



Southland disAbility Enterprises Ltd **History**



Now trading as
Recycle South

1974

Southland disAbility Enterprises Ltd (SdE) was established in 1974 as an Industrial Work Training Unit for People with Disabilities. It was determined that Southland disAbility Enterprises Ltd would be a commercial business with a social purpose. All work would be costed out at full commercial rates, and wage payments were to be made to staff based on their individual abilities and work output (productivity).

1975 – 1981

SdE existed as a second level option for those who were unable to enter into the mainstream workforce directly. Those applying to attend were evaluated and needed to be judged as 50% work capable in order to attend. Over the first decade, SdE struggled to find its true niche. It was hampered by fires and the imported cane ware that came flooding into New Zealand from Asia. SdE had started with seven ex-members of the Rehabilitation league, and its mainstay was manufacturing cane baskets and cane furniture.

1982

SdE formed close links with the IHC, and a number of personnel transferred from the IHC Sheltered workshop to Southland disAbility Enterprises. SdE was offered to the IHC for them to absorb it within their sphere of operations, but it was decided by JB Munro (then CEO of IHC) that SdE should remain independent while receiving administrative and management support instead.

1983 – 1988

SdE operated three main departments: a Sewing Room, a Woodwork Department and a Cane ware Manufacturing Department.

1989

SdE completely developed into a Sheltered Workshop, with the main work being carried out solely to assist with running costs. An allowance of \$10.00 per fortnight was paid to all who attended, compared to the first few years of SdE, when everyone was paid wages based on their individual output.

1990

The New Zealand Aluminium Smelter at Tiwai Point offered on-site work for SdE staff, servicing personal protection equipment and packing disposable masks. Supervision and transport to and from the site was provided by SdE staff, and personnel were paid allowances for attending, but the costs exceeded the income generated. There was a massive increase in attendees – from 35 to 80 – due to CCS closing their workshop. Extensions were added to the main building to house the extra workers properly, and these included a conference room, a packaging room and a new canteen.

1991

SdE was awarded funding to conduct a pilot study into all facets of Supported Employment. SdE did not believe that 'placement first' was the correct method. They had found that the true successes they had enjoyed were when the individual had been fully prepared for employment before they were placed into a position. A second work enclave was established, recycling wool packs to the standard of the New Zealand Wool Board. This involved sorting, cleaning, grading and mending with industrial sewing machines and repairing small cuts and tears in second-hand wool packs before re-selling them. The Tiwai Work Enclave was restructured. The best people for the job were selected to work there on a permanent basis. Attendance allowances were paid, and Tiwai started to generate income. True costings were now charged for the work performed.

1992

The packaging department was opened for business. SdE quickly gained a reputation for tackling small jobs that were very labour intensive as well as larger contracts. SdE presented the results of their Supported Employment Study to the Ministry of Social Development. The Ministry determined that Supported Employment would work; however, much needed to be done to ensure that the right person got the job. SdE became a founding member of the Association for Supported Employment New Zealand. In Invercargill, SdE determined that pre-employment preparation was critical to ensuring that job applicants had the best possible chance to succeed. Community organisations were invited to make the Kinloch Street site their permanent home for evening meetings. This community involvement has proven to be an effective method of obtaining and keeping wide support for SdE, as ownership of our main complex is now held by several hundred people of the community.

1993

The Packaging Department purchased folding machines, shrink wrap tunnels and heat guns so that we could add shrink-wrapping and heat-sealing to our services. Our Packaging Department became adept at fulfilling the varied and interesting contracts we received.

1995

It was decided that we needed to restructure the organisation of SdE and give the decision-making to the workers. Five staff members were therefore made redundant, and six workers in the Tiwai enclave were placed on full wages as the income they were generating far exceeded the amounts they were receiving in attendance allowances.

This decision was the single most important step in moving SdE from a Sheltered Workshop back to an Industrial Work Unit. The immediate individual growth that the workers and staff displayed at the time was remarkable, and all of the success we have enjoyed since then can be traced back to this time.

Sheltered Employment, as defined in the Disabled Persons Community Welfare Act 1975 (DPCW Act 1975), continued however, as it was considered that "employment in suitable occupations under conditions less stringent than those found in normal work situations" was the catalyst in enabling people with disabilities in the workplace.

SdE was asked to look at demolishing houses and decided to do so to obtain timber that we could then sell for firewood or kindling wood.

This experience taught us that there was a demand for dry firewood and also for kindling that was cut to length and uniform in size. We removed and collected all of the nails and sold them as scrap metal.

So that nothing was wasted, we obtained de-nailing guns. These use compressed air to push the nails back through the timber to be easily extracted.

We realised that not everything in the old houses needed to be demolished, so we invited a few auction houses to mark the items they wanted before we started the demolition. A number of items like windows, doors, fireplaces, and mantelpieces were then carefully removed and sold directly. We were also able to do this with any good roofing iron and spouting.

The Wool Pack Enclave was proving to be successful as far as output went, but financially it struggled to break even. Dairy conversions started happening in Southland, and the number of wool packs required reduced drastically, which greatly impacted the price being paid for them.

The Wool Pack enclave "broke away" from SdE and became independent.

1996

The roles of Team leaders were established along with health and safety delegates and fire wardens appointed. Training was given in their new roles, and systems and procedures were established where we could obtain regular feedback on the direction that the people attending SdE wanted their organisation to go.

A workers committee was set up to provide the conduit to address employment and conditions of service issues. This later became SdE's workers' own formally incorporated union.

The Wool Pack had to close, as wool packs were no longer available.

Three staff members moved into other full-time employment, and three returned as workers to SdE.

1997

Working uniforms were designed and implemented, and individuals had a choice of skirts and blouses, trousers and shirts or overalls, all with the SdE logo and their first names embroidered on them.

The decision to wear these uniforms was an individual choice for both staff and workers, from the General Manager down, with the majority electing to wear them.

1998

Special cages were built and placed in twenty-seven sites throughout Invercargill for people to deposit their aluminium cans into.

SdE collected the cans, cleaned and crushed them, and the community group got paid for the weight of aluminium collected. On average, we process in excess of six gt of aluminium cans each year.

1999

The Cane Room processes were inherited from the Rehabilitation League. Staff have turned their hand to a range of tasks. Eventually, they reduce their reliance on furniture by growing their own willow.

Cane Room workers de-zip and de-button clothing and then cut the clothing into rags. They harvest the leaves from Red Poker plants, dry them and turn them into a rush weave for mending old chairs. They rebuild beaded car seat covers using thread that doesn't break down under ultraviolet rays.

A formal contract is signed with the Ministry of Social Development, which initiated the Supported Employment services.

As this was something that SdE had always provided, formalising the arrangement and being paid to place and support people in mainstream employment was a natural progression.

The decision was made to become serious about supplying kindling wood and firewood. SdE's kindling wood would be of better value in both quality and quantity than any other on the market.

A new Kindling splitting machine was designed and built, and a contract was established with the New Zealand Aluminium Smelter to take all surplus wooden pallets and scrap wood off-site for further processing. The pallets were dismantled by hand, the wood de-nailed, and then graded into either firewood or kindling wood. Any boards that were still in good condition were put aside and made into second-hand pallets as there was a ready market for these. Wood that was not suitable for resale was used to heat our main premises, and the purchasing of coal for this purpose ceased, creating further savings in energy expenditure.

SdE established a Resource Recovery Centre at the city Transfer Station.

Over time, this was built up to where it was paying two full wages and six part wages (two days full wages per person per week and three days on an "Activity in the Community Project").

2000

The re-use of items that people did not want was found to be useful in generating income, so recycling of used candles, books into new paper as well as garden briquettes from old newspapers was started.

Wool and other oddments were donated, and the culture became one of accepting any donated items to turn into other products or resell in their donated form. Where value could be added to the items, this was carried out, especially if there was no major costs involved.

Concerned about the waste from the canteen we set up a worm farm which evolved into three worm farms. (Discontinued after 2011). The worms were fed on food scraps and old carpet scraps. In return, we obtain liquid fertiliser, worms for fishing and gardens, and the worm dirt or casings.

2001

A new shed was built to shelter from the weather whilst working with the firewood and kindling. A kindling wood logo was drawn, and plastic bags were trialled to find the most suitable to provide both 10kg and 5kg bags of kindling wood.

Firewood was sold by the trailer load delivered and (if required) was stacked for elderly clients, and the number of bags of kindling along with trailer loads of firewood increased year by year. Regular customers of firewood and kindling were sought, and sales started.

A salesman was employed on a commission basis (for twelve months to establish markets). Customers ranged throughout Southland and as far as Dunedin with some 5,000 to 8,000 bags of kindling wood being produced and sold annually.

2002

Fire Bricks and Garden Bricks continued to be made, but we added shredded documents to our recycling, so white ledger paper was also sought after.

The bricks were made from shredded newspaper and added wood shavings or sawdust from our woodwork room. In the case of the garden bricks, we also added some slug repellent and fertiliser. The bricks are either burnt as fuel or placed around the garden in strategic places so they can mulch down and become compost again. This was considered an excellent method of recycling old newspaper and waste products from a joinery shop.

The Resource Recovery Centre was generating more than \$100,000.00 from donated goods, and several staff had moved through and onto other employment.

Workers became skilled in dismantling bikes and rebuilding them to a level that could be sold. Items that could not be sold were salvaged into recyclable materials wherever possible.

Collection of used cardboard for resale was started to accompany the aluminium cans.

These two products were the forerunners of what is now a thriving recycling business.

2003

We were offered the opportunity to tender for the establishment and operation of the Invercargill Kerbside Collection "processing depot". Our quote was accepted.

We terminated our contract at the Resource Recovery Centre and offered all staff currently employed there full-time employment at the new Recycling Centre being established.

Once we established a site, we moved in and started preparing it for the flow through of the materials that households would put out for recycling. We raised a bank loan and purchased the capital equipment necessary to start.

We applied and received a Community Employment Grant's (CEG's) of \$40,000.00 to assist with the operational costs, along with a Community Organisation Grant (COGs) of \$10,000.00.

We delivered training to all of the staff that had been selected and put some through formal forklift driver licence courses as well as comprehensive first aid courses.

All personnel were taken on a study tour of the Alexandra Recycling Centre so they could form their own impressions/opinions on how we would operate. Operating procedures were written and taught.

Weight lifting belts were issued to all (after proper fitting sessions), training was given in correct lifting and posture stance on the sort lines, and individual padlocks for machinery lock down procedures were issued.

Once the sort line and bailer were delivered and installed, training on correct usage was given.

2004

We applied and received a Community Employment Grant's (CEG's) of \$30,000.00 along with a Community Organisation Grant (COGs) of \$4,500.00. What we did not know and had not planned for, was the amount of product that individuals had been stockpiling. We started drowning under the tonnage that arrived in the initial days.

We refined our sorting systems, changed staff to those more suitable (which involved dismissing two mainstream employees and employing more people with disabilities). Within three months, the stockpile was completely eliminated.

2005

We approached the country schools and offered them a share in the surpluses if they would coordinate the collection and delivery of bale wrap from the farms.

We were not prepared for the amount of bale wrap that came in – particularly the condition of most of it. Most arrived very dirty and contaminated with the mesh that is also used to hold the bales of grass together and bits and pieces picked up off of the farms. We tried many and varied different processes to clean it, ranging from hanging to dry then sweeping off the dried mud, cutting off the most soiled parts and washing in an old bath or hosing down and sweeping with brooms. This made the whole operation very labour intensive.

We decided that we needed to look ahead years and procure equipment and facilities that would enable us to be a serious player in the recycling market. Consequently, in 2006 we started fundraising for a new complex that would house all our recycling activities. We have raised almost \$250,000.00 so far

2006

The processing of recycled wood continued as systems and methods were refined.

A new machine was designed to assist in the dismantling of the wooden pallets and additional markets cemented in, with the policy of quality and always “under promise and over deliver” being the cornerstone of this service.

The tonnage of recycled items that processed at the Kerbside rose to exceed 1800 tonnes per annum.

The environment is enhanced by a huge reduction on items that would otherwise go into the landfill. Utilising recycled materials means that natural resources are not reduced at the same frenetic pace as other places and pollution is reduced as a consequence.

We established a Business Collections Depot, employing five people. It operates independently of (but in close liaison with) the Kerbside recycling Site.

The main items collected are plastic bags, shrink film, poly prop bags, car bumpers and bale wrap. By 2009, we will have collected, sorted, baled, and dispatched in excess of 1000 tonnes of product.

2007

A major competitor of firewood and kindling wood closed down and SdE gained almost the whole market throughout Southland.

This placed immense pressure on our organisation for the winter of 2008, but with our systems and procedures in place, we stepped up production to some 12,000 bags or 120 tonnes of kindling wood annually.

2008

We had been educating the farmers about the importance of keeping the bale wrap clean. This year we received and processed over 100 tonne of bale wrap, and SdE returned over \$15,000.00 to the 43 schools involved.

We put the material through a washing cycle in a commercial washing machine. (The first one was purchased in 2007, with a second one being bought in 2008)

The price difference between clean products versus soiled product can be as much as \$50.00 US per tonne so the exercise is worthwhile financially.

We use a moisture meter to ensure we meet international standards regarding the quality of our firewood and kindling.

No wood is sold unless the moisture content is below 20% which is the level that determines the wood being burnt is dry.

Firewood sales have increased to such an extent, that in the middle of winter our supply is exhausted and we have to turn customers away.

2009

We entered the Vero Sustainable Business Awards.

We updated our Strategic Plan and gathered all of the information and costs to establish a new centre where all business units could be on the one site.

The Invercargill City Council elected to change their Kerbside Recycling System to Wheelie bins and both the Southland District Council and Gore District Council elected to join the scheme as well.

We won the Sustainable Business Award and were presented with the Trophy by the Prime Minister at a black Tie Dinner held in Auckland.

The Richardson Family approached us and offered to build a complex (or modify one of their existing buildings) so we could concentrate on fundraising for equipment to be in a position to offer a full processing service for the new recycling system.

We made a decision to restrict firewood sales to staff and commercial customers only due to the scarcity of raw materials.

2010

We submitted a proposal to WasteNet regarding the setting up and operation of a Mechanical Recycling Facility (MRF) for the processing of all recycling, collected through a new system of 240 Litre wheelie bins from all properties throughout Southland.

We also started some detailed planning on what equipment we would need to carry out the processing and started looking for an alternate site to work from.

We submitted a funding request to the Invercargill Licensing Trust and the Community Trust of Southland.

The Invercargill City Council elected to go back to their rate payers to ascertain whether wheelie bins were the preferred option as doubt had been cast on the methods used to arrive at the WasteNet Conclusions.

After independent reviews and a fact finding tour by the Mayor (with our General Manager) to the Timaru MRF, the decision was re voted on and wheelie bins were selected as the preferred method of collecting.

WasteNet Southland accepted our proposal and we became their "preferred Supplier"

We tendered out the building of the MRF and awarded the contract to RDT Australia and Scarlett's of Timaru.

Both the ILT and the ILT Foundation along with the Community Trust of Southland pledged \$250,000.00 each towards the cost of the MRF.

This made timing very tight for the signing of the tender documents as manufacturing could not commence without a signed WasteNet contract.

The contract was signed, bank loans approved, community monies received and manufacturing started.

2011

The mechanical recycling facility (MRF) begins operation at SdE's current address.

SdE, through our business collections and our contract with WasteNet (WasteNet is the three Southland Councils which consists of the Southland District Council, the Gore District Council and the Invercargill City Council that provide your kerbside recycling service), receive, process and sell as many and as much recyclable items as logically possible.

2018

Discussions began to renew the WasteNet contract. These discussions broke down and became very public. 2018 and 2019 became a very stressful time for our employees as we worked through securing a new contract.

2020

During 2020 we were able to re-negotiate the recycling contract with ICC, which provided certainty for all staff moving forward.

During this year, we established a partnership with SIT to provide study for our people in the form of a Certificate in Supported Living. This resulted in 11 of our staff graduating with other SIT graduates at their ceremony. This was a great occasion for all.

The Board confirmed the plans and committed to importing a machine to further process rural and domestic plastics at a new plant.

In March, a new pandemic came to the world, called COVID-19. This saw us locked down for five weeks and the introduction of health and safety measures that we all took time to get used to. It also caused the cancellation of our major awards night.

2021

2021 brought continued disruption from COVID with stringent lockdown rules that affected a number of our staff for different parts of the year.

We managed to have a fantastic awards evening at the Ascot Park Hotel. This was an outstanding event enjoyed by all.

Our SIT Supported Learning Certificate course expanded on the success of 2020 to the point where we employed a tutor for the course.

An agreement was reached with Makarewa Coolstores to develop a site for the further processing of bale wrap and domestic plastics.