



Photo: Christobel Munson

War on waste

Libraries of Things are sprouting up all over the world. **Christobel Munson** explores a new venture in Mullumbimby where you can borrow ‘stuff’.

With the help of a small volunteer team, waste warrior Sasha Mainsbridge (above) has established the region's first Library of Stuff. Like toy libraries where parents recycle toys their children have outgrown or no longer love, Libraries of Things (or Stuff) help minimise the expense and waste of buying infrequently used items.



The project was initiated by Mullum Cares, a group that promotes and supports the growing consumer demand for conservation. "The idea is to increase the community's access to quality items, as well as for waste reduction," explains Sasha, the founder of Mullum Cares. It's aimed at families, individuals, event organisers and not-for-profit (NFP) organisations, including schools.

Opening on 6 April, with the official launch party set for May, the Byron Shire's Library of Stuff will initially be located within the Repair Café on the Mullumbimby campus of Byron Community

College (corner of Gordon and Burringbar streets).

It will eventually move to a permanent location at the Mullumbimby Community Gardens, pending additional funding to relocate a 21 x 7-metre shed – donated by Chincogan Real Estate – that will house the library.

To kick off the collection, there are two main categories of 'stuff': DIY (power, hand and gardening tools) and Waste-free Catering items. A category called 'screen-free family fun' is in the planning stages; aimed at encouraging families to ditch the computers and devices for outdoor family entertainment, it includes sporting equipment, canoes and camping gear.

Inspiration to create the Library of Stuff came from environmental activist Annie Leonard's 20-minute movie, the *Story of Stuff* (storyofstuff.org), which details the detrimental effects of our increasing consumption of low-quality products. With cheap, less durable options available, more expensive, longer-lasting goods are being bought far less often. The impact is evident in the increasing volume of waste produced globally.

As Sasha points out, long-arm garden loppers can cost \$260, but they may only be used every now and then. So why not borrow a pair through

this special library for a weekend gardening blitz? Her team is already loaning waste-free catering assets, often to NFPs. These include reusable crockery and cutlery for parties and one-off events, as well as bins, wash-up tubs, trestle tables and marquees.

Although tents can be purchased cheaply, the quality is often inferior and many single-use tents and inflatable mattresses are sent to landfill after local events and music festivals. Sasha hopes to set up a subsidiary rental service to rent out better-quality tents to festival-goers to avoid

this unnecessary junking of inferior products in landfill.

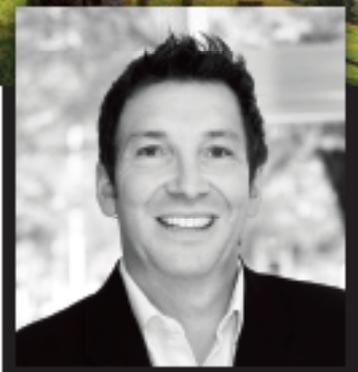
Over four months of surveying the Byron Shire community at farmers' markets, Sasha and her team discovered that the "No. 1 desired items" for the library were tools and camping goods. A \$15,000 grant from the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal helped get the project started, with half of the funding spent on buying tools.

Sasha says the community has been generous with donations, although tools in good working order are still welcome. They can be taken to the Repair Café from 9am to noon on Saturdays (or email the libraryofstuffmullumbimby@gmail.com to organise a drop-off).

Initially, while the library operates out of the Repair Café, membership will cost \$40 a year. The fee will allow members to borrow items for one week, usually with the easy option to renew for a second week. Members will be expected to pay for unavoidable repairs to the equipment they borrow and to volunteer at the library for two four-hour shifts per year.

Opening hours at the Repair Café location will be Fridays, 10am to 2pm, and Saturdays, 9am to noon. Visit libraryofstuff.org.au for more details.

"If we can slow down the wheels of consumption, we can also help to address climate change."
Sasha Mainsbridge



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