

## Plastic Free Aurora wants you to re-think what it means to be green



**By Brock Weir**

How many of you opened up a plastic container, unwrapped some packaging, or put a straw into a cup ? only to toss it in the nearest blue box when you were finished?

If you did so without a second thought, Plastic Free Aurora wants you to pause for a second and consider the future.

Inspired by the Facebook community Random Acts of Green, Plastic Free Aurora is a burgeoning group of like-minded local residents who are brainstorming tangible actions to reduce and eliminate single-use plastics while working on clear solutions to make that a reality.

Plastic Free Aurora sprang into action last month at the Aurora Farmers' Market where they were on hand not only to give shoppers some practical advice on how to reduce their plastic consumption, but give out hand-made reusable vegetable bags you can take to the grocery store.

The best part? The bags were the ultimate in ?green? ? hand sewn by a group of dedicated volunteers ?upcycling? some used window sheers donated for the cause.

The idea to start what could be considered a volunteer-driven sewing circle came out of conversations between local environmentalists Jennifer Sault and Lissa Dwyer. Ms. Sault knew Ms. Dwyer from other environmental initiatives and knew she knew her way around a sewing needle. They borrowed a concept from Plastic Free Peterborough and put their own spin on the initiative.

?We had just started up our Plastic Free Aurora Facebook Group with the idea of getting local neighbours that are interested in ways they can reduce plastic connected in one place so we could talk about it, see what ideas get generated, and where things could go from there,? says Ms. Sault. ?These Plastic Free groups are popping up all over the country. At first, we saw Plastic Free Guelph and were talking to them about some ideas. Then we saw Plastic Free Peterborough and we decided we could start something right here in our area and demonstrate that our community, our neighbours really do care and there are a bunch of like-minded residents who want to help protect our planet and make life a little bit more sustainable.?

Sitting down with a group of eight volunteers and sewing enough reusable vegetable bags to meet demand was their first big project, and one which they had a lot of fun doing. But, while they were sewing, they were also brainstorming other ideas they could

spearhead down the line.

?We're excited,? says Ms. Sault. ?We basically just started a couple of months ago. We got together over a couple of weekends and hand-made these reusable bags and had a lot of fun. The team was able to find materials and we were able to upcycle. It's not like we are taking the single use plastic and replacing it with more plastic.

?Our goal really is to create awareness for using reusables and making it the norm, kind of socially acceptable because it is funny with plastic. With recycling, we think that that has always been the solution, but now we're hearing more and more about the fact recycling is not as easy as we once thought. Only nine per cent of plastic waste gets recycled in Canada and we produce just tons of it every year.

?The hard truth is what we put in our bins is not easily recyclable and some of it is not recyclable at all just because there are so many mixed materials, is contaminated because it is not clean, there are no buyers for it. For us, our goal is really about helping shift the mindset to refusing and reducing. We can't really any longer think about buying things and justifying it because we can put it in the blue bin when we're done with it. We have to look at it as what is going to be done when I am done with it.

?It's all about changing habits, but I think we're getting there. I see a lot more people using reusable grocery bags. Now we need the government to help here. We need a national strategy to deal with plastic pollution.?

If you would like to get on board, Plastic Free Aurora is always looking for new members, volunteers and even a hand sourcing material to upcycle. To become involved, visit them on Facebook or find them on Instagram @plasticfreeaurora.