

Sustainability Options was founded in 2012 by brothers Phil and Nik Gregg.

Both brothers were working in different roles in the business world. Both had extensive experience with corporate businesses and privately owned businesses and they both decided that they wanted their work to take them in another direction. One where profit wasn't the bottom line, and where business success was measured by the good that was done and the positive impacts made. Both brothers were inspired by their environmentally conscious father to care for the planet and the community you live in, from a young age.

Phil had a desire to start a sustainability business - *"If we could get everyone to move 10% [toward more sustainable living], that's a big shift. Then, if they get on that journey, they will move another 10%, you have just got to keep getting people to move a little bit more"*.

Nik wanted to start a sustainability business *"that was compassionate, generous, willing to give and driven by doing good. Wouldn't that be an interesting business model?"*

So, the brothers decided Sustainability Options needed to be a compassionate business with an environmental passion. A business that was for the good of others, not for personal profit. They called their new business model an altruistic business. It was going to be a part of the 'missing middle'; the gap between the traditional worlds of government, not-for-profits, and businesses - a business for the common good. They created a special recipe called 4ESL as a guide to our doing good. It stands for '4 ethically sustainable living,' and involves four ingredients: Environmental care, Social justice, Charitable good, and People compassion.

It began with a focus on making more conscious decisions in housing.

Phil and Nik decided it was about going out there, talking to people, and meeting them where they were at - in their home. Sustainability Options would be invited into the home to have a chat about how the house was constructed, what was going on internally and externally, how the home was performing, and how people were living in the home.

It was never about the money. What drove this passion, was people buying stuff that the 'commercial world' said are 'the solution,' when they are not.

"We are paying for these products to be dug out of the ground, refined, manufactured, distributed, installed, all for them to not be effective".

The brothers knew that we were burning through resources faster than the Earth's capacity to reproduce, so it's about going out and helping people make better-informed choices about conscious consumption. *"How can we help others make better choices. We wanted to do something, and do it for the right reasons".*

We started by providing free sustainability advice to anyone.

We had four core considerations when we would talk with people, we called it WWEE: Waste minimisation, Water conservation, Energy efficiency & renewable energy, and Ecological care. We would talk about the financial and environmental impacts for people. *"If you have \$30k to retrofit your home, what could you do with that \$30k? Let's break that down so people can make well-informed decisions, rather than being influenced solely by advertising or sales".*

"We wanted to be impartial, so we made the decision not to 'sell or provide anything'. Our focus was on providing good advice and pointing people in the right direction, and we also made the decision to do this for free, so that no one would miss out".

Not selling anything, and giving advice and information for free, meant that we didn't know how we were going to make a living out of this. *"But we felt strongly that if we focused on helping others, others would find a way of helping us".* We tried a lot of different things to create sustainability within this business model. It was an interesting process.

We got invited to do a 'Ted Talk'.

In 2013, having visited hundreds of homes, providing free sustainable living advice and having answered the question *"so how do we pay you?"*, with *"you don't, we do this because we want to leave a more sustainable future for our children's grandchildren"*, we were invited to share a Ted Talk about our business vision and business model: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xq5tf4RfeQQ&t=3s>

Now we had a 'line in the sand' that we needed to deliver to.

We installed insulation and solar power.

In the first two years, we gave away our time gifting our knowledge, advice and advocacy. Most homes we visited asked us *"how do we pay you?"*. When we advised that the service was free to all homes (because we want to share what we know), it

was met with surprise and gratitude.

Ultimately the gratitude translated to people inviting us to deliver on projects based on the advice we had given.

Whilst we gave advice across many different 'sustainable living' considerations, two project areas became an easy way for us to help people: Solar energy & Building insulation.

Before we knew it, we were being invited to deliver on lots of projects involving solar energy and building insulation.

Looking back, it was challenging for us. On one hand we were absolutely focused on giving free independent advice with no product sales intended, on the other hand, we had a growing number of requests to manage the installation of solar energy and insulation.

If someone we were having a conversation with said they were interested in how to get solar installed or were wanting insulation installation, we would be honest with them "*we are not here to sell anything, but if you are comfortable inviting us to deliver the project, then we will leave that with you to decide*". There was always honesty involved as we were intentional to not compromise our ethics.

Who would guess, for a service we didn't promote, we became the biggest micro-inverter, domestic solar power installer in New Zealand by around 2015/2016. We had a similar process with insulation. If people who invited us to have a conversation with them were wanting to purchase insulation, they would support us because they were already set to purchase the insulation anyway, and valued our advice and approach. It was a win-win method.

We talked in schools about sustainability.

We were always challenging ourselves, how does what we do today impact our grandchildren's children?

We realised we needed to focus on the next generation to start to shift the understanding around sustainability, and make an environmental impact. This next generation whose future is motivating our mahi, deserve to be a direct part of the conversation and learnings.

When we were invited to manage the Bay of Plenty Enviro-Challenge programme (engaging High Schools in Sustainability) and to assist the Tauranga Kindergarten

Association (now called Inspired Kindergartens) to chase their dream of becoming 'a net-zero energy user', we leapt at these opportunities.

Between 2014 - 2019, we provided hundreds of hours of free time to support the education and sustainable leadership of high school students. We did this through a number of our own initiatives as well as through the Enviro-challenge programme and personal mentoring for willing high school students.

From 2014 to today we have worked with over 20 kindergartens from the Inspired Kindergarten group, coaching them in both the classroom and through free home sustainability visits. The free home visits have been offered to staff and to community parents. The objective, to build and grow knowledge and understanding about sustainable living. In tandem with this focus on energy conservation, many of the kindergarten group have installed solar energy systems in the pursuit of achieving a net zero energy use across the entire Inspired Kindergarten group.

We were invited to speak to businesses and organisations about sustainability.

As our knowledge and experience has grown, we have been invited to speak with builders, architects, building training organisations, property developers, rental agencies, councils, health-related agencies, Iwi and the general public to improve understanding around sustainable building and sustainable living.

We have spoken and presented (and still do) in a variety of workshops, forums, conferences, and meetings, sharing our experiences and knowledge.

Since our inception in 2012, we have been invited to provide Sustainability Audits / Advice and planning to a wide variety of organisations: schools, retirement villages, businesses, manufacturing plants, community organisations, marae, commercial entities, and more. These activities have generated income that have helped us help low income, struggling families to improve their housing conditions.

We imported electric vehicles for people to trial.

In 2015, to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles, we imported a van and a car with the vision to lend out to businesses and people who wanted an EV trial that lasted longer than a drive around the carpark. We realised there was a lot of preconceptions and misconceptions around EVs, such as: how long do they last for?

We wanted to provide the opportunity for people to test them out to help bring normality to EVs as a viable option. We even got our motor vehicle dealers license in anticipation of having a fleet of loan vehicles.

Alongside these trial vehicles, we became heavily involved in organising funding for car charging stations around the Bay of Plenty.

Using our solar knowledge and our EV interest, we piloted a solar powered EV charging station. To lead this project connecting the solar panels to a car charging station. The example of this is the solar panels above the angel wings mural on The Strand.

In these early days, Sustainability Options was heavily engaged in the environmental sector. We love being at the 'giving edge' of environmental sustainability.

Our passion for environmental sustainability led on to social sustainability.

Our conversations around sustainable housing and sustainable living had spread throughout the community and the region. Our connections and impacts in the housing space were growing. When the government became concerned about the link between Rheumatic fever and poor housing conditions, we leapt at the invitation to be of help to those on low incomes struggling with poor housing situations. We began this partnership in early 2015.

In 2016, the government expanded its focus on housing conditions and broadened the Healthy Homes initiative to provide support to a wider range of struggling families with children under the age of 5 suffering from a range of health concerns. With a compassionate business focus, the ability to combine environmental sustainability with social sustainability became a reality.

We were still doing solar power and other environmental projects, however our focus grew in the social sustainability space.

We started providing free sustainability advice in more communities.

Initially we were only operating in Tauranga, Katikati, and Te Puke, but it didn't take

too long for other communities to start reaching out to us.

As we grew our relationships and reputation, people would pass our information on. Soon, various councils became interested in our unique delivery of independent environmental and social sustainability advice for housing.

Since 2015, we have been involved in a wide range of council, government and Iwi projects, helping improve housing performance, housing conditions, and sustainable living.

We now have the pleasure of working with a range of communities, entities, ministries, and organisations across the wider Bay of Plenty. From Waihou Bay in the east, to Ruatāhuna in the south east, to Tūrangi in the south west and up to Waihi in the north, and everywhere in between.

We advocated for better housing conditions.

Through developing a reputation and being connected with many homes and many communities, we formed relationships with a range of research organisations (like the Building Research Association of New Zealand, Otago University - Wellington School of Medicine, and NZ Census). Since 2013, we have been involved in a wide range of research projects, helping improve the understanding of housing performance, housing conditions, and sustainable living.

Through this understanding, we have been able to work with a range of local councils, regional councils, and government ministries, advising and advocating for better housing conditions and more sustainable housing for current and future generations.

In 2015, we formed a very close relationship with the HPA (Housing Performance Advisory certification) training programme. Jo Wills has been a key lead in the development of HPA as an independent, evidence-based training certification, while Nik has been a contracted trainer over the past 8 years. Much of our close work with communities and homes has benefited from this relationship.

We created heater, blanket, and curtain banks.

We see so many homes with no heating, or unhealthy unflued gas heating, and with young vulnerable children. To help, we have collected over a hundred heaters, and through the support of HPM business, we have placed these heaters in to homes,

with timers and advice on how best to use them economically and effectively. A big thanks also to ABS Electrical who help us to ensure that all the heaters we collect are safe to be relocated.

Having established Curtain Banks in Whakatane and Mount Maunganui, we now support the Red Cross in running this.

We now have many blankets kindly donated, to help homes with young vulnerable children during the cold winter months.

We saw a need for repairs and maintenance in the homes we were visiting.

We struggled working in this space knowing that there were gaps in the service we were providing. Now moving more into conversation with home occupiers in lower socio-economic communities, our advice on sustainable living often required products alongside this knowledge. We could donate products, or get curtains made, but not everyone we visited could hang them. We could provide education on how to make their home warmer, but their broken window meant that heat would escape right out.

Out of this realisation grew lots of hui with communities, social workers, mental health providers, philanthropics, the at the time DHB, and a whole variety of other people. They had tried to develop a solution, but it became clear there needed to be a connector. As they narrowed it down to what needed to be done, they realised that it sounded like us!

So, we didn't set up the idea of our repairs and maintenance programme, in reality, it was set up by others, and we became a natural addition to it. It has grown, and we have grown to cater to it. And now, it has become, in many ways, the primary mahi we operate in.

Our 20 Degrees vision was formed.

Our 20 Degrees vision was founded to stay focused in our social sustainability pursuits. The vision is for all homes in the Bay of Plenty to be able to maintain 20 degrees on a cold, winters night.

This vision encompasses all of our social sustainability mahi from advice, to advocacy, to education, to workshops, to repairs and maintenance. Everything we do in a home is to journey with the home occupier to move closer to this vision.

A two-pronged approach.

Our core purpose is to provide free sustainability advice to home occupiers. This is either focusing on environmental sustainability, the mahi this organisation started on, or social sustainability, the mahi that funds our efforts.

Our vision with this two-pronged approach is to continue to provide both services, with the social sustainability supporting our endeavours within environmental sustainability.

And this is where our journey is at today!

