



I have always believed in going where the energy takes you.

Barbara Cooper Milina

When Barbara was a school teacher she was known as the ‘recycling lady’. In 2003 she moved to Paremoremo, where she encouraged the local people to work together to build their community through sustainable practices. The Sustainable Paremoremo Trust received two environmental awards for its work; firstly in 2010 for the most sustainable community from North Shore City Council, and secondly, from Auckland City Council in 2012, again for the most sustainable community. That year it also took out the overall supreme award. The real rewards continue through the active legacy of what Barbara and the Trust have built.

Barbara grew up on a large sheep and beef farm 45 minutes from Masterton. A love of nature and the sustainable ideals of self-sufficiency seeped into her awareness from an early age. She enjoyed the freedom of living on a farm. She loved tramping with her three brothers, who were her best mates. *I know tramping is popular now and a lot of people are into it, but back then it wasn't. It was quite nice, as a female, to be out doing what the boys were doing; and as females, we're every bit as capable. I guess having three brothers was like 'I'm one of you' kind of thing.* Her sense of independence was encouraged largely by her mother, Mary. *I've come from a line of teachers. On my mother's side, they're all teachers. Mum was a nurse; she was very strong willed and determined to do what was right for her. Mum brought us up so we were really independent. Don't do anything for your child that they can do for themselves. For example, 'Mum, how do you spell this?' The answer is, 'Sound it out.' Let them do it themselves, empower them, don't steal their learning.*

In 1980 Barbara was busting to leave Wairarapa College House, the boarding hostel attached to Wairarapa College. At 17 she signed up for Wellington Teachers Training College, and she began her teaching career in Masterton in 1983. Barbara went on to teach in primary schools in Masterton and Rodney (North Auckland) for the next 15 years.

She married at 21 years old and had a girl and three boys before moving from Masterton to the Hibiscus Coast in 1997. After the move Barbara taught at Gulf Harbour School for five years. During that time she returned to tertiary study (in 2002) in order to upgrade her teaching diploma to a degree in education.

That same year, Barbara separated from her husband and was in the position of sharing the care of her four children. She decided that she needed to find something more for herself. Once more, she reconnected with tramping; she also bought a bike and a kayak, and did more of the things she loved to do.



Barbara on her childhood farm with her horse Running her first marathon at 18 years, 1981

Barbara also understood that she needed a change in direction, in terms of both career and lifestyle. Moving to Paremoremo in 2003 with her new partner was a turning point in Barbara's life. Together they established a building company, Thermobuild, which had a franchise for constructing pre-insulated concrete homes. Today, Barbara and her husband, Dave, run a successful eco-landscaping business called Sustainable Landscapes.

However, before joining Dave full-time in the landscaping business, Barbara decided to return to an earlier career in real estate. In 2007, she re-sat her real estate ticket and became a salesperson for the Paremoremo area, working out of the Barfoot and Thomson office in Albany. She had her freedom again, had escaped the confines of the classroom and was her own boss. Life was good and work was plentiful, but Barbara also wanted to see if any of her neighbours shared her interests in sustainable living.

She then decided to shape her real estate advertising flyers in the form of a community newsletter. She introduced references to sustainable communities and distributed the newsletter to letterboxes on her bike. There was only one response, from Jayshree Mannie. She had previously been involved with quite

a lot of community work with children in South Africa, and was keen to work towards community betterment in New Zealand. The two met to discuss how to recreate Paremoremo as a sustainable community.

They went on to meet Tony Hart, team leader for the environment at North Shore City Council, and Kate Jackson, who was the education officer. The project began with community meetings, visioning sessions and workshops. The Council could not resource the project, other than by providing the expertise of Kate Jackson as an advisor. Her advice and expertise proved invaluable. Kate

led the visioning work. *She'd come out and we'd sit down and she would be 100 per cent supportive of me. Kate also added ideas but would check to see if they were along my line of thinking. She was continually empowering me to be the best I could be.*

Kate Jackson's way of working was complementary to Barbara's understanding of teaching and developing people. *I tell you what, that's what we should be doing for children. In any learning situation, that's how it should be. We should be empowering them to be the best they can be. If they've got a vision or a goal, we should be asking the questions that will lead them to achieve their own vision or goal.*

Sustainable Paremoremo (SP) Charitable Trust was established in early 2008. The underlying vision of the group is 'caring for ourselves, our families, our neighbours and the environment'. Areas of interest were strongly focused on resourcefulness and protecting the natural environment. *Ten people attended the first community meeting. People were interested in pest control, establishment of a market, in growing vegetables, organic gardening, recycling, and using local resources. The ball was rolling.* Kate brought in bio-security professionals to teach people about eradication of pests;

they had a great community turnout, and subsequent monthly events galvanised the community.

There were five core members of the Trust when it first started: Judi McLachlan, Derry McLaughlan, Kate Gillard, Andy Riley and Savannah Carter Green. No one person took the full workload of management or initiation of projects. *The work of the Trust is entirely voluntary, and it is largely self-funded by local people, which means a high degree of autonomy and no bureaucratic responsibilities.* Derry McLaughlan had an interest in possum eradication and called his campaign 'Pest Free Pare'. *The challenge was, and is, to improve the wild life corridor between Waitakere Ranges and Tiritiri Island.* In the initial stages, over 100 households signed up to eradicate pests on their properties.

Sustainable Paremoremo also works to teach and upskill people in the community to be more self-sustainable. *We had Dee Pignegui [author of Feed Me Right] from Glenfield. She came and spoke to us about organic gardening. She's written a couple of books and she's a great lady. She's been out here several times. Dee and her husband, Mike, come out and talk to the community. It's so interesting.*¹

Free gardening classes are currently provided by NorthTec at a house leased by Sustainable Paremoremo. *There is not a community garden, as such, but rather people apply their learning to their own gardens. Cuttings from an old orchard in the area were also 'recycled' some years back, and they are now producing fruit in gardens throughout the community.*

There have been many other changes in the area in recent years. Community plantings have been initiated, with clusters of neighbours working together to remove noxious weeds from communal areas such as the roadsides and edge of reserves. A new bus service was established to take older children to schools on the Shore, reducing the number of parents having to take extra trips to pick up their kids. A community garden,



in conjunction with the Ridgeview School, has been established. A 'Naturally Smarter Homes' pilot project was initiated to encourage local people to make environmentally smarter choices in their homes and on their properties. A large number of local residents have sought help from Kaipatiki to clear the growth of weeds on their properties and replant with native species.

The work has enabled Barbara, and others involved in the Trust, to connect with a broad range of people, locally and farther afield. Some members have become very good friends as a result. The interaction was the basis for establishing the local neighbourhood support initiative. It provides a further level of direct communication, and welcomes and connects new people in the community. Communication is a key element in engaging community and local resident Kim Ward has throughout the years developed a large database of followers. Kim constantly keeps the community aware of what is happening.

The *Pare Trade and Swap* was established in 2012 to channel surplus produce, and it still works brilliantly. The newsletter continues, after its initiation was further developed by Barbara's daughter, Anita Dobson, and is now fully managed by Kim Ward. The newsletter makes money for the Trust through advertising. The *Pare Publisher* is the Trust's online presence. The website covers much of the early information about the formative stages of the work, beginning with Barbara's first newsletter in 2007. A booklet has been published to tell people about the work of the Trust.²

The other channel of communication is through the Flaxroots Community Planning Network, an initiative of North Shore Community and Social Services (NSCSS). The network had an important role in bringing together community leaders and sharing ideas about community planning through active community

engagement. There Barbara met up with Keith Salmon, Peter Carter, Dr Dean Manley, Sandi Morrison, Max Thomson and others. *This was a wonderful opportunity to share stories, display enthusiasm, passion and support for one another and to work with some amazing and inspiring people.*

The Sustainable Paremoremo project has been supported by New Zealand Forest and Bird, Auckland Regional Council (ARC), North Shore City Council, University of Auckland, the Kaipatiki Project, the Albany Community Board and Auckland Council.

Through the Trust and its activities concerning community-led development, a realisation on the importance of community action has been developed. *The encouragement and impact of community action keeps the momentum of change alive, locally as well as regionally.* Those involved can share their experiences, communicate change and inspire the wider community.

Barbara and Dave have thought about moving elsewhere, but they remain drawn to the beauty and community qualities of the area.

I have always believed in going where the energy takes you. Life has pushed us in another direction and we have looked to move away, but really all that we love is right here, especially our family, wonderful friends and the native bush and the wildlife. To understand the attraction to the area, you only need to listen to the locals who have a very common saying: 'There's another word for Paremoremo, but sssh, don't tell too many people... it's called Pare-dise.' Too true!

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for Paremoremo, but sssh,
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¹ <http://www.feedmeright.co.nz/>

² <http://www.parepublisher.co.nz/>

