

## ArmLETS Benefits Info Sheet

### LETS IN ACTION...

Stories from across Australia and around the world about how LETS enriches lives...

When **Joanne's** child started school, she decided to return to work part-time. However she calculated that all her earnings would be eaten up with childcare and there seemed little point in working. She joined LETS and was able to pay for after-school care for her son in local units. She earned units by providing home-cooked meals to her neighbour.

**David** had just immigrated to Australia from Serbia. He found a flat but had no money left over to furnish it. His landlady paid for his LETS membership and sent the word around to other members for furniture and household items. Within a week David was 1000 units in commitment. He spent the next few months mowing lawns to bring his account back to zero and made a whole host of new friends in the process.

**St John's primary school** was having trouble filling its canteen roster. They started paying their 'volunteers' in local units and in turn the children were able to buy their school lunch on LETS. They negotiated fresh supplies from the local baker who used the local units to get his van fixed. In time, nearly all the parents became members of LETS - trading sports equipment, second-hand school uniforms and textbooks. The school 'micro-system' had a 3400-unit turnover in LETS the following year.

**Sophie** had been an active LETS member for 3 years. She worked as the Office Manager getting to know all the members and had a huge turnover of LETS currency. When her third child was born with a learning disability she was no longer able to contribute her time to the system. Her balance, which had been kept close to zero for 3 years, started to creep into heavy commitment. The administrators of the system were aware of her situation and decided to do nothing - effectively allowing Sophie to continue trading unabated. She was able to gain much needed services like yoga and massage that assisted greatly with her state of mind whilst going through a difficult period. Two years later when her child entered specialist childcare, Sophie slowly tackled her huge 'debt' and worked her way back to zero. "No bank or financial institution would ever have given me the support that LETS did. There was no pressure to re-contribute to the system and although I had enormous stress from my cash-money problems, I never had to worry about LETS".

**Jenny** injured her back while skiing and took medical leave from work. The osteopathy (for which she could not afford the cash cost for regular treatment) was available on LETS. After seeing the osteopath regularly through LETS she was able to go back to work again, and repaid her LETS account by doing babysitting and selling unwanted clothes.

**Jeremy** worked in a busy architectural firm in the city. His assistant Bev had been a LETS member for 4 years and was very active. When another member needed help with his new house extension, Bev offered to approach her boss and invite him to join LETS. He liked the philosophy and could see the potential benefits so he signed up. He asked Bev if he should lower his normal \$180ph rate. Her reply was that he could charge what he pleased - 180 local units was not unreasonable as long as he paid Bev's daughter 180 local units the next time she did some babysitting.

"I begrudgingly did my first job for 20 locals, considering it to be more like a 'favour', but I soon shook off the exploited feeling when I visited the work site of the house extension. There were plumbers and electricians and plasterers all working for 20 locals/ph and I felt really proud that I had been a part of that. It felt like a family"

LETS enabled **Barbara** and her husband to feed the family. He worked all hours in the Health Service, but took home very low wages. Barbara had babysitters on LETS, allowing her to work in the evenings and build up a small sales business. Barbara earned LETS by lending out her car and giving massages. They bought most of their food, including regular homemade meals and goats milk (one of their children was allergic to cows milk) for LETS. "We now depend on LETS for our food. The scheme is absolutely marvellous. Without it, we literally couldn't afford to eat."

The **LETS Garden Gang** was formed in 1993. The members of the Gang were:

**Sara**, a young woman who wanted to learn all about gardening;

**Mike**, an out of work builder's mate;

**David**, a retired teacher living alone and suffering from depression;

**Paul**, a graphic designer who was looking for healthy activity out of the office.

They thoroughly enjoyed working together clearing gardens, and were often given lunch supplied on LETS. David says, "The work was secondary, it was the socialising that became most important to me"

**Maddi**, a single mum, loved to travel. When the summer holidays came she contacted all the other LETS groups in Australia to seek accommodation. "My daughter and I spent six weeks travelling through Victoria and South Australia and not once did we pay for accommodation. The

people were lovely and even if it was just camping on their lounge room floor it was better than paying for a stark boring hotel room."

**Bob**, a quantity surveyor, was unemployed and hard up. He provided home insulation, energy-saving advice and gardening. His partner Di offered home brew, Caribbean cookery, the hire of a bike with child seat and a powerfullawnmower. Bob said LETS was far more useful for helping him to develop his skills than any government-training scheme. They spent their LETS on babysitting and holidays. LETS gave them the opportunity to get out of the house, and a break from the children - which, they say, eased a big strain on their relationship: "it's really saved our marriage". Bob did gardening for Doris, an old age pensioner who became very enthusiastic about his regular visits; he provided her with company as well as additional handywork. She repaid the scheme by babysitting, cake making and pet minding. Doris, who was previously very isolated, became a grannie to the family. "Its a wonderful thing - the scheme has completely transformed my life."

**Clare** runs a parent link support group through LETS. It enables parents to meet and support each other practically (eg sharing toys, books and child care) and with ideas on childrearing, discipline, ways of handling teenage difficulties and improving communication within families.

**Dennis** had been in LETS for several months offering handyman work and gardening while studying at Uni. When he graduated and opened a small dental practice he was concerned that his newfound profession would be in such high demand that his LETS credit balance would go through the roof. Hewas also paying rent and had high cash overheads. "There was a real need inthe community for affordable dentistry but when I thought about jugglingMedicare and Private Insurance and LETS it was all just too hard." His wife drew up a plan to limit his LETS earnings each month by negotiating a different rate with every client on their 'ability to pay'. Dennis paid his wife for bookkeeping and tax accounting, work she would normally have done for'free'. "At the end of the year she blew the lot on Christmas presents for the whole family! It was brilliant! All through uni I was never able to treat my mum to anything special, but now, because of LETS I can spoil her rotten."

**Peter**: "Perhaps I owe my life to LETS. I was unemployed and distressed after my divorce. Pills from the doctor couldn't lift my depression and I was thinking about ending it all. In desperation I rang the surgery, but no one could see me for at least a week. I would then have to pay for a course of counselling, but I had no money whatsoever. But I had joined LETS: the acupuncturist on LETS could see me immediately - and finance was no problem. The treatment calmed me and

lifted my spirits. I saw the acupuncturist over a number of weeks, and it began to change my outlook. I've now started a self-help group, supporting others going through similar crises."

**Penny** liked making clothes, and wanted to make each item individual. As an artistic person she did not want to go into mass production, or even be committed to running a part-time business. She was very happy to produce a small number of special clothes on LETS - and her customers were happy, as they couldn't afford the cost of tailor-made designer clothes otherwise.

The Hideaway Cafe on the south coast operates on 50/50 local units. They buy all their cakes and buns for locals and train apprentice waitresses and chefs paying them 50/50 locals. "The arrangement works perfectly for the whole community. People who could not normally afford to eat out can treat themselves; our business is flourishing because customers will travel that extra mile to dine using locals; we can afford to train new chefs every six months giving them the qualifications and experience they need to get fulltime work. Its just win-win all the way."

### **A few more Quotes...**

**Geoff** " You feel a lot better about yourself when your community asks for things you like to do... LETS acts as a catalyst by reconnecting individuals with their fellow community members."

**Lawrie** " Just about every time I trade through LETS I get to meet someone personally. I've got to know an extra 100-150 people in this way. To me, that wealth of relationships in the community is synonymous with economic wellbeing."

**Joy** " It really gives you a sense of community spirit - because every time you buy something, you're not only getting something you like, but you're improving someone else's situation. LETS has made my existence quite a bit easier by allowing me to fit my skills and time of working around my busy schedule."

**Marian** "The wonderful thing about LETS is that it gives "work" which is often undervalued in the conventional economic system, a completely new meaning. It encourages ingenuity, creativity, and self-reliance... it recognises skills which the normal market-place does not value."

**Penny** "It fosters an active and supportive community, uses otherwise dormant skills, encourages businesses in the face of recession, and keeps money local."

**Mark** "Instead of being stymied by high levels of unemployment, people have another route to use their talents and potential for economic activity in their everyday lives."

## **LETS Success Formula**

- ❖ Join the LETS elite and trade 100% Shells @ 20 Shells an hour
- ❖ Read your newsletter
- ❖ Make some phone calls
- ❖ When you need a service or goods, think LETS first and check your register
- ❖ Advertise your skills and goods in the newsletter, have a special offer and/or discounts
- ❖ Make some phone calls
- ❖ Go to Trading Days
- ❖ Don't wait to earn, go into debit - make a start
- ❖ Be organised. Keep your membership card with you.
- ❖ Think LETS for birthday & Christmas presents
- ❖ Meet other members at meetings and socials
- ❖ Tell your friends about your successes with LETS
- ❖ Keep a balance and work out each month how much cash you have saved by trading in LETS
- ❖ Help others by recommendation of their work
- ❖ Make some phone calls
- ❖ Write articles for the newsletter, telling your success stories
- ❖ Get a LETS member to design flyers or advertising brochures and hand them out at meetings or Trading Days

**.Most of all – Enjoy LETS and happy trading!**