

SAMESH Sustainable Style

Parkstone Foundation Grant Acquittal (2024)

Since April 2023 Sustainable Style Adelaide has provided monthly textile-based workshops for LGBTIQ+ and HIV+ individuals in the SAMESH Community Space. The workshops not only foster technical capacities, they also help to overcome social isolation, foster intergenerational exchange, strengthen community, and enhance individual confidence, self-image, purpose and social-emotional wellbeing and health outcomes. Sewing machines, fabric, upcycle-able garments, and craft supplies are available for use free of charge. The facilitators offer support with garment and object making and repair, and provide a free and nourishing lunch.

Initially Sustainable Style relied almost entirely on public donations with the project facilitated using donated second hand sewing machines, often vintage, prone to breaking down and often complicated to thread and use. Public donations of fabrics and materials otherwise destined for landfill helps foster consciousness for the environment and helps reduce fashion waste. Over the last two years Sustainable Style has saved over a tonne of fabric from landfill.

Funding from the Parkstone Foundations has ensured that new machines are available for the participants to use, making them much more reliable for use, but also considerably easier for novices to learn on.

While LGBTIQ+ and HIV+ focussed, Sustainable Style attracts a range of generations, sexualities, gender expressions, cultural identities, and more. It has become a much-valued space to meet and spend time with others as well as to learn new skills. Sessions attract up to 30 participants per Saturday session and 10 per Friday session, and at least 340 attendees over the time period of the grant acquittal.

98% of attendees are LGBTIQ+, 33% are 50+, 20% are overseas-born, 2% are Aboriginal, and 40% disabled. Confidential data collected anonymously shows that participant ages ranged from 7 to 80+. Around a fifth identified as straight (ally) or unsure, and twelve different ethnicities or countries of birth were represented, including Aboriginal people from multiple nations. Almost a third of participants identified as non-binary.

Gender identity is particularly important for attendees with many participants are unable to access garments that express who they are. Sustainable Style provides space and materials to develop skills that empower attendees to experiment with garment making that encourages gender euphoria, and to support others to do likewise.

Sustainable Style fosters individual and community pride and promotes social acceptance by supporting people to express themselves through clothing. Skill development and sharing is celebrated within and beyond the group, and intergenerational exchange helps participants to better understand, support, and advocate for others within the LGBTIQ+ community.

An offshoot of Sustainable Style is Bloomin' Fabulous!, an annual fashion runway in collaboration with the Adelaide Botanic Gardens celebrating the rich history between queer identity and botany, with many of the works that featured on the runway, made on machines purchased with the Parkstone Foundation grant. Bloomin Fabulous! encourages Sustainable Style participants to create fantastic couture garments with skills learned in Sustainable Style and utilising supplies and materials provided at workshops. Bloomin' Fabulous! was presented at Feast Festival in November 2024 had 19 participants to a sell out crowd of over 100 attendees.

Comments on reasons for attendance included:

"It gives me an opportunity to engage with the community and be creative.

Meeting people, being able to make new friends, having the ability to make clothes. This workshop series has helped me engage with my community. I have felt very welcome and included here. Working on projects in a shared makers space has also been wonderful for my creative productivity."

"I first came to Sustainable Style to learn to sew, but then i started to enjoy meeting new people. This is important to me."

"It is an important resource for me to connect w the community, and to support my creative output. This has in turn helped my mental health and supported me to feel more secure in my gender identity. It is also a great source of clothing, materials and expertise."

"I have met some very inclusive and encouraging instructors and participants at the SAMESH Sustainable Style. These people encouraged me to showcase my creativity and sewing skills. Which I would not have had it not been for these people. These monthly gatherings and fellowships have help to ease the feeling of loneliness and bring me out of my shell. I feel empowered and seen and not just the invisible person. "

"I feel empowered. At first, I was not sure I can do this but now I know I can do anything if I put my heart and soul to it. Definitely, be back next year for more. It was exciting to be involved in and very validating for expressing my gender identity as well as my creativity."

Grant funding from Parkestone Foundation - \$1500

Itemised expenditure budget for this Project

1 x Singer 4423 Heavy-duty sewing machine - \$700

1 x Husqvarna S15 overlocker - \$550

1 x Elna EL2000 sewing machine - \$250

Find out more:

<https://samesh.org.au/services/sustainable-style/>

<https://samesh.org.au/events/>

https://samesh.org.au/image_gallery/bloomin-fabulous-2024/

https://samesh.org.au/image_gallery/sustainable-style-march-2024/

Skye Bartlett
Social, Marketing and Community Legacy Lead
SAMESH