PRESS RELEASE

Local schools save old lift chairs from the scrap heap

MT RUAPEHU, 4 NOVEMBER 2019: National Park School's latest upcycling project is benefitting both the environment and helping fund the 2020 ski season for local school children at the same time.

When Mt Ruapehu put out the call that old lift chairs needed new homes schools from Ohakune, Taupo, National Park and Owhango took up the opportunity and snapped up nearly 200 chairs.

Mt Ruapehu Commercial Manager Cesar Piotto says, "The old Rock Garden, National and Centennial lift chairs had come to the end of their life on the mountain so we saw an opportunity for them to be recycled instead of ending up in the scrap heap.

"RAL is committed to helping promote skiing and snowboarding for kids in the North Island and this is another initiative to work with our whanau to develop the next lifelong skiers."

National Park School Principal Jane Welburn says, "As an environmentally friendly school we saw this as a great way to not only fundraise but to also help the environment. With the school on-selling the chairs it diverted them from the scrap heap."

And the response has been amazing. The old chairlift chairs have flown out the door and been loaded into trailers, the back of station wagons and into a freight truck off to their new homes in Ohakune and also Auckland.

"The first wave of requests was from people in their 60s keen for a piece of mountain memorabilia," Jane says.

"Six school dads got hands on and did all the heavy lifting moving the chairs from the RAL storage yard to the school bus shed. And the kids have kept a chair, which is now a friendship chair, out on the playground for the kids to sit and chat.

"The kids have helped with a mountain rubbish clean up in the past and they're very aware of the maunga and its significance in their community, especially with it right on the doorstep, so they're all happy that they've helped in this environmental project."

Dean Lark, part of the Friends of National Park School parents group, has managed the collection of the chairs and upcycled some repurposing them into an authentic Whakapapa lift chair for sitting in, with the safety bar remounted as legs and complete with their Doppelmayr manufacture number.

These chairs have sold for between $500 - $600 dollars each. In total $5,000 has been raised selling the chairs with a target of a further $3,000 over the coming months. There have also been more than 45 requests for 4-seater chairs when they become available later in the summer.

This year Friends of National Park School gifted $100 to each child living locally all year round, for taking part in the school snow programme run by RAL.

Student Tarn Hoyle's thoughts around the school's friendship seat:
At first we were assigned a project in which we had to get into small groups and come up with something that we could build to make our school better… We thought about it for quite some time and had many different ideas along the way. Then my little brother Mica Hoyle said that he saw a upcycled chair lift made into a seat up the mountain. It was such a brilliant idea we knew we had to make it our project, but then we needed to come up with a way to make it fit with our school values (integrity, respect and whanaungatanga). We then had it, a friendship seat, somewhere where anyone with their friends or by themselves could sit and other kids in the playground would notice and help them out.

I believe that the friendship seat will help any kids in our school. It will be a place where anyone is welcome. It would not only be for relaxing with your mates, but also a place to think and have a fresh mindset. We hope that children of all ages will sit in the seat for not only hanging but also to sit when feeling a bit lonely, and hopefully kids will see the lonely student and want to help them out and include them in their games.

I think that the use of a chair lift as a place to sit is a great idea specifically because it is reusing a piece of machinery. Currently there has been a push for kids to put in a big effort to look after and watch over our environment. It would save a lot of trouble finding a place for the chair lifts to go once they are too old and brittle to be used safely.

We knew we wanted the design to not only be rustic and environmentally safe but also we wanted it to be practical. We did much research to find the perfect materials. Obviously we needed a chair and we had some good ideas on how to find one. But then we needed to find a way to make it stable, so we researched what parts of the Doppelmayr two seater chair was the heaviest and it turns out it was the top. So we decided that we would remove the top bar and add two old recycled macracarpa railway sleepers to the bottom, this would guarantee that the chair won't fall in use.

We are also planning to get some old cables or chains and to peg them down to secure the chair from burglary or wind.

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