

Talk by Colleen Philp of Sustainable Ōtautahi Christchurch (SOC) for Networking for the Environment - Intergenerational Hui on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020.

SOC formed in 2005 to work toward strongly sustainable city and environs. What does strongly sustainable mean? Given the capture and abuse of the word Sustainable by personal, political and corporate green washers it's worth defining. A group of primary school students helped me with this definition:

"Sustainability is:

Being careful

Looking after the environment

Saving the world

- for the animals
- for us
- for our children
- their children and ALL future generations."

That really sums it up I think but strong sustainability acknowledges we need to think about the fundamental drivers of non-sustainability like the economic system we humans operate; the drivers of injustice and inequity; the human motivations that are leading us to destroy the planet. And much more.

She's a big job!

Fortunately, SOC works in a matrix of organisations and individuals in ChCh, NZ and globally all passionate about this kaupapa. So SOC looks for ways to strengthen other people's work, to collaborate, and to find niches where what we do locally can help everyone.

Our overarching passion project is trying to save the world in less than 9 years, but our particular projects are determined by the passion, interests and skills of the people who engage with SOC in an active way. These projects include work on things like: waste minimisation and the circular economy; land use change including ecological restoration and re-wilding, as well as alternatives to intensive industrial agriculture; creating local sustainable businesses; facilitating conversations to change attitudes and behaviour in the face of the climate crisis.

Basically, if someone has something, they want to do which fits the SOC kaupapa we can shelter them supporting them to do it.

All these threads of work SOC are engaged in based on peoples' individual passions, priorities, interests and skills. But also, with the purpose of looking to find the levers or pathways to deep systemic change.

Change won't happen unless we make it though, as the drivers of 'business as usual' hurtling us toward our own destruction are deeply entrenched, powerful and very, very hard to shift. Therein lies the biggest challenge to SOC but having said that the strongest achievement of SOC is having a team of people backed by a community prepared to try with skills, passion and purpose.

While we do a range of things which you can read about on our website, on our Facebook page or talk to us about I want to focus more today on one of our flagship projects 'Speaking for the Planet'.

This is an art, speech and soon to be drama competition run each year in June on World Environment Day. SOC run this in partnership with NZ AEE. It is an opportunity for young people to speak to their passion about our world along particular themes determined each year by the United Nations. This year it was biodiversity - the interdependence of all living things; previously plastic pollution, air quality. The link with climate is included each year.

It is as I say an opportunity for young people to speak to their passions, to reach people and to reach into themselves. It is also about our wider community coming together. Businesses, schools, councils, community groups and individuals. It is truly intergenerational.

It is also fun, colourful, and brings us together in a way that feeds the soul. Feeding the soul, keeping ourselves and others happy and healthy is vital if we are to achieve our goals.

So, as Chairperson of SOC my biggest personal challenge is bringing people into SOC to help each other and then finding ways to avoid them overloading and burning out.

One way is to engage some paid people to help. This is Kate Horrell. She has been contracted to do a bit of work for SOC. She is also likely to lead our S4P work for next year's competition. We have to find funds to contract people like Kate and to protect the volunteers from overload and burnout.

We have to do this in a way that genuinely helps and does not lead us into spending too much time fundraising; and having funders telling us what we should do and how. Money generally comes from the 'business as usual' crowd. Unless we find alternatives, we could be sucked and driven down pathways that will deviate us from our purpose. A balance we have to negotiate constantly. Certainly, something I'm looking to our wider community to help find the solutions for.