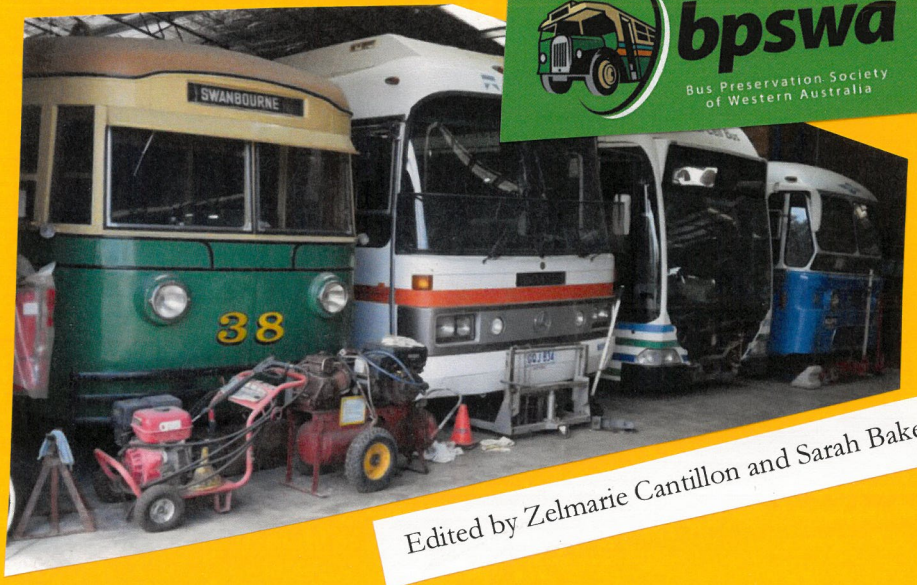
The Next Stop



Organisational Sustainability and the Bus Preservation Society of WA



bpswa
Bus Preservation Society of Western Australia

Edited by Zelmarie Cantillon and Sarah Baker

Sustaining Community Heritage zine series

Series editors
Professor Sarah Baker
Dr Zelmarie Cantillon

The Sustaining Community Heritage zine series emerges from an Australian Research Council-funded project, 'Co-creating a sustainable future for the community heritage sector'. This project explores the organisational sustainability of Australia's volunteer-managed galleries, libraries, archives, museums and historical societies which serve important functions in shaping public history through the collection, preservation and display of local, everyday and marginalised heritages. However, the sector faces a sustainability crisis. Mounting pressures pose a threat to the long-term futures of volunteer-run heritage institutions, putting at risk the diversity and accessibility of the nation's historical record. In this project, we collaborate with representatives from community heritage institutions across Australia to co-develop strategies for recognising value, measuring organisational sustainability and creating benchmarks for sustainable practice.

The zines in this series capture the work of the project as it unfolds, enabling volunteers in community heritage organisations to communicate their experiences and knowledge creatively and accessibly. We approach the zines as a way to facilitate a networked, co-designed understanding of organisational sustainability from a range of institutional contexts. The zines in the series identify challenges, but they also seek to build on existing resources, capabilities and ambitions already in place for the pursuit of viable futures.

For project updates and other issues of this zine series, see:
https://communityheritagetoolkit.com/

The Next Stop: Organisational Sustainability and the Bus Preservation Society of WA

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Zelmarie Cantillon
Sarah Baker

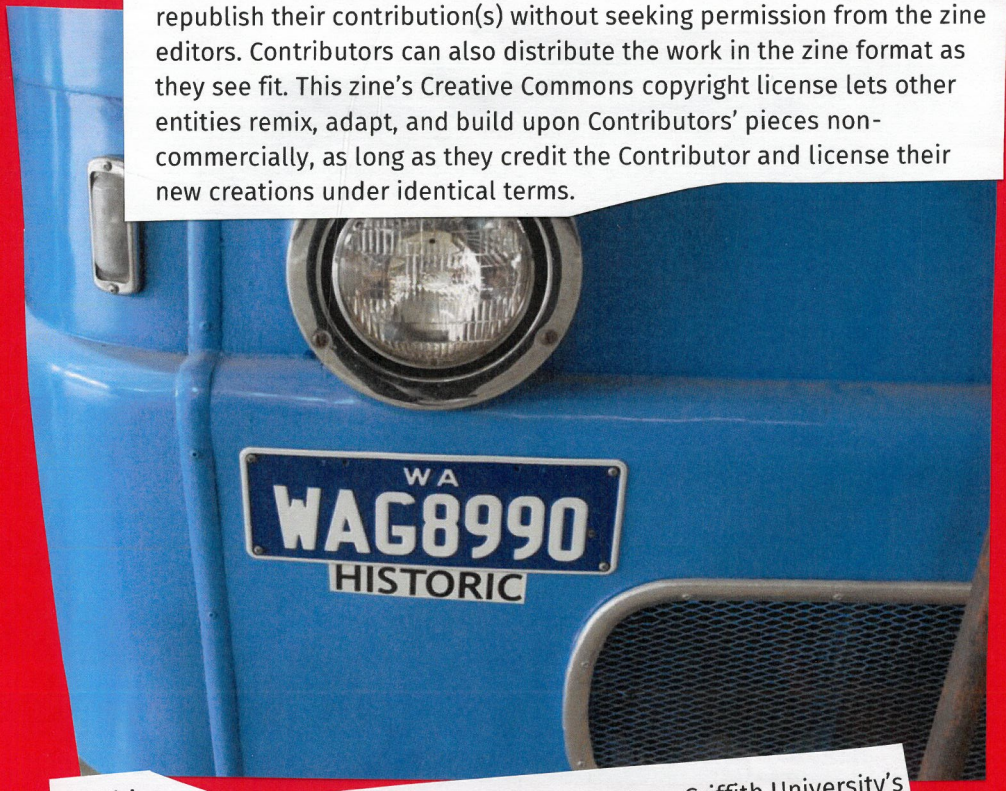
Contributors
Peter Abbiss
Ian Kerr
Brett McPherson
Shane Montague



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The Next Stop: Organisational Sustainability and the Bus Preservation Society of WA

Editorial

About the Bus Preservation Society of WA

For more than 50 years, the Bus Preservation Society of WA (BPSWA) has been working to document and restore the state's bus transport heritage. The BPSWA is currently located at Whiteman Park, a 4,000-hectare recreation and conservation area situated 28km north of Perth's CBD. The Park is home to a cluster of transport-themed heritage groups, including the Motor Museum, Revolutions Transport Museum, Tractor Museum and the Perth Electric Tramway Society in addition to the BPSWA.



The BPSWA is supported by about 35 active volunteers and holds 22 restored buses that can be displayed at community events or at the Park's Revolutions Transport Museum. Within the Park, the BPSWA manages a workshop for bus restoration projects as well as an adjacent 'graveyard' with 50 other buses – amounting to '200 years' worth of work ... if we wanted to restore everything'.[1] In addition to the buses themselves, the Society preserves a range of related materials such as uniforms, bus stops, ticket machines and other ephemera.

[1] Ian, interview

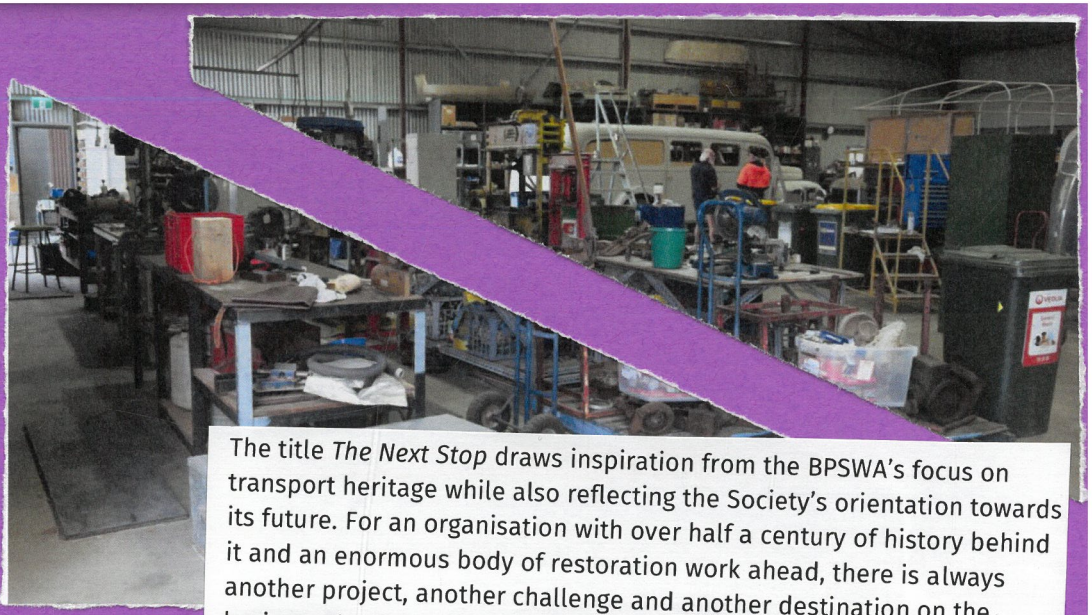


Although the workshop is not open to the public, it can be visited by appointment. The Society also makes buses accessible to visitors through the Whiteman Explorer tours through the Park.



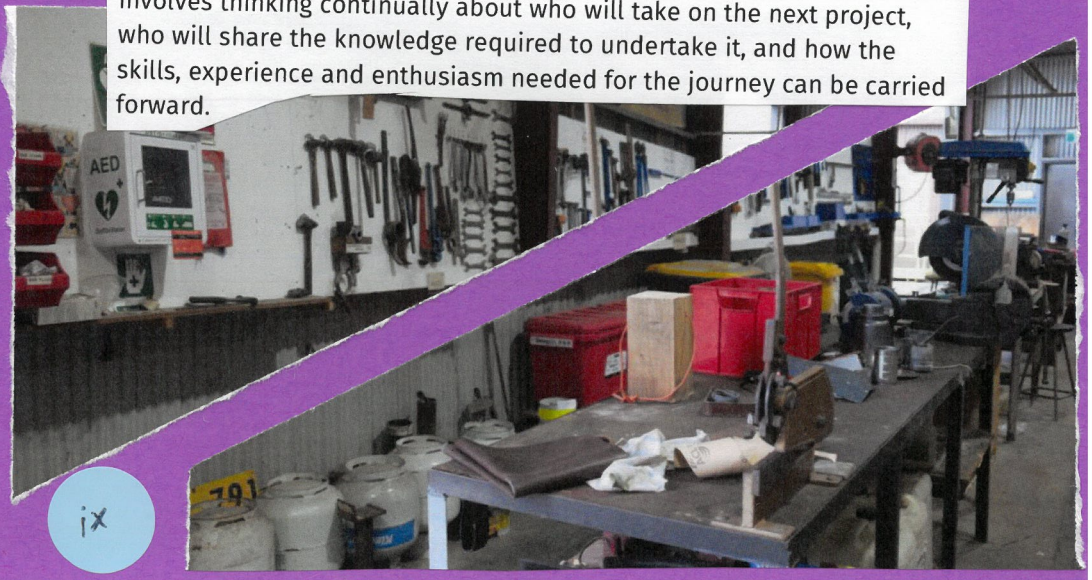


During fieldwork, the Society had just learned that they were successful in receiving a large Lotterywest grant to support the construction of a museum in the Park. This new grant marks an exciting new chapter for the Society with increased public access. However, such a major change also comes with attendant challenges relating to staffing the museum and adjusting the museum's design amid rising construction costs.



The title *The Next Stop* draws inspiration from the BPSWA's focus on transport heritage while also reflecting the Society's orientation towards its future. For an organisation with over half a century of history behind it and an enormous body of restoration work ahead, there is always another project, another challenge and another destination on the horizon. The title captures this sense of movement and progression, while acknowledging that the Society has reached an important point in its journey.

The Next Stop also speaks to the ongoing work of preparing for what comes next. Volunteers recognise that the specialised skills required to restore historic buses can diminish over time, making the passing of knowledge and experience between generations an important part of the organisation's future. At the same time, the BPSWA has evolved to accommodate people with different skills, interests and connections to the bus industry and its heritage. Sustaining the Society therefore involves thinking continually about who will take on the next project, who will share the knowledge required to undertake it, and how the skills, experience and enthusiasm needed for the journey can be carried forward.



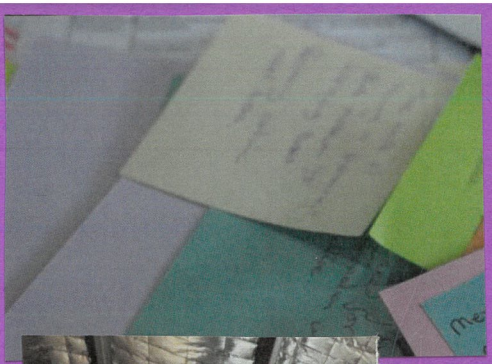
Outline of this zine: What's inside?

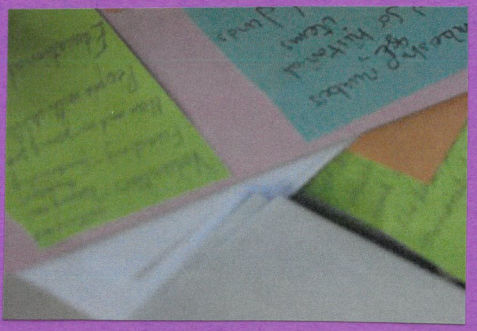
Content for this zine was created during a two-hour workshop held on 26 May 2026 with four volunteers. Zel, one of the project's co-leads, facilitated four activities aimed at encouraging the participants to think creatively about organisational sustainability.

To begin, participants were asked to write on sticky notes as many words as possible that they associate with 'organisational sustainability'.



Next, we turned to an activity where participants were invited to collectively reflect on the organisational sustainability trajectory of the Society. They were asked to look back on past hurdles to sustainability and things that might have enabled the organisation to build a strong foundation. They were then asked to look ahead to future hazards the organisation might encounter and what they might need to do differently to counter those challenges.





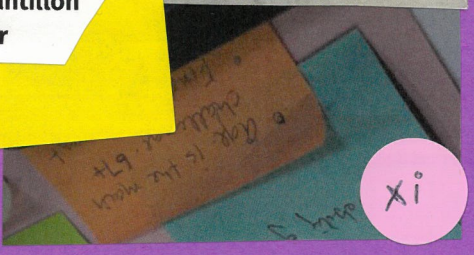
The next activity utilised the preliminary framework of organisational sustainability created by Zel along with the project's other co-lead, Sarah. This was used as a tool for BHS to self-evaluate how they are performing against different dimensions of organisational sustainability. In this 'traffic light activity', participants were asked to use green, orange and red highlighters to map performance against the indicators. Green indicated strong performance, orange was used for good performance but with some risks identified, and red was used where more attention should be focused.

The final activity invited participants to write letters to the future – specifically, future volunteers at the BPSWA.

Also dispersed throughout this zine are excerpts from an interview undertaken with BPSWA President Ian, as well as snippets of discussions that took place during the zine workshop.

Zelmarie Cantillon
Sarah Baker

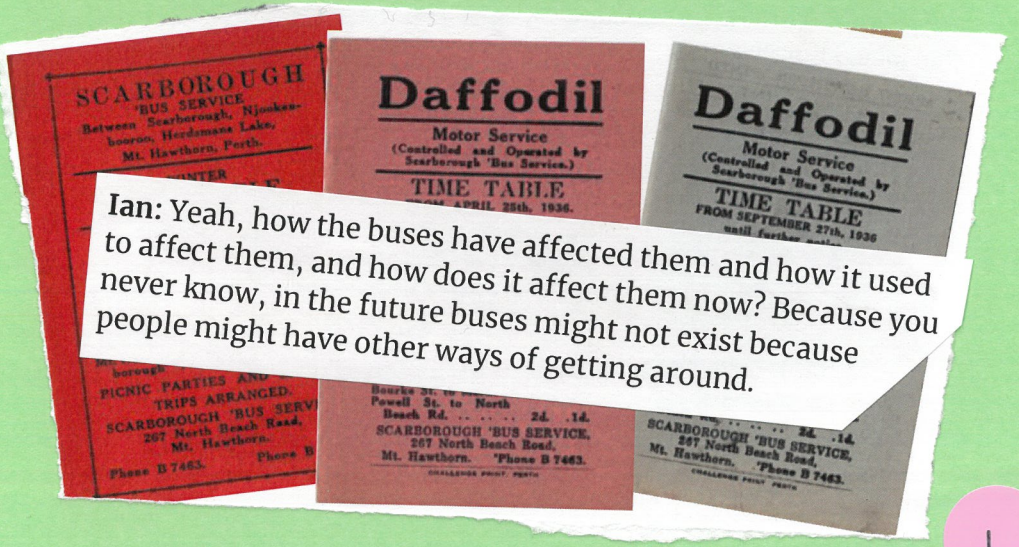




Ian: you've got to show where you've come from and the past, and how things develop. If you didn't have museums how would you know that things went on in the past. You've got to be able to look back in history, and for us it's just to see how the development of the vehicles has happened from when it used to be, how does it affect the social – what do you call it?



Zel: The social and community side of things?



Ian: Yeah, how the buses have affected them and how it used to affect them, and how does it affect them now? Because you never know, in the future buses might not exist because people might have other ways of getting around.

IAN

Younger Members.
Age an issue.

Knowledge of "buses"

Number of members to commit

Volunteers - getting and keeping new members
Funding - fundraising
New and on-going projects
People with skills
Educational Program

SHANE

- Age is the main challenge. 67+
- Finding relevant skills that has disappeared
- Fund raising
- Male dominance

BRETT

PETER

Membership numbers age -
Need for historical items
Availability of funds



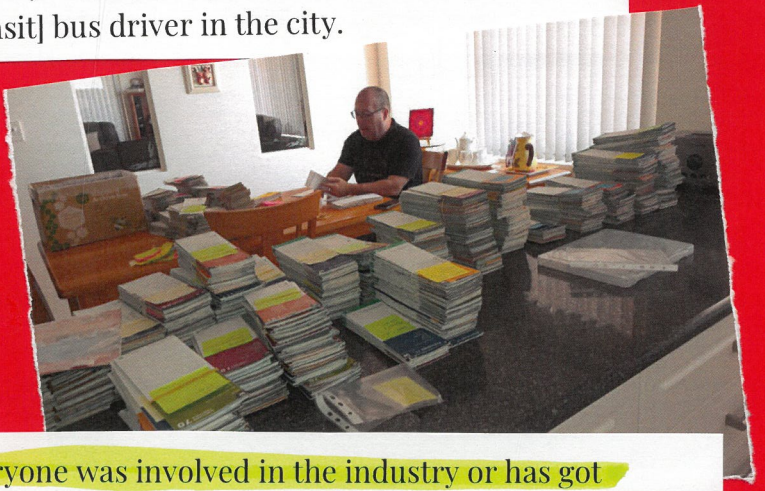


Brett: I've got ... age being the main challenge for its sustainability, because everybody that starts here are retired. So we're starting at a very high end. We probably need to inject younger people into it, which is difficult because they've got jobs and other interests. Finding relevant skills for doing up these buses – similar to what Ian's saying – but specific skills which just don't exist anymore. Mechanics is one thing, but working on older, diesel engines – the bodybuilders, which were a craft, which just doesn't exist anymore. Upholstery, which involved a lot within the buses. We're finding at the moment it's difficult recruiting people to do that sort of stuff. So relevant skills is a tough one.

Fundraising, which is always ongoing for the sustainability of this organisation.

And I feel the male dominance here is a little bit off-putting for especially new, female recruitees. I think that will change. I know, for one, my wife would love to join, but she sees a relevance more in the museum side of things and not so much workshops.

Ian: When I first joined everyone was a bus enthusiast; not all of them worked in the industry, but everyone was a bus enthusiast. Now we're in a situation where maybe 50%, or it might be a bit less, of them are actual true bus enthusiasts, the rest of the people are not. But there's a lot of people in the workforce that used to work in the industry in one form or another, either in office management, bus drivers. We've got one bloke who's just joined us, he just retired as a CAT [Central Area Transit] bus driver in the city.



So, not everyone was involved in the industry or has got enthusiasm for buses, but they've got skills they want to use. So we've ended up being a bit like a Men's Shed, where the guys just come and they can utilise those skills that they've got, which is good for us because we've got blokes who, you know, metal workers, welders, maintenance people, we've got all those skills, electricians, we've got all those skills that not necessarily they used them in the bus industry but they want to keep them going.

So, it's a bit of a mix nowadays: bus people, bus enthusiasts, non-bus people.

To All Future Volunteers.

A recent TV commercial paid for by our State Government, encourages people to 'ACT, BELONG and COMMIT!'

The message is primarily directed at those in the community who have already, or are about to retire.

The commercial suggests that 'BELONGING' to a group or organisation and 'COMMITING' to becoming involved and being regularly 'ACTIVE' within the group or organisation is the best way to maintain both mental and physical health.

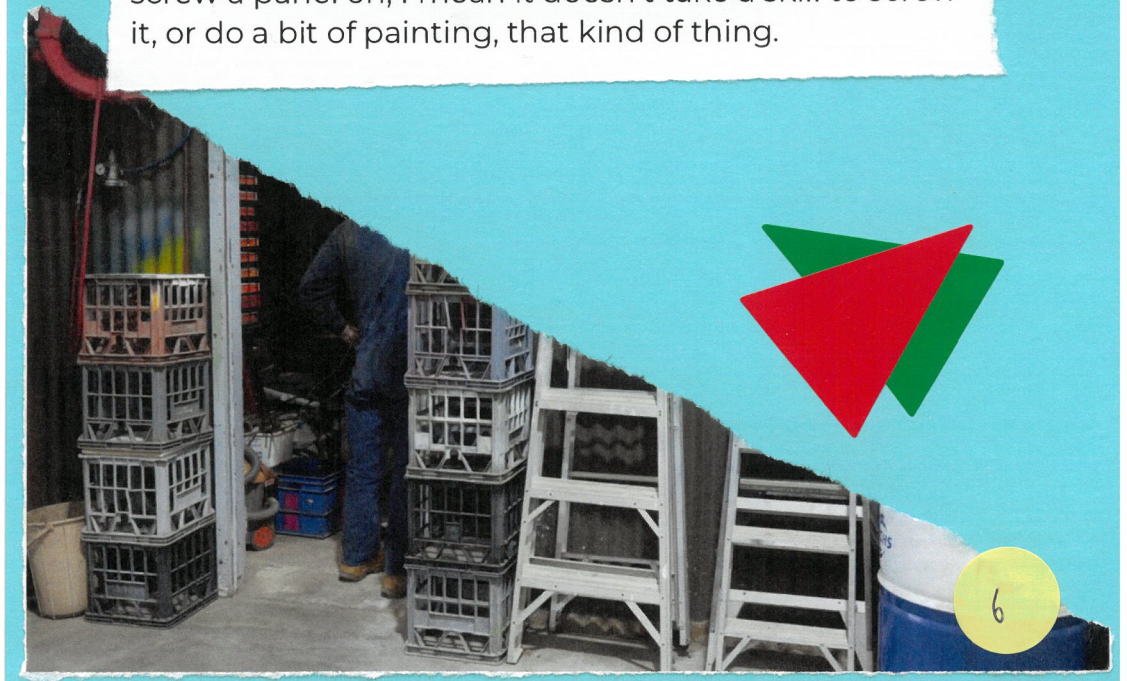
Volunteering with the Bus Preservation Society of WA is an excellent way to achieve the desired outcomes promoted in the TV promotional ad, as well as to make some wonderful new friends.

Volunteering is 'ACT, BELONG, COMMIT' in a nutshell. BPSWA is the perfect venue and organisation in which to prosper and develop.

Shane



Ian: If you can come and just brush the floor that's fine. If you want to come and just have a chat to the blokes who used to work on the buses – and that's what they're sometimes like, they sit in the meal room there and they just reminisce about old times as old blokes do. So, you don't have to have those skills. It's good if you do, or even if you're just a handy person – you can screw a panel on, I mean it doesn't take a skill to screw it, or do a bit of painting, that kind of thing.







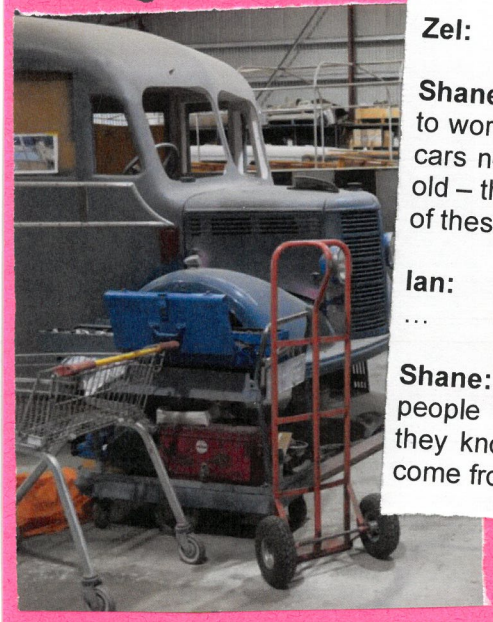
Brett: I'm not a professional by any stretch of the imagination. Some of the professions around here are amazing – the mechanics, their knowledge is outstanding. And replacing them is going to be a problem in the future.

Zel: Yeah, definitely.

Shane: A lot of modern mechanics would not know how to work on these buses. People that work on modern cars now, because the technology is – well, decades old – they have no knowledge of how to work on some of these buses.

Ian: You can't plug a computer into these old ones. …

Shane: So it's all very well to say, "Let's recruit some people who are mechanics," but that doesn't mean they know what to do with the buses, because they come from a different era, a different training age.



BRETT

Dimension	Category	Strengths-based indicator
Governance	Participation	Adopts a participatory, democratic mode of governance
	Collaboration	Builds alliances and partnerships with like-minded organisations
	Strategies, policies and procedures	Emphasises strategic planning and clear recordkeeping
	Regulatory requirements	Attains and maintains accreditation/legal status and adheres to regulations
Resources	Funding	Procures funding from diverse sources
	Volunteers	Recruits, trains and retains a skilled workforce
	Space and equipment	Secures an appropriate venue for artefacts and activities
Volunteer experience	Social atmosphere	Cultivates an inclusive, welcoming social environment
	Personal rewards	Provides opportunities for volunteers to activate their interests and learn new skills
Community engagement	Accessibility	Ensures venue and activities are accessible
	Visibility	Engages in outreach and builds a strong reputation
	Intergenerational engagement	Pursues younger audiences and volunteers
	Flexibility and dynamism	Adapts to changing local, political and social contexts

Looking back, what have been the hurdles to the Bus Preservation Society of WA's viable future?

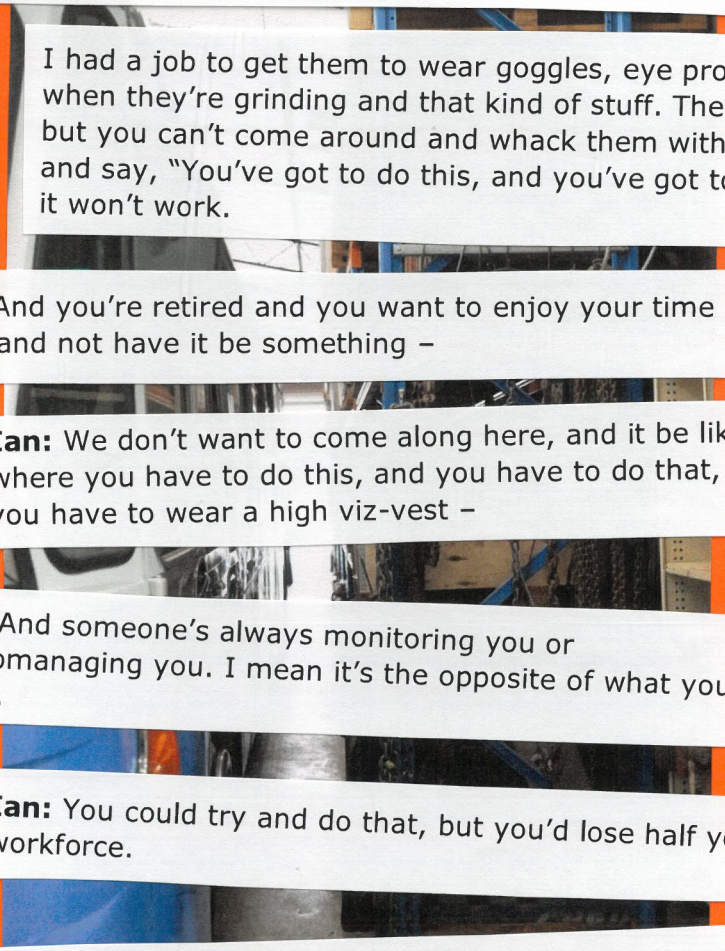
A lack of funds
A lack of members
A lack of expertise
A lack of "TIME!"

Lack of permanent home (we've been lost in the wilderness for a long time)
Lack of skill levels
Lack of funding

Lack of public support.
Limited space

- Park management
- Funding bus drivers
- The older age of members.

Ian: When I retired – I've been retired for a couple of years, and health and safety is a big thing in the industry workshop. I came here and, you know, you can almost cry when you walk through the workshop, but you can't come in here and demand that they do the same things as you do in work situations, because a lot of these old blokes never grew up with that kind of health and safety.



I had a job to get them to wear goggles, eye protection, when they're grinding and that kind of stuff. They do now, but you can't come around and whack them with a big stick and say, "You've got to do this, and you've got to do that," it won't work.

Zel: And you're retired and you want to enjoy your time here and not have it be something –

Ian: We don't want to come along here, and it be like work where you have to do this, and you have to do that, and you have to wear a high viz-vest –

Zel: And someone's always monitoring you or micromanaging you. I mean it's the opposite of what you want.

Ian: You could try and do that, but you'd lose half your workforce.

Zel: Yes, so it's better to have them here doing it at all than having it done perfectly or to a certain standard.

Ian: Yeah, you've just got to do it softly and convince them in other ways.

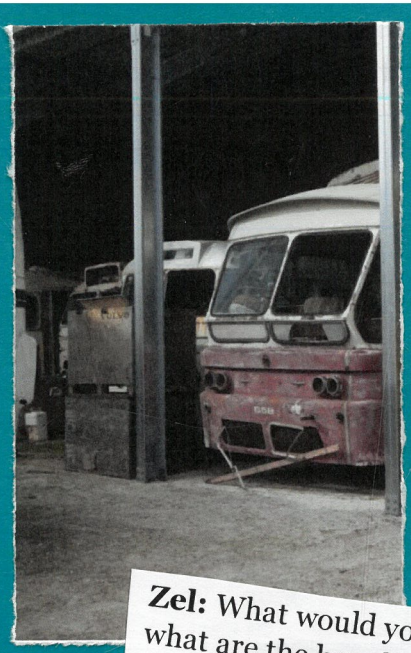
IAN KERR

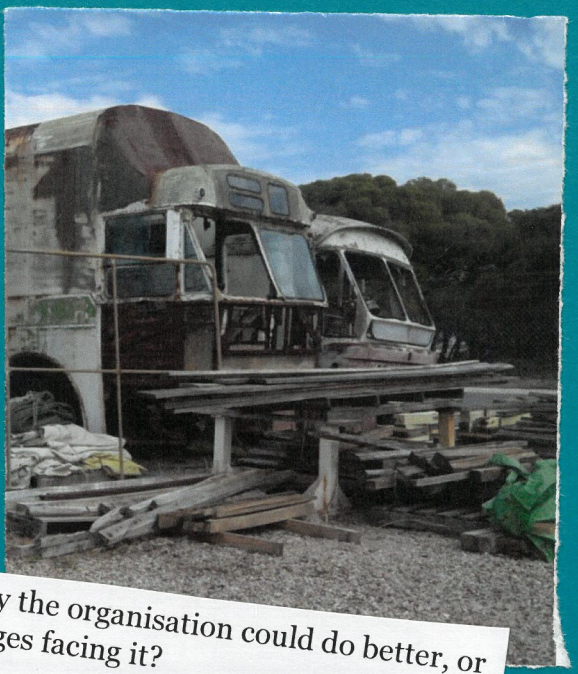
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Dear future Volunteer,

Thank you for your interest in the BPSWA. We have diverse range of skills involved here. and are constantly looking for members to bring in their own skills.

The varying skills include all aspects of mechanical ~~work~~ engineering work in order to carry on the historical legacy of the buses in WA.





Zel: What would you say the organisation could do better, or what are the key challenges facing it?

Ian: The key challenges are our ability – what do you call it – succession planning, that's our key issue because that really worries me for later on, for the next generation.





Looking back, what has been propelling the Bus Preservation Society of WA towards attaining a long-term future?

- Events. Raising the profile
- Corporate identity

- The 'promise' or idea of a Bus Museum in which to display 'our work' and to display the buses and collected memorabilia.

The hope of having a permanent Bus Museum for displaying buses.

Restoring certain model buses.

Promise of Museum & need for historical information in the future.

Dear Future Volunteer,

I'd like to offer you the opportunity to join our volunteer organisation. The Bus Preservation Society of WA. is a non for profit Society that supports and encourages the preservation of Western Australia's bus transport heritage. We operate a workshop in Whiteman Park that renovates buses from the good old days. We also keep extensive records and photographic memories of the past.

Professional skills are not a requirement and

would value any input you are willing to offer. to apply please contact our secretary Peter Abbis on .....

Kind regards

Brett McPherson.

BPSWA Events Coordinator

Shane

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Ian: It's really geared for retirees, and I think our average age in here must be around 80, or maybe a bit less than that. But we do have a couple of people who fly in/fly out, and when they're in Perth, they'll come and work here. And there's a couple of younger people who are on shift work and they may have days off during the week – they'll come down here, but not many. 99.9% of them are retirees.

Zel: Are you happy with that, or do you feel you'd like more younger people to be involved?

Ian: Yeah. Again, I was just talking to someone in there before about getting young people involved. We do have a lot of younger members, ranging from about – when I say a lot, it's not a big number, but 14 or 15 students, we've got a few of them but there's not many of them, and that's our big problem.

I was just saying to the guys in there, "In 30 years' time, will an organisation like this still exist?" Because younger people don't seem to be interested in the things that we're interested in. There are young people interested in buses, but whether they're interested in restoring at the moment, I don't think so. …

I hope when that generation does come to the age where they can get more actively involved, they are actively involved. Otherwise – and it's not unique to this group, a lot of these transport museum groups, like the tractor museum in the park here [Whiteman Park], it's got exactly the same problem, no young people coming through. The tram museum next door – sorry, trams and trains next door here – they've got the same problem as well.

So, it's how do you attract those young people and keep them so that when they grow up they stay in the group, and they continue on what we've started.

Looking ahead, what does the Bus Preservation Society of WA need to do differently to overcome the foreseeable future challenges?

Embrace technology
- Younger members.
- Social media

Prioritise RECRUITMENT

Give greater attention to TRAINING – to ensure continuation of skills.

-

More social events



Zel: What would you say are the organisation's key strengths; what does it do really well?

Ian: Our key strength is our workforce, the fact that we've now got a skilled workforce and there's people in positions that have got the ability to do documentation for grants and that kind of stuff, because in the early days it was a bit difficult, we didn't have that. ...We've got people that have come from positions in their work life that have the ability to do [grant applications], so it'd be the skill levels that's our biggest strength I reckon.



Ian: We've got a committee member who's responsible for all the recycling, which is one of our income earners ... so he's responsible for making sure the recycling's all done. We do the recycling of cans and bottles, which has been in Western Australia now for a few years; it's not a big money earner but we get a reasonable amount off that. We do scrap metal recycling, so we've got a couple of companies that donate old car batteries, and we strip old wiring and we get the copper, and there's a good return on copper and aluminium at the moment, so that's another money earner we've got.

Workshop News



Larry and Dave kept themselves busy on a Tuesday workshop day stripping components for sale as scrap, a good source of income for our endeavours at BPSWA.

Peter.

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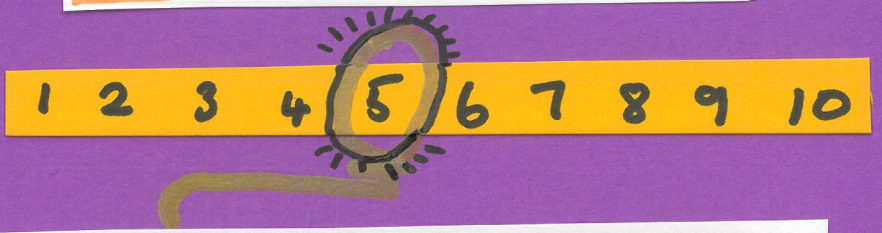
Dear Volunteer

Thank you for your application to join our society. We offe a wide variation of interests ~~that~~ ~~it~~ within our group that you will find meets your requirements. As an enthusiast for the transport indosty your participation will enable our group to face the future with the knowledge it will be in safe hands.

I look forward to meeting you

Yours etc.

Zel: On a scale of one to 10, one being low and10 being high, how resilient would you say this organisation is to change?



Ian: I'd say a five. Mainly because of the age demographic and where we are. You can't really change things where we are. It depends what type of change you mean, really, because we're a fairly static organisation that doesn't change much from year to year, but if something came along, and I can't think of an example right off the top of my head – that really wanted us to do something outside of the ordinary than we do now, I think it may be difficult because people might not want to do it. If you take people out of their comfort zones, then they don't want to do things.

Zel: That's really interesting, because you seem quite sustainable, and that things are going quite well for your current operations and for the future, but I see what you mean, in that it's a balancing act, and that if there was something major to change, that it actually could be quite difficult to survive that, or to survive it in the same way to keep that success going.

Ian: Yeah, and it is a worry. I mean, it's great to have got this grant to build a museum now, but the worry is, "How are we going to staff it?" But I might be worrying for no reason at all because other groups in the park seem to – the tractor museum has got a bit of the same problem at the moment, staffing their museum. I can't just sit here and think, "Oh yeah, people are going to volunteer," "I'll run it for you," I don't think that's going to happen, I think we're going to really push for people to staff it.

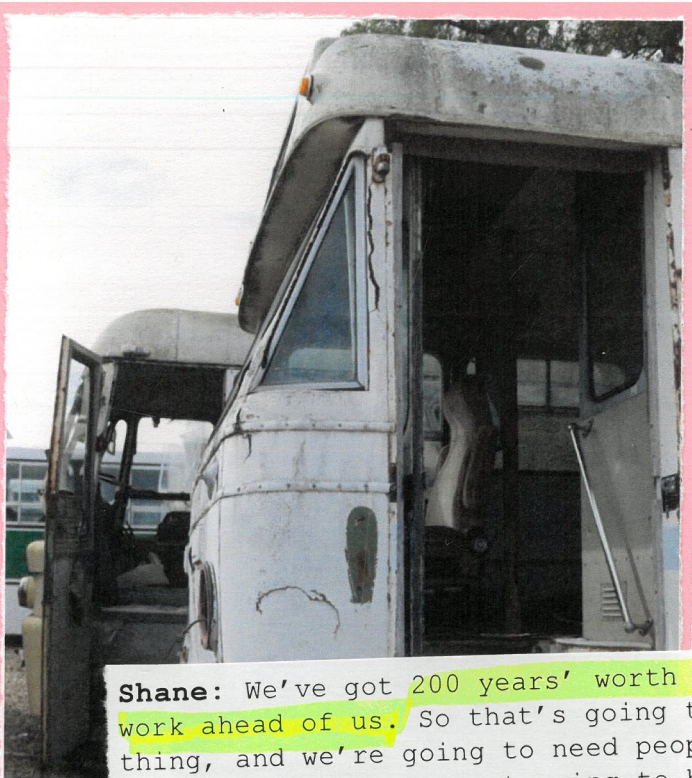
Looking ahead, what are the foreseeable hazards the Bus Preservation Society of WA might face that put the organisation at risk?

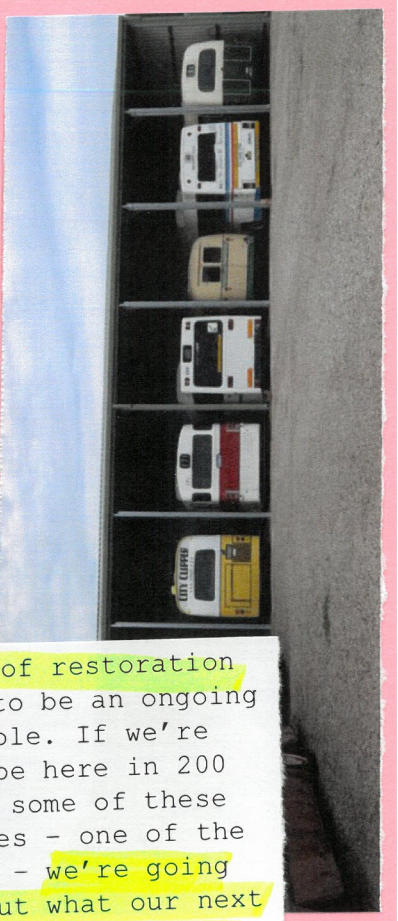
Disasterous events such as 'bushfire' or an arson attack.
Dwindling membership
Insufficient funding.

- Funding
- ageing membership

- break-ins. Vandleism
- lack of volunteers.
- Knowledge.

Change of direction of Park Management (government)
Ageing Membership
Bushfire!





Shane: We've got 200 years' worth of restoration work ahead of us. So that's going to be an ongoing thing, and we're going to need people. If we're going to get - we're not going to be here in 200 years' time, but if we want to get some of these projects, like the Guy Victory buses - one of the ones we'd like to do at some point - we're going to have to make some decisions about what our next projects are, and what's the project after that, and who's going to manage it

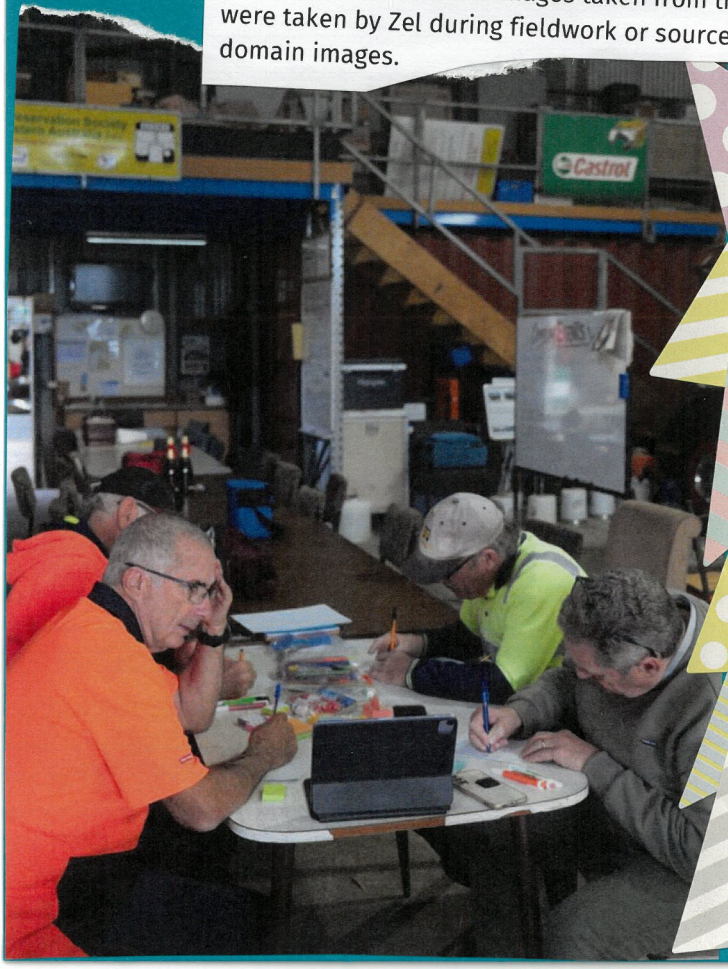


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Compiled by Zelmarie Cantillon

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