

weekender.



Don't buy stuff you probably won't use again. Join The Share Shop, a volunteer-run non-for-profit and self-described "library of things" based in Hamilton instead. It offers a wide range of handy community-donated items, like sporting and camping equipment, tools, kitchen appliances and party supplies. Membership costs \$52 a year.

Why not ride more and drive less? A study by Oxford University found choosing to ride your bike over using your car once a day reduced your carbon emissions from transport by 67 per cent. Established in 2007, the Islington-based Newcastle Push Bike Library is all about promoting cycling as a means of local active transport and will get you riding in no time. Membership is free with a deposit (usually around \$50) charged when a bike is borrowed - but given back if the bike is returned within two years.

While you're at it, skip the fast fashion and rent fabulous threads for that special occasion instead. You can hire designer frocks and outfits from local hire businesses like Goldie's or On the Go.

Little ones will love the volunteer-run Newcastle Toy Library. Downstairs at the New Lambton Library, it's home to many toys, games, musical instruments, dress-ups and more. Membership is \$25 a year or \$35 for families with two or more children, and is open on Saturdays.

"When my husband Sam and I had our kids, Evie and Ari, we decided we didn't want all these plastic toys in the house," says Peach-Steer.

"It's the most amazing initiative. I volunteer there too. You get to take out six different toys or games every month. Then go back and do it again. We constantly get new stuff."

Pursue Zero Waste

When it comes to minimising waste, the

old mantra of "reduce, reuse, recycle" holds true. A report by the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation found that Australia recycled just 16 per cent of plastic packaging in 2020.

Small actions add up. Swap single-use disposables - such as your coffee cup, water bottle, grocery bags, utensils, tissues, nappies, cling wrap and straws - with reusables.

Choose package-free food and goods, where possible, like those available from local businesses like Sustain Grocery, The Source Bulk Foods and Love Beauty Foods.

"The biggest thing we do is use reusable nappies," says Peach-Steer on how her family work to reduce their waste.

"We do our own reusable wipes too with bits of flannel, cotton and towel. If we do occasionally use wipes, we just buy compostable.

"It's a big undertaking. But it's like anything, as soon as you implement a change, it just takes a certain amount of time for you to lock it into your routine."

Explore ways to extend the lifespan of other household products you consume through initiatives such as Hamilton North-based Upcycling Newcastle, which repurposes clothing and textile waste and runs classes and workshops, and Repair It Lake Mac, which runs pop-up repair cafe workshops throughout the year.

Mobile Muster, a national mobile recycling program, recycles 95 per cent of donated mobile phones. There are drop-off points across Australia or you can post it to them or book a collection.

If you're looking for more local ideas and inspiration, the Zero Waste Newcastle group on Facebook, Transition Newcastle (a group that works to foster sustainable and resilient communities) and Sustainable Neighbourhoods in Lake Macquarie are all great resources.



FOR THE GREATER GOOD:

Facing page, community members at Smokva community garden (Lee Illfield photo); Above, Dan Endicott at Newcastle Push Bike Library (Simon McCarthy photo); far left, Beanstalk Food co-operative (Lee Illfield photo); near left, the Steer family (Simon McCarthy photo).

build on it from there.

"If you're able-bodied, riding a bike is a good start," says Garner. "Ride it to work or get food and while you're

Get growing

"Many community gardens have enjoyed a resurgence in care as our lifestyles started to change," says Garner of the Smokva Community Garden at the Croatian Club. Community gardens create green spaces in urban areas, promote environmental education, develop sustainable food systems, offer people a place to connect and come together, and grow and access fresh fruit and vegetables.

"Everyone is welcome to come and help out for as little or as long as you have time for," he says of Smokva.

"Gardeners need to sign up as members at the Croatian Club and turn up to one of our working bees to help get oriented with the projects going on at the garden. From there, you can choose which activities interest you, which might include weeding, planting seeds, making compost, or contributing to building or fixing infrastructure."

If you're keen to get involved, your local council or handy online resources - such as the Community Gardens in Newcastle and Lake Mac Facebook Group - can help connect you to your nearest community garden.

Feedback Organic Recovery, a Newcastle-based not-for-profit that converts food waste into urban farm produce, also offers further opportunities to volunteer and learn more about circular urban agriculture.

Making it work

From reducing (or removing) meat from your diet to saving energy, shopping local and choosing eco-friendly and Fairtrade options, there are endless ways to live more sustainably. Start small, stick with it, and

riding you can think about how bonkers it is to drive to the shops and then drive to the gym and then jump on an exercise bike!"

Illfield believes it's about being mindful of the choices you make.

"I think it involves stopping to think how any action, small or large, has an impact on everyone and everything around me, and how I can actively support my beliefs in considering myself, as well as others, in what I know to be sustainable."

Illfield rides her bike, when possible, sews her own clothes, buys less and chooses better quality when she does. She also makes shopping locally and independently a priority.

"I consider this over the monetary cost, more often than not. I know the income to local businesses will help contribute to someone in my community. It's about people at the end of the day."

While for Peach-Steer it's about "baby steps ... you've just got to do what is manageable for you". For her, this meant her family pursuing a vegan diet, shopping locally (at places such as the Newcastle City Farmers Market), choosing a day-care with a strong sustainability ethos, and choosing to buy pre-loved clothes. She cites The Conscious Exchange boutique in Islington as a favourite go-to.

"Be kind to yourself when you're doing it all too - because you won't always get it right. If everybody just did a little bit, then we'd be on to something really great," she says.

"The phrase 'leaving a place better than you found it' resonates with me. That's how we like to live our lives."