



S O U R D O U G H  
B U S I N E S S P A T H W A Y S

## **Engaging the “Hidden Asset” in the Northern Rivers Dr James Cowley**

I have always been aware of the way that once a person has a meaningful job, they have money to spend and often a positive impact on their mental health and social relationships. Having tried to assist people with certain severe social problems I became convinced that the creation of jobs impact very positively all aspects of a community.

To the contrary where jobs decrease I and many others have seen the terrible impact on just about every aspect of a community and individuals. It struck me through various large-scale research into dying towns that with all the expertise we have, we should be able create employment. And that in the end it was the entrepreneur taking a risk, and communities that valued such entrepreneurs that started to thrive.

Looking ahead, Governments are running out of money, so the creation of such jobs from businesses or social enterprises becomes critical. I started to research what I called the “Hidden Asset”. And the question then became-how do we get the hidden asset of a community involved in creating the momentum for a stable economy?

Sourdough and all its extended network has been successful in engaging the Hidden Asset locally and through the hard work of many we are seeing some real successes. I stress the success is not through sourdough-its through the bringing together of a wide range of people who care enough to give help to create jobs.

## **What is the Hidden asset?**

Lots of people in the Northern Rivers who are willing to help businesses and similar to start and to grow and create jobs as a “give back-philanthropic” act.

Two groups are the starting point:

- Mature experienced- some are sea and tree changers and some have been here for ever.
- Women in their 30's and 40's (and other ages) who have moved here on their own or with a partner and are very underutilized for the skill sets and expertise they have.

And at a later stage 2 potential other groups: The disabled and the unemployed who want to work.

## **What can the Hidden Asset contribute to sourdoughs overall goal of helping businesses and organisations create/save jobs?**

Any of the following: (as suits each individual-all will be different)

- Mentor someone
- Support a necessary message/initiative by writing to the media
- One off help for an hour here and there to a business owner to think through something
- Connections. The Hidden Asset often has amazing connections sometimes throughout the world
- Joining a discussion/online think tank to try to nut out what we can do about an issue (eg a barrier to business)
- Join a supporters group (eg like the 5000 who joined the rail trail group)

- Potentially some may want to be business partners with new ventures
- Set up a new business and pull together people to make it happen.

We have a very serious problem here with jobs and we know from what Sourdough has done to date that we can do something about it by utilizing the good will and time of the Hidden Asset. We know a lot more people want to be involved...sourdough is a loose network, not a small group. We have a few people meet just to initiate or keep things on track, but hand over projects to existing or new people or groups to run and then support them.

### **Whats the criteria for being part of the extended sourdough network of the Northern Rivers?**

- a) You want to help businesses and other ventures that could create jobs.
- b) You want to be part of a network of people committed to build the economy of the Northern Rivers so we can sustain all the things that are important to us here
- c) You recognize sourdough has essentially a very narrow focus about the creation of jobs- its not trying to solve every type of problem!
- d) You would consider from time to time helping in one of the ways above.

Sourdough is politically and in all other ways unaligned, trying to just help the region with jobs.

Generally we ask you not to treat it as a forum/service/network for building ones own (paid) business interests, but we do accept the reality that it may bring people together who will want to do business together from time to time, and may even help create new businesses. We just ask everyone uses the network ethically and respectfully.

We also ask you to be succinct in messages/discussions etc as everyone in this group is part of it as a voluntary activity and time is short for everyone.

There is NO NEED to respond to anything at all that you are not interested in. We are trying to set this up to be easy for people to use, not overbearing, but a real benefit to everyone.

### **Does this work?**

We have already in the last 3-5 years seen amazing results for businesses and organisations through just little bits of help from the existing sourdough network. The stories are quite remarkable. We have examples of just an hour spent helping someone, sometimes all online, sometimes face to face, being able to totally overcome a barrier they are facing. We just want to now open this up to many others who have said they want to be involved (in a way that gives you control over how much or little that involvement is)

### **How do I become part of the sourdough network?**

This is not an us and you network ! We are all in it together.

The “organizing group” of sourdough activities is only 7 or 8 people so we apologise if our communication is not large...its partly because we don't want to go public-we want to support others from the background, and partly because we have been pretty overwhelmed with the amount of work related to the mentoring scheme, the rail trail and individual businesses. Like everyone we try to do as much philanthropic work in the time we have available.

Members of the organizing group or business pathways advisory committee (and we stress sourdough is a much larger network now also working through the Northern Rivers Rail Trail and the Pathways mentoring programme) are (in rev alpha order):

Richard Vinycomb  
Murray Richardson  
Margaret Robertson  
Paul Jameson  
Mark Holden  
Pat Grier  
Phil Daly  
James Cowley  
Margot Cairnes

And project coordinators are :

Organiser BCC-PATHWAYS Mentors scheme: Paul Jameson  
Northern Rivers Rail Trail Association: Geoff Meers