

ALCN Learning Forum: Climate Action – Creating Community Circular Hubs

Thursday 23 October 2025 | 3-4 pm AEDT | Online



Synopsis:

This ALCN Learning Forum explored how Community Circular Hubs can drive climate action, inclusion, and sustainability through localised reuse, repair, and education initiatives. Presenters from Green Industries SA (Shani Wood) and Port Adelaide Enfield Libraries (Benita Parsons) shared practical models, funding pathways, and community-led examples, while international and national frameworks — including UNESCO’s Learning Cities and Australia’s Climate Risk Assessment — provided strategic context. The session highlighted the social and economic benefits of circular hubs, implementation challenges, and behaviour change strategies, with interactive input from participants across Australia and beyond.

A recording of the Webinar is available here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su1xQo3bfsg&list=PLuJFApluKqDGIZOgQhA9wnMy_yoZdy7Vi&index=1

Meeting notes:

- **Overview of Community Circular Hubs and Circular Economy:** Leone introduced the concept of community circular hubs and the circular economy, referencing international frameworks and recent climate risk assessments, while Shani Wood from Green Industries SA provided an in-depth explanation of circular economy principles, the need for behaviour change, and the benefits of circular hubs for communities in Australia.
 - **International and National Context:** Leone described how the Australian Learning Communities Network adapts international frameworks such as UNESCO's Global Network of Learning Cities and the Marrakesh Framework for Action to promote lifelong learning and climate action in Australia, highlighting the Jubail Commitment to Climate Action in Learning Cities (2024) and the

current **UNESCO–UNFCCC** Webinar Series on Climate Change Education for Social Transformation.

- **Climate Risk and Circular Economy:** Leone cited the Australian Climate Service's National Climate Risk Assessment Report, emphasising the intensification of climate impacts and the urgent need for communities to become more resilient and adaptive by transitioning to a circular economy and reducing consumption.
- **Definition and Examples of Circular Hubs:** Shani explained that community circular hubs are physical spaces offering services such as repair workshops, recycling, tool libraries, education, and community gardens, and referenced the Green Industries SA guide for establishing hubs at various scales to promote sustainability and community connection.
- **Circular Economy Principles and Barriers:** Shani outlined the importance of moving towards a circular economy to achieve net zero emissions, noting Australia's low circularity rate and the need for behaviour change driven by **convenience, awareness, skills, and inclusivity**, with examples of successful initiatives in South Australia.
- **Social and Economic Benefits:** Shani highlighted the social benefits of circular hubs, such as reducing loneliness and building community relationships, and the economic advantages, including job creation through reuse and recycling compared to landfill disposal.
- **Design, Implementation, and Funding of Circular Hubs:** Shani detailed the design principles, operational models, and funding opportunities for circular hubs, describing three scales of hubs (neighbourhood, council/citywide, and mega hubs), and provided information on grant funding available in South Australia for hub development.
 - **Design Principles and Accessibility:** Shani emphasised that circular hubs must be convenient, accessible, relevant to local needs, inclusive, supportive of existing initiatives, and climate sensitive, with location and design tailored to community travel habits and existing services.
 - **Scales and Management Models:** Shani described three scales of circular hubs: neighbourhood hubs managed by resident groups, council/citywide hubs often located in community centres, and mega hubs at transfer stations, each with different spatial requirements and service offerings.
 - **Case Studies and Examples:** Examples included share sheds for tool borrowing, resource drop-off points, community gardens, and second-hand shopping malls, with a notable case study from Sweden demonstrating the economic viability and social normalisation of second-hand shopping.
 - **Funding Opportunities:** Shani informed participants about council modernisation grants in South Australia, offering up to \$100,000 in matched funding for hub development, and encouraged interested groups to consult the Green Industries SA website for details.
- **Practical Initiatives and Operations in Libraries:** Benita from the City of Port Adelaide Enfield Libraries shared practical examples of sustainability initiatives, including repair cafes, food hubs, recycling stations, sewing classes, and partnerships with waste education teams, illustrating how libraries function as community circular hubs.
 - **Repair Cafes and Maker Spaces:** Benita described monthly repair cafes linked to makerspaces, where staff and volunteers assist community members in repairing various items, including electrical goods, contributing to waste reduction and skill sharing.
 - **Food Hub and Community Garden Collaboration:** The library's food hub, supported by a nearby children's centre and community garden, provides fresh produce to the community, with surplus food quickly distributed and low-cost supermarket events held monthly.
 - **Recycling Stations and Partnerships:** Benita explained the installation of custom-built recycling hubs in libraries, developed in partnership with the Waste Education team, allowing for the collection of specific materials and facilitating reuse of packaging, with service providers handling the collected items.
 - **Sewing Classes and Resource Sharing:** Volunteers run sewing classes in the library, enabling community members to learn repair skills and use sewing machines, with plans to expand tool libraries based on community needs and advice from the STEM team.
 - **Community Education and Event Spaces:** Libraries host recycling and gardening workshops, provide event spaces, and distribute educational pamphlets to raise awareness about proper recycling practices and the benefits of circular economy activities.

- **Audience Q&A: Implementation Challenges and Solutions:** Participants raised questions about compostable bag legislation, food hub management, food wastage reduction, collaboration, and community engagement, with Shani and Benita providing detailed responses and practical advice.
 - **Compostable Bag Legislation and Supermarket Involvement:** A participant asked about the process of involving supermarkets in compostable bag initiatives and challenges with composting facilities; Shani explained that South Australia's single-use plastic ban mandated compostable barrier bags, with local composting facilities and certified suppliers supporting the initiative.
 - **Food Hub Management and Freshness:** Another participant inquired about managing fresh food turnover in food hubs; Shani and Benita described models involving fridges, volunteers, and rapid distribution, with Benita noting the importance of community awareness and partnerships with local organisations.
 - **Reducing Food Wastage:** A third participant asked about strategies to reduce food wastage; Shani highlighted the need for consumer acceptance of imperfect produce, opportunities for farms to access surplus food, and promoted the [SaveFul](#) app for recipe suggestions based on available ingredients.
 - **Collaboration and Resource Allocation:** Leone asked about collaboration to avoid resource competition; Benita explained that the council targets areas of high need and coordinates with other local initiatives to fill service gaps and avoid duplication.
 - **Community Engagement and Behaviour Change:** The final question was about how to make circular economy practices the norm; Benita discussed the importance of convenience, education, and sometimes enforcement, while Leone emphasised the role of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and school-community partnerships to influence broader behaviour change.
- **Interactive Menti Activity: Sharing Local Circular Economy Programs:** Benita led an interactive Menti activity where participants shared keywords describing circular economy initiatives in their communities, revealing common practices such as seed libraries, tool libraries, recycling, and gardening workshops.
 - **Community Program Sharing:** Participants contributed to a word cloud via Menti, listing local programs such as library of things, seed libraries, tool libraries, community recycling, plant swaps, and sewing classes, providing a snapshot of popular circular economy activities across different regions.

What circular economy programs and resources do you offer?



Resource List

- **Australian Learning Communities Network (ALCN)** ALCN is a national network of leading-edge practitioners building sustainable communities using learning as the key element. <https://alcn.com.au>
- **Marrakech Framework for Action (2022)** UNESCO's global commitment to lifelong learning as a driver for sustainable development. <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/marrakech-framework-action>
- **Jubail Commitment to Climate Action in Learning Cities (2024)** Outcome document from the Sixth International Conference on Learning Cities (ICLC 6), held in Jubail, Saudi Arabia. <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/jubail-commitment>
- **UNESCO–UNFCCC Webinar Series: Climate Change Education for Social Transformation** Includes the October topic: *Getting ready to promote greener communities at COP 30*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/cce-social-transformation>
- **Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment Report (2025)** Published by the Australian Climate Service, this report outlines key risks and priorities for climate resilience. <https://www.acs.gov.au/pages/national-climate-risk-assessment>
- **Community Circular Hub Guide (2024)** Developed by Green Industries SA, this guide supports local governments and communities in establishing Circular Hubs. <https://www.greenindustries.sa.gov.au/community-circular-hubs>