever, since you know, the industrial revolution. So there's a real focus within that industry to work more sustainably, and it was something that I was super interested in.

I remember I did a course, toward the end of my degree called a Global Crisis, which was run by this old academic Ted Trainer, and, I mean, he looked like he was going to drop dead on the lectern. But he was really passionate about sustainability and was old school, like, he lived in a commune, and he wore a scarf every day that his wife had knitted, and we could see the patches where he'd fixed his jumper, and, he was a proper conservator, I suppose, a conservationist.

I did that course, one summer with some friends, because we had to make up some credit, and we thought it sounds interesting, we're all sort of into sustainability a little bit. But after that, it changed my life, changed the way I live. I mean, it was from there that I started buying green electricity, I got a compost bin, I started shopping only at op shops. I mean, I was riding my bike everywhere anyway, but more for fitness and I suppose probably to save money, more than anything. But from there, it became something that I did to save fossil fuels, and I just made my life as sustainable as it could be, and I started to become really interested in how I could do that in my work as well.

For my major project, I wanted to design this thing that had zero impact on the environment, and I mean, that's absolutely impossible, unfortunately. But I went most of the way there, and so I found a resource that could be reused, I started to source old road signs from the RTA and started making furniture from what is essentially these large pieces of sheet metal that otherwise go to a scrap metal yard, and they are recycled, but it's not a great process, because they're covered in vinyl, the vinyl gets melted down, there's off gassing, they have to skim it, and it really it contaminates the process and means that the aluminium down cycles, whereas if we can reuse it, there are no further impacts from that material apart from a bit of cutting.

For my major project, which was 17 years ago, now or so, I made these pieces of furniture entirely out of old road signs, which then was something not many people were doing. Since then, adaptive reuse, which is what that kind of practice is called has just taken over the world and the circular economy ideas are top of mind for a lot of people. So, it's taken off and even started to enter some mainstream parts of

industry now, which is great. I guess from there, I worked on projects that were pretty squarely focused on sustainability for a long time, doing a lot of adaptive reuse, but also trying to work with companies to develop ways of making more commercial types of furniture that were still really sustainable or as sustainable as possible within that context.

Then I started in, I guess it was about 2010, or maybe slightly after, to work on some ideas that I might take into a PhD. You know, I wasn't that keen to do a PhD, it sounds silly, I did one eventually, but the university that I was teaching at casually, a lot of the academics, they were encouraging me to do it and helped me to find a scholarship so that I could kind of get paid for a few years to do it. So, it seemed silly not to, if I could just work on a project I really wanted to do for a few years, and I had no intention of getting into academia, that just kind of happened.

But I was interested at this point in this idea of what was Australian Design, I was kind of transitioning from focusing solely on sustainability, because that can be part of any project. It doesn't have to be the conceptual focus, it can just underpin the way that you choose materials and processes. So, I started working with these ideas of asking these questions of what is Australian Design. Everyone in the industry talks about my work as Australian, because I'm Australian, but to me, it looked like design from anywhere, it could have come from Europe or America, there was no particular sort of aesthetic or narrative calling card that made it sort of intrinsically from here.

So, I was keen to pursue that question, and I spent four years researching that and developed a thesis and I think five or six bodies of work that kind of explored that idea over that period. And one thing that I was really keen to focus on as part of that project was that there'd be some component of this project that spoke about the incredibly important contribution that indigenous Australian cultures had made to our contemporary understanding and experience of Australian condition, which was a sort of vexing thing to do, because I'm not an indigenous Australian person, but I really wanted my work to have some representation of those cultures within, within the way that it was developed.

So, at the time, I was living in Alice Springs, and was meeting with a Western Aranda elder, Baden Williams is his name, and I was actually meeting with him to talk about a very different project about an old German guy whose father had started the mission at Hermannsburg, and was kind of important to that place, and controversial in some ways, and but you know, an interesting figure in central Australian history. And we were driving to Hermannsburg from Alice Springs one day, and we just started talking about creature stories from that country, I think he mentioned something about a creature in the landscape and it just took my interest, I was so keen to know more.

He started talking to me about this creature, the Pankalangu, which lives in the scrub and is completely camouflaged, you can't see it until it rains, and when it rains, the water that falls over its body catches the moonlight, and that's how you see its silhouette, you sort of see this sparkling creature in the rain. And I was just fascinated by this story.

So, I started looking into other creature stories, and I found that there's this Australian researcher, Robert Holden, who talks about the way that in the early years of the colony, and what is now Sydney, early colonists came to Australia with this idea of the Australian bush and creatures that lived in the Australian bush, and one of them was called the Hairy Wild Man from Botany Bay, and it was this creature myth that existed in London before the First Fleet came here, and when they arrived, they were terrified of this thing, and the stories go, or at least Holden's research says that they started to speak to Aurorae people about these stories, and there was some confirmation that it existed in their stories. There was this creature that they called the Yahoo or the Yowie that seemed to fit the exact description, so they came to the conclusion that this thing was real, and legitimately terrified about it.

So, there were these connections that formed between local communities and colonisers around these conversations, and it was this sort of shared fear, and I suppose some just fascination about these creatures, similarly to the way that Baden and I really formed a relationship over several years, mainly talking about creatures. So, there was this kind of shared interest and fear and fascination about these stories.

It was in Holden's research, he talks about these connections, these personal connections and relationships that were formed, and I'd experienced that myself. So, I was really keen to tell Australian stories, Australian myths, these stories that we tell ourselves about who we are, but that connected indigenous and non-indigenous cultures across our post-colonial history. And these seemed like the perfect stories because they'd been generating these connections since those very early years and were hopefully some, perhaps, some way of breaking down some barriers between those communities and giving us some shared Australian cultural heritage, some myths that we share, which most Australian myths are white myths or pre-colonial or post-colonial indigenous myth, but there aren't many that crossed that boundary, these were a group of myths that I found that did.

So, I started making work about these creatures with permission and very involved consultation, especially with Baden and community members from Western Aranda community to make work about these stories. So, I guess that was my introduction to working with indigenous Australians stories and storytellers and artists and crafts people making work that was about the breaking down of these cultural barriers hopefully. And since then, I've sort of continued this work on but have refined it and improved hopefully at one iteration at a time.

That first project, as I said before, I'm not indigenous Australian, I'm not a Western Aranda person, but I asked permission to work with those narratives and work closely with Baden and one of the community members to seek permission and consult on that story. But I was really interested moving forward in not being the sole creative person giving voice and giving form to these stories. I wanted to be able to work with community members collaboratively to bring form to these narratives together.

I've started working over the past, I don't know probably 8 or 10 years in, in various collaborations with remote indigenous Australian artists and craftspeople starting first of all, with some artists from Fitzroy Crossing, I was invited there by Fremantle Art Centre and Mangkaja Arts, which is the art centre out there to work collaboratively with that community to make some work for an exhibition at Fremantle Art Centre, and that was my first real, I guess, experience with working on community, with community members, making things together according to our shared creative vision, and it was just such an incredible experience and such a privilege to be able to work in that space with artists on country, sharing stories, doing this sort of two way learning where we're, we're learning from each other about each other's lives, and each other's ways of working and skills and knowledge and practices, and, I mean, I've learned an incredible amount.

Since then, eventually ended up working with Johnny Nargoodah, who's a Nyikina man from Fitzroy Crossing, and we've been working together now for, I don't know, 5, 6 or 7 years, something like that. And he's worked for a really long time on remote cattle stations as a saddler, he now works at the Art Centre in Fitzroy Crossing, but he has this incredible knowledge working with leather, and we eventually kind of meandered towards working with leather, and now we work almost solely with leather, I don't know if that will continue.

But I've learned an incredible amount from him, in doing these projects, about working with that material, and about those techniques, but also about his history, his culture, the place that his family have been, for countless generations, hopefully been able to, to share some knowledge and skill too over the years and also use my networks to bring some attention to the work that we're doing and to Johnny's work, and his skill and his knowledge and the stories that were telling together.

Over time, because this has taken up my practice for the past 10 or 12 years, working with these kinds of narratives, in remote places with remote practitioners, every now and then I get an email from an art centre, from a community that may be keen to do another project. So that happens from time to time, and the current project is working with some woodcarvers, Tanya Singer and Errol Evans, from Indulkana are in very remote South Australia to make some new work with them, and there's some really beautiful ideas in there, and they'll be resolved sometime in 2023, for a couple of shows here in Australia, and then they'll probably go overseas as well.

But the projects kind of evolve with time to express and embody my politics, but also the politics of those collaborators that I'm working with their stories, their histories, their lived experience, and I suppose to share what have historically been really marginal stories with a larger audience, and for me that that's a huge focus for the work I'm doing at the moment.

Robyn Johnson 20:38

So that Fitzroy Crossing project, you have some beautiful pieces with leather, encrusted with what are salt crystals, can you tell us how that came about?

Trent Jansen 20:49

Yeah, sure, that project was commissioned by the Powerhouse Museum, and there was this kind of brief that was given to us quite open ended, but one of one of the points in the brief was to reflect on, or design some work, that communicates or advocates for action on climate change. And it was very clear that the Powerhouse Museum were really keen for me to collaborate with Johnny on that project.

We were in Melbourne, actually showing some other work that we had designed at Design Week 2020, right as COVID kind of began and we started talking about what we might do for this project. We would walk to the gallery every day, and we were just sort of chatting about how can we discuss climate change in a design project, and we started talking about these things that happen on country.

It was both Johnny, myself and his wife, Eva, these connections between things on country, they're indicators really, so for as long as Johnny knows, for example, when the Boolaroo tree flowers around Fitzroy Crossing, they know that there are crocodile eggs in the riverbank, that flower acts as an indicator, so that they know they can go and harvest the croc eggs, and there are others, Johnny's told me about probably a dozen or so, that are commonly used year in year out, to survive on country and have been for generations, as long as storytelling can remember.

He was really keen to talk about the fact that these indicators have started to misalign. So for years, these things have happened as, like I said, as long as anyone can remember. But now, when the Boolaroo tree flowers, for example, the croc eggs and not in the riverbank, and because these things are, you know, come from local knowledge and from stories and ways of living that have been passed down over many generations, there's no specific talk of climate change as being the cause of that within community. But when I started to speak to some climate experts who do research in that area, they started to make some suggestions that this could be the reason for it. But there are things that are happening in that ecosystem that have not happened for probably 1000s of years, and that, that could be one of the factors.

I think we all know that the changes that we're witnessing, and it seems like an obvious cause. So, one of the changes that Johnny and his family and other community members had noticed was that the Fitzroy River every year has been drying up in the dry season, and for as long as Johnny can recall, he's never seen that, as a kid or as a young adult, this didn't happen, there was always water running in the Fitzroy. But these days in the dry season, it dries up, they are these salt crystals that form on the sand, and he's never noticed that either, because it's a freshwater river, down that far at least. So, I was really interested to find out more about how this might be happening.

So, I called some water experts from that, that have done a lot of research in that region, and they said, without doing some specific research on it, it's impossible to know exactly what's happening. But from their experience, and from their knowledge of that region, what they think is happening is that, what they know is happening with the weather is, that they're getting fewer monsoons every year, it's going from six or so small to medium monsoons to two really intense monsoons. So, they're getting lots of rain falling in two isolated periods with long dry periods in between. So, this is causing heaps of flooding during the wet season, and people are getting stuck on community and in town, and you know, that's becoming more common.

But what it also means is that during the time in between, the river drying up in a way that it's never done before. So that's why Johnny's noticing these dry spells in the dry season. But what they suggested and the reason that they suggested that it's becoming saltier, or that there's salt on the sand, when it does dry is that you know, rainwater runoff is obviously not salty, it's fresh water, but when the river dries up, it starts to draw from this subterranean aquifer that sits under that region, and that is incredibly salty water, so they think that because of the low water table in the river, it's starting to flow in from the aquifer, and that's bringing salt.

So, Johnny and I were super keen to try and represent this idea and in a design work that could yet again, tell this story that's unknown, because it's out in this remote part of Australia that no one goes to and also this is a change that's noticed by community members, but that's not yet been really properly studied, or reported on. So yeah, we made these kinds of large furniture forms that are influenced formally by the shapes in the riverbed when it dries up.

So as the water dries, it creates these little pools and then as they subside, or evaporate, they create this sort of indentations. I mean, I think we've all seen this on the beach, you know, we see these indentations in the sand. It's really similar because it's a sandy riverbed. So we created these furniture forms that have these dried sand indentation, kind of water flowing details, we upholstered it in leather because we work a lot in leather and that's a material that it's something that we like to use, it also has this beautiful kind of natural tonality that speaks of country, of red dirt and has those kinds of earthy colors and then we encrusted some sections of it with this black gemstone. Black, because of the I guess, you know, we're trying to make this thing feel somewhat ominous because these stories are not nice stories.

But the encrusting using these gemstones is representing those salt crystals that Johnny notices on the sand. So, representing this complete story in a project that then was exhibited in the Powerhouse Museum, seen by 1000s of people and written about by journalists, and it really brings this story in front of a lot of people, hopefully, and informs many more people than would have ever found out about the story before of this issue that's affecting this remote community that, in most instances would remain marginal, and would probably not be told, but now, you know, at least that story is in the world, and we're getting a warning I suppose about the effects of our behaviour, even in the most remote places, when we think that these places are away from the reach of climate change, you know, they're absolutely not, it's hitting us everywhere.

Robyn Johnson 27:15



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Robyn Johnson 27:51

Absolutely, it's pervasive. I feel like there's more conversations than have ever been in my career of working in environmental management. Let's now have a chat about Wollongong, so your family is here, who've based yourself here, let's talk about our local environment and what's your favourite way to immerse yourself in nature?

Trent Jansen 28:11

Yeah, I guess my ways of immersing myself in nature have changed over the years, but it's strange, I've lived by the ocean my whole life, but I don't really like getting in it that often, because I don't like the cold water. I love being by it and I love looking at it, and I like walking along the beach.

But you know, recently some of my friends basically forced me to get into mountain biking, they bought me a mountain bike and said you're coming with us. So that has very quickly become my favourite way of being immersed in nature. You know, we do these long rides up in the bush above Thirroul and Austinmer, and even some days, when we're feeling particularly energetic, we ride all the way to Wollongong, up the escarpment, and the countryside up there, the bush is just so beautiful. I think often were hurtling through the bush too quickly to really appreciate it, but really often I try to stop and take it in and realise what a special part of the world we live in. We often ride up to Kurumul, or Brokers Nose of a morning and get up there just after sunrise, and the view and the landscape from up there is just so spectacular, so yeah, that's my, that's my way.

Robyn Johnson 29:25

Now your partner Amy is also very inclined to sustainability and local action, tell us a bit about your story together in terms of trying to share stories and connect people.

Trent Jansen 29:40

I guess we had our daughter, Ari, five and a half years ago, she's five and a half years old nearly to the day. And whilst we were both incredibly motivated and concerned before having her, I think nothing, nothing brings it home to you as much as having a kid. And looking at the future projections for climate change, if we continue along the trajectory we're on and understanding that, you know, I'll be dead by the time much of the worst is on us, but she will not be and, thinking through some of the worst projections and understanding what that will mean for her, especially as a woman trying to live a happy and healthy life and experience some of the privilege and joy that we've been able to experience. I mean, we were just completely dismayed by that possibility for her.

I'm also obviously concerned about everybody else and other people's children, hopefully that goes without saying, but nothing brings it home, like having your own kid, and the love and the joy that you

hope for them and realising that, that this thing could be a really, really difficult is an understatement, but massive problem for her future. So, we were feeling so dismayed about this, and we're trying to figure out, what can we personally, because it's just this huge international problem, that that it seems so overwhelming things have to happen, and the only way that things can happen is if people do things, nothing's gonna happen automatically.

So we were just like, let's just try something, I don't know what, but let's try and motivate our community. So Amy called community meeting in Thirroul, we put up posters around town and sort of said, hey, are you are you concerned about climate change? If so, come to the Thirroul Library on this day and let's talk about what we can do as a community. We had a couple of 100 people show up, and Amy was very much the face of this thing, she was up there presenting, she showed a crazy photo of Ari, as her motivation for doing this, and was hoping to speak to people and their motivations too. And you know, I was helping organize, but I just thought it was something that she would be amazing at, and she obviously has been.

So the community were so motivated, and in the end this this sort of resulted in a local extinction rebellion group Extinction Rebellion Northern Illawarra, we didn't really know whether that was the right name or the right philosophy for that area, and we thought, maybe not because they're pretty hardcore, and we're mostly families with young kids, and we weren't going to be super gluing ourselves to trains and stuff. But there was a framework there that we thought was useful. We could work with the framework, and we could tone it down when we felt like we needed to, or the community didn't have appetite to do that stuff, and we could just do the things that were right for us, and at least there was a name and we're affiliated with a larger global movement.

There are lots of examples too, of extinction rebellion groups around the world that are family friendly and doing these type of symbolic but not overly disruptive actions. We did a few things, we organised a bushfire vigil on Austi beach, while the bushfires were on, raised money for the RFS. We did a camp out at Jackson Park in Thirroul raising money for our own group to do another project. We painted a big mother earth mural on the pool in Thirroul, which a few of us got arrested for, which was not terribly intelligent, but it was beautiful, and the community in lots of ways really got behind it, but unfortunately, Council did not.

That all led to a project in the lead up to the recent federal election, where we wanted to give people agency to really demonstrate that climate change was on the front of their minds in the lead up to that election. We worked with local artist, Mignon Steele, amazing local painter, and she designed this poster and we sort of said, we want it to say I'm voting for a Safe Climate, and how you depict that is, you know, we'd love to see what you can do, and she's amazing and the posters were so beautiful.

We had hundreds of these printed and door knocked on Lawrence Hargrave Drive from Bulli, all the way up to Wombarra, I think if not maybe Stanwell Park, I didn't do that end. And we asked people along that main road to display these in their front yard if they felt like it aligned with their politics, and yeah, we had hundreds of them along that strip. Our idea was that it gives people the agency to, to show their motivations, because we had this feeling that lots of people were motivated by this, but they weren't sure whether there was a kind of social licence to talk about it, they weren't sure whether this was something that they shared with the neighbours, that we had this idea that if they put it in their front yard, then everybody knows that that's their motivation, and they can feel like there's, like an ability and openness to talk about those politics and to spread that those ideas.

Robyn Johnson 34:45

So this is the I'm voting for a Safe Climate, Beyond Coal Coast?

Trent Jansen 34:49

Yeah, yeah, so we kind of we've moved away from Extinction Rebellion, and we've started calling ourselves Beyond Coal Coast, because I guess we've been doing it long enough that we feel we have our own philosophical motivations, we don't need to align ourselves with a larger movement. And also, I think that now that a huge part of the community is coming along on this issue. I feel like the disruptive action is not that is not that beneficial. I think that a lot of people are there, we don't need to get in their face and stop them from moving on with their day, in order to bring it to people's attention, for most people, it's front of mind.

So, we did this project, and what was really interesting is that when we were door knocking, the first question we would get was, which political party are you aligned with? And we'd immediately say, well none, we're just a group of local parents, we're concerned for the future of our children, which we all were and this is a really key issue for us, and we want to know if it's also a key issue for others. And mostly people would say, oh great come in or we'd have a conversation with them on the doorstep, and a lot were sort of skeptical about, obviously, party politics, didn't want to talk to a Labour member or Greens candidate about the issues. They wanted to feel like they were talking to someone who, who wasn't partisan, and they were just wanted to talk to a normal community member.

Robyn Johnson 36:17

Yep, they weren't trying to get a vote.

Trent Jansen 36:18

Yeah, exactly, and we had so many people who were previously liberal voters who were like, well, you know, I'm really concerned about this, and the party that I usually vote for is not addressing this issue. Who should I vote for? So we didn't want to be partisan and we didn't have like a voting scorecard, but then people were asking us for that, you know, we had shops around town that were saying people are coming in seeing this poster, they want to know how to vote, I don't know what to tell them.

So, we developed a scorecard, and of course, you know, we're all greens voters because that's the best option, they're by far the best party when it comes to this kind of action. So, we were telling people to vote for the greens and, but we were giving them that information because we've looked through all of the policies, we know that they are the party that can deliver the best outcomes on this issue.

Though it seemed to resonate with people, and we had so many people from all the volunteers who were knocking on doors, say I voted liberal all my life, but I'm going to vote for the Greens this time. It was so heartening to see that there was something of a shift, at least in some people's mind.

And then of course, it was so clear in that election for everybody that the climate was such a major motivator nationally, and we felt that here too, and then after that project ended, we were at a bit of a loose end, we sort of, we were having a beer at the pub one night, just we'd organised to meet up and discuss what our next project might be.

We're always keen to do something, we're quite busy, but we try to fit it in, and I think I sort of suggested, well, Saul Griffith lives in Austi, I'd spoken to him a few times on the phone. He was supposed to speak at one of our events a couple of years ago. And I think I said, well why don't we just give him a call and see what he needs? You know, because we are this group were sort of 8 to 10 parents at that point, and we have skills, a lot of us, me excluded, work in comms, but we're also just motivated, and we're sort of pretty good at just getting stuff done, if we're given a task.

So yeah, I called Saul and said, we want to we can be your feet on the ground, what do you need doing? I thought he might give us some research to do or, I mean, I just didn't really know what he would say. And he said, well, you know, there's this org that I run called Rewiring Australia, and we're trying to get

some pilot programs up in communities for this this electrification idea that I'm always on about, why don't you try and see if you can get the community behind it here. So yeah, I mean, we organised to meet with him, we all got together at the pub, our kids running around like crazy as they do every time, and Saul talked to us through what this would look like and what we'd need to do to potentially get Rewiring Australia's attention and to maybe become a pilot.

We started working on this project, he basically said that if we could get 500 homes from 2515 to sign up, that would be a pretty great indication that there was some interest in the community for this. So, we as a group, we have this organising committee, there's 8 to 10 of us, and we've been working together for quite a few years on different things. And we set up a survey that we wanted to get out to community as a way of signing community members up, as a way of signing households up, but also the way their collecting data for Saul and Rewiring Australia so they can understand what people have, what their interests are, how much they are interested in this pilot, how many of the six machines in their homes: which are heat pumps for hot water, air conditioners for space heating, induction cooking, the other three are EV (electric vehicle), battery and solar.

How many of those set six things they'd be keen to change If we were to become a pilot region, we were aiming for 500 homes, we got 500 homes signed up in two days, we had no idea, we thought we could be going for months to get to 500, we just had no clue. We opened up the survey, we sent some text messages to some friends, and within two days, it was all over the place. And people were getting messages from different communities that they're part of that have no connection, but that there was just coming to everybody from all directions. So it was clear that, at least there was this group in the community that was super keen for this to happen and saw this as the practical change that they've been wanting.

So, we got to 1000 homes just recently, so we've been going for, we started on August 1st and, what are we now, mid-September, so about a month and a half to get to 1000 homes. So, it slowed down after the low hanging fruit had signed up, because there are people that are motivated and keen, and now we're trying to reach different demographics in the community that may not be so personally interested in these issues.

It may take more convincing, I think the great thing about this program, electrifying all of the homes into 2515, hopefully, is that there are huge financial benefits that come from it too, we're talking about using about a quarter to a third of the electricity that the fossil fuel alternatives use. So we're also talking about saving, making those kinds of savings financially too, which is what motivates a lot of people. It's not all about carbon emissions for everybody, for a lot, it's about finance.

But the project is going well, we have a town hall meeting with Saul coming up on the 9th of October, which is fully sold out, so we have no more seats available, again another indication that the community is super ready for it, and we're hoping that Rewiring Australia will choose us as one of the communities that they take to ARENA and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and other federal and state bodies as well as hopefully some, you know, manufacturers and suppliers of these machines to help us become, hopefully, the first fully electrified suburb in the world, and to help people along the way with some subsidies to assist with that with that transition.

But we don't yet know whether we will be, we don't yet know exactly what this pilot will look like, what those subsidies might look like, what kind of support there will be for families. But we know that as an early uptaker, there will be benefits for us because in many ways, we're kind of a guinea pig community that there will be massive benefits, but there will also be some complications, because this has not been done before at this kind of scale. But we want to be a community that tests this important transition out and provides the learnings that are needed to make this a rollout that can happen well, nationally and

internationally to make the shift that we need to, to bring our emissions down to hopefully zero as soon as possible.

Robyn Johnson 43:25

Yeah, it's setting up that pathway to learn those things that we need to learn about the interaction with the grid, the subsidy pathways, that then could be rolled out more broadly. Yeah, it's an exciting project. I'm somewhat involved, I've been handing out letterbox drops and promoting Saul and the messaging for Electrify 2515 for a while.

I think there's been a lot of questions about, well why not other parts of Wollongong? I know we actually did get quite a lot of interest from surrounding Bulli and Woonona people register, so there's opportunity to perhaps expand the geographical reach of that project. But I think the important messaging here is that you've got to kind of connect with your social circle and generate that interest, and I think you mentioned to me that maybe we got 5% of the households in 2515?

Trent Jansen 44:21

No, I think we're close to 20% actually.

Robyn Johnson 44:25

Okay, and before that in Australia, the most had been...

Trent Jansen 44:28

It's 2% or 3%.

Robyn Johnson 44:30

Yeah, I think there's obviously the potential to be recipient of some subsidised appliances here. But that show of interest of around 20%, is the thing that's really driving that people will actually make these changes and sign up to a program and be that guinea pig for other regions to do it. So, I guess I can stand behind that this is a pilot that really leads the way for all of Australia to move forward and therefore has a larger and broader social equity piece behind it.

Trent Jansen 45:07

Yeah, I think that's true, and for this to work, it has to happen worldwide. I think to speak to that equity issue, yes, we are a wealthy community, but we're not all wealthy. There are lots of members of our community that are renters, who were doing our best to figure out how to how they may fit into the program, that are single parents who, you know, struggle from paycheck to paycheck. So, whilst overall we're a wealthy community, that doesn't include everybody.

And we, I've had lots of people come and talk to me in the street and say, well I'm a single parent and we really struggle, and I worry that we might be left out of this program, because we can't afford to subsidise the subsidies, we can't afford the bit that we may have to pay in order to be part of it. And you know, so we're discussing ideas of means testing and things. We don't know what all that will look like. But we're, we're absolutely aware of the privilege of our community generally, but also, the fact that that doesn't speak for everybody.

We've also set up a page on our website, which is at Electrify2515.org that asks the question, are you not from 2515? Do you want to do this in your community, and we've been helping other communities we've had, you know, probably one every couple of weeks, contact us and say, hey, how did you do this? can you help us? and a member of our committee will meet with them and talk them through what we've done.

We're sharing our survey, we're sharing our graphic collateral, we're trying to help this happen in other places, and we're kind of creating competition for ourselves for Rewiring Australia, but we want this to be, I mean this needs to be, a national and global movement, so there's no point holding your cards to your chest on this kind of thing, you know, we want this to be huge. So, we're gonna do everything we can to, to make it spread.

Back to that, to that point on, surrounding suburbs, I think of the more than 1200 people that have signed up at the moment, 1000 of those are within 2515, and around 200 are from outside, many most are from Bulli, Woonona, surrounding suburbs, but we've had people sign up from Albury Wodonga, because on our website, it says sign up, no matter where you're from, because, if someone contacts us from your community, and they want to start their own group, we can put you in touch, and you can work together to do this in your community.

But it takes people power, and it takes volunteers and it takes a group of people who are willing to give their time and I should take this opportunity to thank everyone who's working on it, we have an army of volunteers, like you and your daughters, letterboxing, and developing all sorts of collateral that we need to get this out to the community, and to really be thinking about how to address a lot of these peripheral issues that we didn't think fell within our mandate. But there are so many questions that come up, once you start doing this within a community that you don't think of it in the beginning, but you realise just how important is these questions are over time.

There's a big group behind this, and it's so important to have all of those feet on the ground doing the work, because it doesn't, it doesn't come from nowhere, it comes from community action. And from what we've spoken to Saul about, that's what makes our particular movement attractive to Rewiring Australia, we are a grassroots movement, we're bottom up, we're engaging the community as community members, we have trust in the community, because we're one of them. One of the reasons that past attempts have been so, well unsuccessful is that they've often come from utility companies, and a utility company will send you an email and say, hey we want to do this thing. And everyone sort of thinks that seems like a scam, I don't trust that. So, they get 2% to 3% response rate, and they assume there's no interest in this and it goes nowhere.

But we found that if you do it as a community group as people from the community, and you're reaching out to your friends, and they're reaching out to their friends, and it's snowballs from there that people will get involved if they're keen, and that's been the case here. And because we can, we can show such community interest, and because we're different to a lot of the other pilots that are that are trying to make headway at the moment, there are some others that are being run by utility companies, others that are working top down from government that were one of the, well probably the furthest along, that's community grassroots motivated, that makes us attractive to them, and I think it stands us in good stead to hopefully be one of the communities that they select to go forward.

We're told that we will know more about that within the next couple of months, and we'll be able to report back to community and let everyone know whether we are one of those groups that Rewiring Australia will be working with in that kind of way, whether we're one of the selected pilot communities, or whether we need to work as a community to do this ourselves through bulk buys and existing subsidies and similar. Either way, it's possible to different degrees, but it all comes down to community interest and motivation, and with that we can we can do a lot.

Robyn Johnson 50:18

And if you're listening and you're not from 2515, get in touch because this knowledge, the questions that are being asked, the facts that have been developed, the going through this process will speed things up, if you want to do this within your community, so I encourage you to get in touch.

But one of the things that attracted me to the program is because it is these six things to electrify your home, that you're going to do at some point anyway, or that my family is, and that, you know, we're trying to encourage the community. These are the most impactful things that you can do in your life, in terms of your footprint, to minimise the use of electricity by a family that comes from fossil fuel sources. So, it hits stationary energy consumption, it hits transport energy consumption, and they're the biggest things that we need to be focusing on in terms of what we're using and how we're getting around.

So, I guess for me, I've worked within industry my whole life or consulted to it, because from an environmental performance and management perspective, my skills as an environmental scientist lend me to helping those operations to be the best that they can. A lot of people within industry are like, I can't believe you're bringing in an activist onto your podcast, because we're from different sides of the fence. But it's like, if we're gonna fix this, we all need to work together, have these different perspectives, have industry taking its action and community taking its own action. And it's the very same thing that you said before, you know, when Ari was born and you're looking at her future, it's the same for me with my girls. Their hope for their future also goes in ebbs and flows, because I'm often talking about climate change and environmental action myself, and it's confusing and confronting for this generation. And as you say, it's not going to hit us in our 40s as hard as it's going to hit them when they're in their 20s and 30s. So we need to pave this way for our kids and our local community to be able to find these solutions. Well, let's wrap it up there, thank you so much for coming on, it's been a really interesting chat.

Trent Jansen 52:45

Oh, it's a pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Robyn Johnson 52:47

Yeah, you're welcome, and yes we'll see you 9th of October, if you want to learn a bit more about Electrify 2515.

Trent Jansen 52:55

Yeah, and jump on the website if you want to get in touch or get involved, which is Electrify 2515.org.

Robyn Johnson 53:00

Thank you.

Trent Jansen 53:01

Thanks.



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