

Capacity building

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Sharing the Load to Save the Nursery

Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc



How co-management, diversification and stronger promotion helped a volunteer run Landcare nursery regain its feet and keep delivering local native plants to the community.

The issue

After more than two decades of operation, the Riverina Highlands Landcare Network (RHLN) Nursery had started to succumb to the pressures of volunteer fatigue and burnout. Funding grants were becoming less reliable, day to day running costs were rising, and there were growing concerns about how sustainable the existing setup would be into the future. RHLN was feeling the strain, with committee members stretched thin, fewer volunteers renewing memberships, and the nursery struggling for self-sustainability whilst staying true to Landcare values. Closing this vital community asset was becoming a real possibility, which would have been a significant loss for both the environment and the local community.

The solution

RHLN entered a co-management arrangement with Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc to share responsibility for the nursery and strengthen governance. This facilitated streamlined financial systems, modern payment options and extra administrative support for the volunteer run facility. The steering group stepped up its social media presence and marketing through paid advertising and consistent communication formats, which broadened the usual customer base. There has been further diversification in business ideas, including veggie seedlings and using the nursery as a fee for service venue for natural resource management workshops hosted by other agencies, all aiding a self-sufficiency business model.

The impact

The nurseries future is now almost certainly a positive one with the ability to support itself without relying on consistent grant funding. Each year more than ninety thousand locally sourced trees and shrubs are grown for revegetation and restoration projects across the South West Slopes and Lower Alpine bioregions. With nursery operations on a more stable footing, the Landcare group has been able to refocus on being a traditional local Landcare group, putting more energy into plantings, education workshops and growing local membership.

Learnings

- Shared management can reduce pressure on volunteer committees and keep key community assets operating.
- Strong but simple governance and up to date payment systems make it easier for customers to support community nurseries.
- Targeted marketing and a clear story about local impact help bring in new customers and partners.
- Diversifying income streams, while staying aligned with Landcare ideals, improves long term resilience.



Key facts

- Established in partnership with Tumut Shire Council in April 2000, volunteer run nursery producing more than 18,000 trees and shrubs in its first year.
- Now supplying over 90,000 native tube stock annually for local and regional projects.
- Co-managed by Riverina Highlands Landcare Network and Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc.

Project Partners



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