

THE JUNK TO FUNK ORCHESTRA – SOUND THROUGH WASTE

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A 90-MINUTE PAPER/WORKSHOP

ABSTRACT

Over the last four years Waiheke Islanders have been encouraged to send less waste to Auckland landfills through a concerted education and awareness campaign co-ordinated largely by the Waste Resource Trust.

As part of this awareness campaign – and in an effort to make recycling and protecting the environment on Waiheke funky and cool - a group of talented and committed volunteers came up with the idea of an annual celebration of waste re-use called Junk to Funk.

The Junk to Funk project involves the entire community including the schools, community groups and businesses and the large pool of volunteers offer workshops and mentoring to children and adults alike to encourage our people into re-thinking our attitudes to waste. In 2005 the project included the formation of a children's orchestra whose instruments were made from waste material. Their mentor - volunteer Klaus Rachuy – says the orchestra was an attempt for children to experiment with music and sound and develop their skills in problem solving and technology by making something functional from the waste-stream.

This workshop/presentation will explore the Junk to Funk experience and includes a hands-on approach to creating music from waste.

Background

Introduction

On Waiheke Island the coolest way to get people to rethink their attitudes to waste is the Junk to Funk Recycling in Action Experience. For the third year in a row over 1000 people - out of a community of under 8000 - celebrated our creative re-use of rubbish with a show of wearable arts and useful objects. The event is now being hailed as the largest event on the island and this project was developed and organized by a committed team of volunteers. This year the Junk to Funk experience incorporated the debut of our very own percussive orchestra – which involved a range of children in developing instruments from everyday objects and waste items – to much public acclaim.

Background – Waste on Waiheke

The Junk to Funk project is run under the auspices of the Waste Resource Trust – a community organization whose mission is to promote waste minimization so that the island sends less rubbish to Auckland landfills.

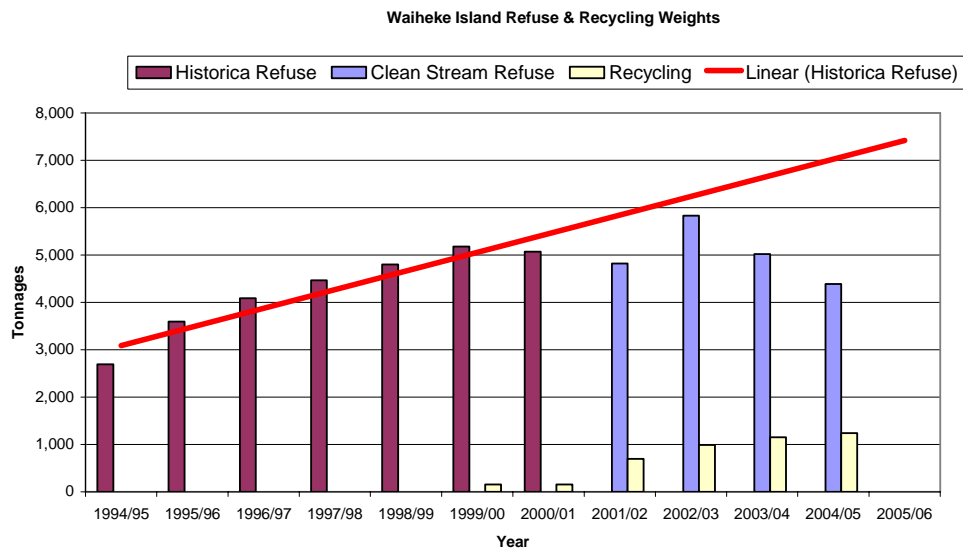
Four and a half years ago the Waste Resource Trust established a community-owned company to run the local transfer station and introduced a kerb-side collection for recycling. The company's contract to operate the collection system included targets for reducing the amount of waste we send to landfill and with this in mind the trust employed two part-time staff at the start of 2002 to promote recycling and other waste minimization behaviour through an education/social marketing campaign that targets businesses, householders, schools and the visitor population on the island.

Waste is a big issue for Waiheke. The island is a 35minute ferry ride from downtown Auckland and is part of the Auckland City Council local body area. It has an established population of nearly 8000 people with a total of over 5000 residences. The island is a popular visitor destination with around 20% of the homes being holiday homes, and at peak holiday times the daytime population can increase to over 35,000.

All these people create rubbish that has to be removed from the island at considerable cost. Each tonne costs around \$200 in transport costs alone and for the year ending in June 2005 a total of 4,389 tonnes of residual waste was taken off the island.

On a more positive note however, in the four years from 2001 to 2005 (since the re-introduction of a recycling pick up from households) the island has increased

its recycling from 156 tonnes a year to 1,238, tonnes.



These figures do not reflect waste resources diverted from landfill through re-use including the composting of green waste. If these are included the total diversion rate is closer to 5000 tonnes for the year ending June 2005.

The Waste Resource Trust maintains that the dramatic increase in recycling – and the gradual reduction in waste is largely attributable to Waiheke residents' active support and participation in the waste reduction programmes developed by the Waste Resource Trust over the last four years.

A crucial part of that programme is the Junk to Funk Experience.

Junk to Funk – what is it?

Waiheke is an ideal case study because it is geographically contained and has a unique sense of community. The population has a reputation for being strident and active around environmental issues. It was one of the first nuclear-free communities in New Zealand and has also declared itself GE Free. There is a high level of participation in its affairs – and an amazing amount of goodwill towards community events and organisations. In a recent count there are over 200 community groups on the island – all run by volunteers - and it has one of the highest turnout rates for local body elections.

For Junk to Funk it is fair to say that our organisation tapped into this goodwill to enable us to source the volunteers, prizes and the goods and services we needed to enable the project to get off the ground. It is our objective to engage all in rethinking their attitudes towards recycling and the disposal of waste.

The objectives of Junk to Funk (which were developed after the conclusion of the first event in 2003) are reflective of the values and vision of this project:

- 1) To raise awareness of waste through workshops within the education sector on Waiheke that enable participants to create wearable art which also promotes collaborative work between groups and adults and children.
- 2) To engage local businesses in philanthropic and environmental activities and enhance our community's social capital by endorsing and recognizing their sponsorship relationships with Junk to Funk.
- 3) To make the possibilities of waste reduction and recycling palatable, accessible, do-able and fun by showing how through workshops and the catwalk event.
- 4) To strengthen the sense of community identity by holding the celebration/catwalk event in such a way and at a venue where all our people feel involved.
- 5) To celebrate and reward the efforts of all who participate by 1) offering prizes; 2) giving certificates to all who participated and 3) public thank-yous and certificates to sponsors, donors and judges and participants.
- 6) To encourage volunteerism by making participation in the mentoring process and the event management fun and rewarding.

Our objectives mention 'fun' twice. All the objectives have been met in each of the three years that we have run the project – and we suspect that having fun is crucial – not only because it keeps our volunteers engaged – but also because the children are more likely to actively participate.

People learn by doing. We cannot do other people's recycling for them. But we can encourage them to re-use through the Junk to Funk projects.

Junk to Funk is now seen as the biggest community event on the island and our success means we can not drop it from our awareness-raising activities.

For the 2005 project this success is apparent by the following numbers:

- 🚩 20+ children involved in the Junk to Funk Orchestra
- 🚩 Workshops run by volunteers for 450 children at two schools
- 🚩 40 adult volunteers
- 🚩 101 entries crafted by around 350 people and modeled by 150
- 🚩 \$4750 donated from local business for the prizes
- 🚩 Goods and services donated (excluding volunteers' labour) valued at around \$8000
- 🚩 18 entries awarded prizes (plus 5 highly commended)
- 🚩 Around 60 performers on the night
- 🚩 1200 people in attendance on the night

Junk to Funk inspires our people to participate in a community event that promotes a positive environmental message. One of the project's strengths is that anyone in our community can bring new ideas that fit with our objectives and values. And this is what happened with the formation of the Junk to Funk orchestra.

The Junk to Funk Orchestra

After conversations with friends and others who had been involved in the previous Junk to Funk events Klaus Rachuy - a local artisan and dad - developed the idea for an orchestra of musical instruments made from material scavenged from the waste stream. Klaus says it was the 'funk' part of the project title that spurred him to think about music in connection with waste.

Klaus original idea was to involve the children and teachers at the three local schools (two primary schools and one high school) in constructing instruments and then setting up an orchestra for a performance at the Junk to Funk event scheduled for September. He envisaged children researching and building their own instruments at school (where he was happy to assist as a volunteer) or they could work with him in his workshop.

In January 2005 he organized a meeting of the music teachers from all three schools – and one of the technology teachers from the high school - and demonstrated a few of the instruments that he had built himself to showcase his idea.

The initial responses from the teaching staff was very supportive – and it was decided that a group of adults would demonstrate the musical instruments to the school assemblies in an effort to engage the imaginations of the students and get them involved. Consequently “The Wastrels” were formed.

After achieving a certain level of proficiency on the nail violin, the juice bottle banjo, the copper pipe xylophone and the jandal and plastic pipe drums the Wastrels performed at each of the three schools at their assemblies. The demonstrations were timed with the launch of the Junk to Funk event in term two and the performers were well received. However, by this time the school year was in full swing and the original excitement and commitment from teaching staff had dwindled under the curriculum delivery pressures and time constraints. Despite this two schools did decide to participate – although one dropped out because the children were new entrants and their abilities, in both construction and performance, meant that they could not meet the timeframe for the performance at the Junk to Funk event.

Klaus is adamant that without teacher leadership the orchestra that did perform on the night would never have got off the ground. Waiheke Primary School teacher Fhiona Wainwright was able to work with children from her school with

Klaus as a volunteer and because she has both teaching and musical skills was able to both motivate and control the children thus ensuring they actually learned while they were involved. Volunteers do not necessarily have these skills and this was something that we had not considered at the outset.

We had assumed that children would self-identify for their involvement in the project – and this is in fact what happened at Waiheke Primary. This did however mean that workshops could not take place during class time because the children involved were of varying ages and levels. Despite this Fhiona and Klaus were able to run workshops during lunch times and after school for those children who wanted to participate.

Around 20 children participated in the workshops – and their ability and skills varied according to their ages. There were also a mix of introverted children – who were just wanting to make stuff - and extroverted children - who were keen to perform.

Klaus had originally thought that the children would be able to explore musical instruments from musical ‘families’ – which for the purpose of the exercise he described as:

- Strings – guitar, violin, mandolin, banjo – also piano and harp
- Flutes – flute, recorders, pan flute, pipes
- Reed instruments – clarinet, saxophone, bazaar, bagpipes etc
- Percussion instruments including drums, rattles and clap sticks (like cymbals) and xylophones and glockenspiel

However while it was useful for the children to explore musical instruments to see how they worked and develop an understanding of how they can be made from alternative materials sourced from the waste stream, invariably the time constraints did not allow for too much experimentation. Klaus maintains that the designs - including the designs that he had developed in his own experiments with sound - were too advanced for the abilities of the children so they needed to come back to percussion ideas.

One of the first activities that the self-identified orchestra did was to watch the video of ‘Stomp’ – where percussion music is created from everyday objects and to some degree the performer’s bodies. This gave the children an idea of how material that we have overlooked before can be used to create sound. The children were encouraged to explore waste and everyday objects and to play with them to find out what sounds they could make. Then they developed rhythmic lines and strung them together.

The results of all these efforts were showcased on 12th September. Twenty children performed with bottles, barrels, bins, twig brooms, bamboo sticks a class rubbish bin, the copper pipe xylophone and Klaus’ very special film canister pipe.

They were introduced by local master of ceremonies and Waste Resource Trust board member John Stansfield as the group 'who are putting the Funk back into the Junk.' – and their seven minute performance was a highlight of the show.

In retrospect Klaus maintains that there were several points that he hadn't necessarily considered before the project started. These are:

- The normal problem solving approaches used in metal work or woodwork to attach things together may not apply when dealing with plastic or other waste material. (Klaus developed a process for soldering plastic bags that he used to create his maestro costume.)
- Stuff falls apart very quickly – Simple instruments are more effective because they are easier to repair and this work takes time.
- Sourcing waste material from the producer (for example copper piping off-cuts from the local plumber) rather than scavenging through smelly stuff is not only more pleasant but also promotes re-use activity for small businesses.
- To develop new ideas about how to use waste material - play with it. Invention comes through play.
- Volunteers can add value to the school curriculum teaching, however learning needs to be lead by the people trained to do it – the teachers.

Conclusion

The workshop we intend to run will involve participants in exploring waste and playing with it to create music. We fully expect that by doing so we will be giving rubbish a voice.

