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Burger Off

Communities in Control Conference: The Lucky Country
Conference

Melbourne, 26 May, 2014

Presentation by

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Our protest has galvanised a community and many people who would not normally protest have marched and stood in the wind and rain to make a point about community and democracy and the belief to speak out against what we believe is wrong.

There are some who are supportive of McDonalds but the majority of locals in Tecoma, in fact nine out of 10 people, oppose it.

My quote of the day is, '*the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing*' – Edmund Burke.

You can look for us in more detail on burgeroff.org or our Facebook page. I think the protest, in the light of the current political situation, is of extreme importance. As I have said, I think the mainstream media often demonises protests.

I spoke to a primary school last week and they had their version of what a protest is and during this campaign we had an opportunity to sit down with a Detective Commissioner of Police because last August Victoria Police turned out 90 public order response officers – riot squad, weaponised – and they faced off against the community you have seen here today.

The very next day they raided a bikie compound in Bayswater to get automatic weapons and they did it with 12 police.

Now, when we asked the Deputy Commissioner, "Why did you do that?" He said, "Well we had intelligence your group was infiltrated by Occupy Melbourne" and our faces just dropped and we said: "They're mums, they're dads, they're kids – Occupy Melbourne?"

I said: "What intelligence?" Wait for it: "I listen to 3AW" was the response. Your taxes at work – and I have mentioned before the *Herald Sun* doing its best to demonise protests.

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Do you know McDonalds in Tecoma? We are a grassroots campaign, it's all local input so we haven't got the 'rent a crowd' that the demonisers often say, "Oh, they're just 'rent a crowd' they haven't got jobs."

Often we find it hard to get people on the picket because we have got jobs; that's one of the problems. We have got a huge membership, 105,000 have signed our signature on change.org – that's the second biggest petition that change.org has ever done in Australia.

That's quite a feather in our cap, I believe.

We have 22,000 on our Facebook page and we treat that almost like a magazine so we use a lot of outgoing communication in that. We have 2300 on a Facebook group and they tend to be the people – we talk about 'off the hill' and 'on the hill' – the 2300 are 'on the hill' up in the Dandenongs and they are basically our campaigners so when we put out an SMS call that we need people onsite they are our 'go to' people.

We have about 100 senior activists. Now, we haven't got a structure, as such, when I say 'senior activists', these are the people that we can rely on to guide others.

There are photographers, videographers, there are documentary film people following us around, there are artists, there are musicians, there are knitters — as I go through this you'll see that what we have got is a community and that's what this is about.

Our beef, and I'm not going to spend a lot of time talking about why we didn't want it, it can be summed up very, very quickly: too close to a primary school, it is only 150 metres away, too close to a kindergarten, it will be the closest McDonald's to a national park anywhere in Australia, it will go 24/7, it is six

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times bigger than any other shop in the same street, it will create traffic problems, it will create litter problems.

For these reasons our council has received just under 1200 objections. Council did the right thing, they weighed it up, they had a special meeting, they had to hold it in a reception centre, and the council voted against the project 9-0.

McDonald's then went and spent \$900,000 at VCAT and got the democratically elected council's decision overturned. McDonald's then started somewhat of a PR campaign, and I would say a ham-fisted PR campaign, claiming that they had strong local support and that they had consulted with the community.

Well, two things there, they had no local support and they had not consulted with the community.

I come from a PR and marketing background and I said to anybody I could talk to at the time, "If we let them get away with that, if we let them keep saying that, that will become fact and people will believe it so we have to change the narrative."

So our challenge was to keep it out of the courts; that was one of the things, McDonald's love to take people to court and you'll see a bit more about that later on.

We have found out since this campaign was running in the last five years they have gone to courts and planning tribunals around Australia 45 times in an attempt to overturn council decisions. They don't care what the council says; they know that they can go to a higher court and if they do the right thing they can probably get it overturned.



We were looking at appealing the VCAT decision, we heard anywhere from \$400,000 to \$1.4 million it could have been and we didn't have that sort of money, it wasn't fair on the council and there was interesting differing opinions on how we would appeal it.

If we had lost we would have been up for all of McDonalds' costs and if we had won all it was going to do was refer it back to VCAT and two years down the track we would be doing the same thing again.

We decided to move it to the 'Court of Public Opinion' we spoke to a leading paediatrician in Port Macquarie in New South Wales, who led a campaign against McDonalds up there and who happens to have the name of Dr David McDonald spelt exactly the same way. Dr McDonald said, "These people hate bad PR so get it out there, do things that they are not going to enjoy and they are not going to be comfortable with."

Also at that time we were getting "we're unemployed, we are all hippies up there, we're all vegans," you know, "you hate progress", all of this sort of stuff so we had to change that narrative. As I said, we are a broad church, you have seen my community here today and we needed to stay on message and that message was that the community did not want this.

VCAT, as I mentioned before, found in favour of McDonald's and we could spend hours talking point by point, how we put things in front of them and they answered etc.

The timing was problematic because once the VCAT decision was handed down it was actually at the time of council elections so our council was in caretaker mode and they couldn't make a decision even to appeal it.

So it was a real, real issue and as I mentioned before, we didn't want to go to the Supreme Court because of the costs. We had to come up with a better way

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and we felt that we had to show that we were first and foremost community based, that we were clever, that we were professional, peaceful, branded.

Now, the reason I put branded into the presentation is that we had to be extremely mindful of our brand. I'd say to people that when we are talking to the media and we are out there in the community talking to others there were three things, three golden rules. Stay on message, stay on message, stay on message. If we could do that, we could possibly beat them.

We also had to punch above our weight. No one, particularly Australians, like "losers". As soon as they can sniff that you are probably going to lose they will jump off you so we had to come up with ways to look like we were beating them all the time, so as I say, punch above our weight. (I had to explain that [expression] to Year 6s the other day, they hadn't heard of it. I said, "Oh, yes, that's punching above your weight.")

One of the first things we did once the VCAT decision was handed down before they started any demolition of the site, this was really cool, 500 people turned up on a Sunday and they planted a community garden in the block next door.

It was fantastic, people donated plants, we had building suppliers donate soil etc, it showed off our community spirit and resolve. We occupied that site 24/7 for six weeks and eventually 22 police came at 7 o'clock in the morning and removed one lone protester. How McDonald's can pick up the phone and get 22 police, I still don't know, but it gave us high media visibility.

A couple of times Channel 7 News crossed to it and we realised that people were starting to take an interest in it so I mentioned before about the branding.

From that point, at the community garden, we started to break up into sub groups. We had an arts group, a singing group, a lobby group, a PR group, a

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marketing group, and we started to bring all of the skills from our community into focus to take them on.

We treated the campaign as a product, we came up with logos, typefaces, we created a website, some clever Facebook pages, we started Twitter accounts and we started to come up with rules of how our media and communication would be outgoing.

Some of the images you see there [refers to PowerPoint presentation] were posters that we put up advertising a rally that we put on. If you go up through Upwey, we put them all up the Mad Mile so for a week and a half there were these posters and people knew driving through the Dandenongs that something big was happening.

We also needed to build a message. McDonald's were running with just "a vocal minority don't want this, the vast majority of people want it", I can quote that in my sleep. We were bumping into people that said "no one rang me for an opinion."

We contacted McDonald's. At this stage we were still sort of talking to them and we said: "How did you come up with 'the vast majority'?" "Oh, we did a survey." "Would you share that survey with us?" "Yes, maybe." "Why didn't you put that survey to VCAT?" Stony silence. So we don't know if they ever really did take a survey so we decided that we would have to do a survey.

The survey took six weeks. We knocked on every door of every house in Tecoma and we asked them a simple question: "Do you want the McDonald's built in Tecoma, yes or no?" If they weren't home we made three attempts to go back so we basically covered, I think, of the houses, 95%.

It was a great section of the community. We found out that 92.8% of people said "no." More people were undecided than the people who were saying "yes" and

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the people who were saying “yes” tended to be the older ones that said “Oh, it will be great, my grandkids will be able to get jobs.”

We finally had a message that nine out of 10 people didn’t support the McDonald's.

And what was interesting at the survey was, when we were knocking on the door, a couple of things happened. It validated our position, we were hoping that we would get 60% or 70% and we were in the nineties so that was just amazing. It produced our first major messaging point, that nine out of 10 people said ‘no’ and we kept on hammering that home and that had to become the narrative.

People were prepared to give us money; we would be knocking on the door saying “Do you want a McDonald's built?” And they would put their hands in their pockets and pull out \$100 notes and say “go and fight the bastards.” So we knew that we had tapped a nerve in the community and they asked us: “When are you going to do a march, when are you going to do a rally?”

At this stage, we hadn’t even considered that so we thought about maybe doing a march on what happened to be the 2nd of March last year. We thought that if we could get a couple of hundred people it would look great. We could put them out the front of the Cameo in Belgrave and walk about a kilometre down to Tecoma and that would be a really good image, we would be able to get some pictures for the local papers and it would show that we were strong.

At this stage, we decided that we needed the shirts that you see here so one of our campaigners contacted a t-shirt manufacturer and he said “Look, I’ll give you some, how many do you want?” And she said “Oh look, 40 or 50 would be great.” And he said “No, no, I’ll give you a thousand.” All of a sudden, we had t-shirts to sell which could start to fund this campaign.

So on a very sunny morning in Belgrave 3000 people turned up. We were hoping for 300 or 400, we got 3000 and we blocked Burwood Highway.

The police didn't know what to do; they had no traffic control in place. Even though we were ringing the police the week before saying "This is going to be big" and were hoping that we would get, you know, a few hundred.

It was the largest community gathering ever in the Dandenong Ranges, more people turned out than did to see Princess Di and Prince Charles when they came through after the Ash Wednesday fires so I'd like to say that we bumped them out of the history books.

It galvanised our support base and we finally had some real media dynamite, people were taking us seriously. We also realised that we had to start to show ourselves on YouTube very professionally and not just handheld videos shot by people on the cameras, we needed to get someone involved and I'm pleased so say we have got documentary filmmaker Tim Smith.

He did a lot of the work for us and this is one of the first he did about the march.

[Plays video]

That was some of Tim Smith's beautiful work. I mentioned before about media dynamite and CNN picked it up and they wrote a story and they put it on their website.

They then tweeted it and I got a call on Easter Saturday morning by some of the ladies in the campaign that said, "It's starting to trend on Twitter" and as the sun came up around the world we saw the CNN story getting viewed as it came up in Europe and then as it moved over the states.

I think we worked out that it was translated into something like 25 different languages and 10.5 million people saw our story which led to other media organisations wanting to talk to us.

We had the BBC and we had now the Australian media talking to us – this was big, it just went off and the interest was huge.

We got two supportive editorials from the *Herald Sun* – you did not mishear me then – two supportive editorials from the *Herald Sun*, who said that McDonald's should listen to the community and go away. I just thought that was amazing. We even got a supportive cartoon in the *Herald Sun*. We were also front page in *The Age*, we got all of the television shows, we were interviewed on almost every talkback radio program around the country and as well as that we did heaps of community and internet radio.

And if I have a tip for a campaign, please treat the community radio stations as you would mainstream media. They are great. What these people have done for us is they have done interviews, they have provided content back which we could put on our social media pages, they have been the engine room to getting our message out. So it is not just Fairfax and the News Limited and the Sky News etc, it is these smaller ones that can be important as well.

We've had a few cartoons – First Dog on the Moon did one recently with police with McDonald's logos on their hats. I thought that was quite a nice one as well.

We quickly realised that media was key to getting the message out there so we started to build a media database, we started to cultivate media relationships, we made sure they were on our speed dials, that we had them in our database of email addresses. We created a look and feel so when a press release went out they knew it was from us, that there wasn't 14 fonts on it and it wasn't sent 12 times a day from different email addresses. It had to look like it was corporate.

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We aimed for organic media. What I mean by that is very early in this campaign I somehow got on an email list from the people (opposing) the East-West Tunnel and I remember one day I got six press releases from six different mailboxes. It was almost like spam and I thought if journalists are seeing this they are just going to throw it away so we actually put very little media out, we created events and tried to get people to come and talk to us and get an organic feel, and it seemed to work very well.

That being said, we had to look for stunts and I will come back to some of the stunts, like what you have seen before at the start of our presentation – a flash mob. Now, with the rally and the media and people starting to take interest, we actually claimed our first scalp in the campaign when the franchisee, who was on the *7:30 Report* claiming that he was going to be running Tecoma, backed out.

All of a sudden, McDonald's didn't have a franchisee. They quickly announced another one and they rang one of our campaigners and they said, "Oh, that mediation that you wanted to do, yes we would be happy to come and talk to you."

So six of us went in and it was like organising the Arab and Israeli peace talks. I'm not going to go into what was at the mediation but two things came out of it. One was that McDonald's promised that they would give us their findings, that they were going to give us the survey. So that was a win for us. And they said that they would organise or ask Catriona Noble, their CEO, to come out and meet with our elected representatives. What that meant was we were going to set up a meeting with our council, our state member and our Federal MP, who had all agreed. They were the two things McDonald's had agreed in mediation, but they didn't do any of it and that was basically the last time they have picked up the phone to us except to sue us.

I'm going to go off the timeline for a minute and talk a little bit about some of the, and it's probably strong words, 'stunts', but some of the things we did to create interest.

If we did stunts they had to be relevant, create interest, try to get the mainstream media involved, be funny or quirky and look clever.

That's my next door neighbour [refers to vision], she talked to one of the ladies at the school and she said, "What if we had bin stickers?" and someone went out and researched bin stickers and we made them available online and people could buy them and they started putting them on their bins. So that was one thing we did, and of course, the local papers picked that up and it was in the local papers.

We had a CD, it was really cool and you heard one of the tracks there before, and we sold that CD and we sent that CD out to radio stations. 3AW's Neil Mitchell played tracks from that CD one morning so it was getting interest.

This is one of my favourites, we created a placemat and we put it up on our website and through the change.org database asked people to download it, print it and walk it into a McDonald's store and send us feedback.

Now, we thought "Oh that's cool" and it was more about if McDonalds see it, they are going to be pissed off. Sorry, about my language. Five and a half thousand of those were downloaded in 10 hours and our website guy rang us up and said "There's something wrong, it keeps crashing." It was because people were trying to download this and we asked people to send us emails with pictures, so we were getting emails from Cairns, Alice Springs, Perth and people were putting them in. In fact, one lady said in Alice Springs, she walked in and she asked for the manager and said, "These are for you." And she watched the manager putting them all out!



We have got a great team of picket knitters. Local media love this. We were even getting squares sent from Portugal, the UK, USA, adding to a knitted banner that we are putting up.

One of the things that I would be shot if I didn't mention up here, was our gnomes and you've seen some of the gnomes here today. We would take these gnomes and we would put them at bus stops, we would put them out the front of McDonald's stores, we had a Gnome-ageddon one day, where we ringed McDonald's headquarters in Melbourne and it made the front of the *Age's* website and it made the Channel 10 News that night.

We even recently got our community to dress up as gnomes trying to break a world gnome record of around 478 gnomes. We managed to get 446 or 450 or thereabouts so it was really great and it was a really, windy, cold day but it was so nice to stand in front of that many gnomes and say "You know, there is a hundred times more people sitting here than is in that McDonald's store down the road."

So you know, that's great, we will do that again next year, try to break that record.

But back to the timeline. McDonald's now knew they had a lot of negative PR, they turned their spin up to 11 and we heard them say some classic things on radio, asking what we were complaining about, they were going to allow the community to use the car park – so that was their gift to Tecoma, a car park.

They still claim to support [the community] and now they've introduced a new franchisee, a guy called James Curry, and they said "he's a local."

They started to talk about jobs. When McDonald's talk about jobs they want to give the impression that they're basically replacing a General Motors Holden manufacturing job with a job. But a job at McDonald's can be four hours a week

for a kid making seven or eight bucks an hour, that's what the jobs are. Ninety percent of people they employ are kids because they are the cheapest form of legal labour in Australia, so there are very few full time jobs created by one of these stores when it goes in.

It wasn't working very well for them and in an attempt to stop the protest, to shut us down, they started to put 24/7 security on the site, rumoured to be costing \$55,000 a week, and they kept that up for the best part of 12 months.

They put out press releases again that we are a vocal minority and the vast majority welcomed it, which we knew was wrong and we were gaining on that.

They employed a private detective to spy on campaign people – now that's not an exaggeration. I actually read that in *Crikey* when the private detective left his notes in the front seat of his car and one of the campaigners photographed it and there was a list of our names and what we'd been doing and they'd been following us around.

Then they erected a 2.5-metre wall around the site. What this wall gave us was something that's great, it gave us Australia's biggest blackboard. People would go up there and they would do these wonderful chalkings and at night McDonald's security would come out and they would wash them off.

The next morning they would be back and this just went on for month after month and in the end they actually sent up letters saying that we would be charged if we chalked.

One of the ladies got up there one day and when they rubbed them off in the morning there was the chalk residue there, she got up with a sponge and she started writing "No McDonald's" in the water.

That chalk background there was a great thing for humanising our campaign and that's what we needed to do, we needed to sort of tell people that we are

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locals and why we needed to do this and that's when we put this out, another one of Tim's fantastic videos.

[Plays video]

This led to our change.org petition just climbing. In June last year it had about 10,000 signatures and by the end of July it was up at 65,000. We tried to hand that over to McDonald's CEO in Sydney, Catriona Noble, but McDonald's actually locked the door. They sent the receptionist out and we got that on the ABC News.

Again, they scored another own goal, they are not very good at that PR stuff.

I said to fellow campaigners I felt that when the demolition was to come and we were actually going to stand in front of the bulldozers, we were probably going to be in the news cycle for 24 hours but we stayed in the news cycle for 27 days during July, it was just amazing; they just followed us.

We did breakfast television from there, we were doing radio reports from there; we had community meetings there. We found out who was going to demolish the building and we made pleas to them and we know that two demolition companies backed off, they listened to the community and they said they wouldn't do it.

McDonald's then went to the demolition company of last resort, a non-union contractor. We had unions supporting us at this stage as well. They went to go in and do the demolition and some people in the campaign then took a decision to break the law and they occupied the site by climbing on the roof.

Now, it was non violent, it was peaceful, but we were trespassing. Again, it became a media bonanza, it started climbing and climbing and climbing ... I guess you'd say, the momentum was with us.

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But then McDonald's had other ideas.

On Wednesday the 17th of July they launched Supreme Court writ actions against eight protestors picked at random, some of them had been on the roof and some of them hadn't – one lady had just simply held onto a Portaloo truck; she was a 67-year-old grandmother – and they went them for loss of profits, the cost of security, this would have ended up seven figures and could have possibly taken their houses.

They became known as the T8. They served the writs at 8 o'clock on a Wednesday night expecting us to be in court fully represented at 10 o'clock the next morning, which was impossible. We rang around and fortunately the good people from Maurice Blackburn eventually defended us.

I wasn't one of the people on the writs but I went in that day and it was probably the lowest point of the campaign for me when I saw the Norton Rose solicitors McDonald's had.

I think they had a QC, two barristers, half a dozen solicitors and they were bringing in trolley load after trolley load of our Facebook posts, of photos that were taken by private detectives, they had been setting this up and what they wanted was a representation order, they wanted to get an order against these people and say that it applied to the entire community.

The judge said: "What you are asking me to do is shut down free speech" and that's exactly what McDonald's was trying to do. At this point, we still had people on the roof, and as I mentioned earlier, a week later at 4:30 in the morning, 90 public order response officers, weaponised, came down the Burwood Highway standing off against about 20 of us.

I think for the Victorian Police Force it would be probably one of their most embarrassing points in history to do that and we still have not got an answer as

to how do you get 90 riot squad police to protect a McDonald's organisation?
The police are still to answer that.

They removed a 22-year-old protestor from the roof. She was later charged with trespass and I think she got basically a fine of about \$200 so, you know, your taxpayers' money did that.

It was our lowest point. Under police guard the demolition went ahead. Court action meant that they had actually put an exclusion zone around the site so it made protesting on the site problematic.

But our signatures kept going up on change.org and they were heading towards 100,000 and we felt that we needed to do something big.

The change.org people called me one day and they said if McDonald's wouldn't accept the petition in Australia, why don't you go to America and give it to them? And we said, "We haven't got any money". We were worried about the fines and at that stage, we were in court and we really didn't know where we were going to go and they said, "Why don't you crowd fund it?"

On the back of a napkin in a coffee shop in Queen Street we worked out that to get one person over there for two nights' accommodation with an airfare we would probably need about \$3000. We actually looked up when their board would be there and we worked out we needed 17 days to raise \$3000 so we'd give it a go.

If we got there, we would deliver the petition, we would hopefully get a little bit of media, we would send a message to the shareholders, the board members and the stakeholders and hopefully build a bit of support from international activists' organisations.

We pushed the button on an Indiegogo crowd funding platform and the guy at change.org gave me a call after 55 minutes and said, "You've hit the target." And

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I thought he was just having a go and I said “No, no come on.” He said, “No you’ve hit the target” and the money just kept coming in.

We watched the numbers go up, you know, through \$5000, through \$10,000 and eventually we got over \$40,000 and that was just from people all over Australia. Because that money was being donated to going to Chicago, we decided that we would have to use it all for Chicago so instead of sending one person we’d send four, part of that was to send a documentary filmmaker, which gave us the ability to send high resolution video back to Australia, and we decided we would do a week’s worth of stunts in the states.

Now, we had no contact with the media in America, we could have got there, made an appointment and handed our petition over and that would have been the end of it so we had to think on the ground.

As I say, our goals were to hand the petition over, place that large ad in the *Chicago Tribune*, the second biggest newspaper in America, and try to run two independent media campaigns.

The Australian domestic one we thought would be pretty easy because they would be interested in Australians going overseas, that’s news. We had no idea what the Americans and the internationals would do. Driving out to the airport I saw my first positive omen:

[Refers to Powerpoint]

That was in the car park at Melbourne airport when I’m getting on the plane, I had the *7.30 Report* filming me getting out of the taxi and that was in the car in front of me so I thought ‘that’s a positive omen.’

When we arrived in Chicago we looked out of the hotel room and saw this:

[Refers to Powerpoint]



“Going, going gone” and so it was getting better.

Then we took a walk down to one of the biggest McDonald's stores in Chicago. It's called Rock n Roll McDonald's. (What McDonald's do is they acquire people's culture; they are a bit like a parasite so they are right next to the Rock n Roll restaurant and they call it Rock n Roll McDonalds. If you come up to the Tecoma one it is full of Puffing Billy memorabilia, so they acquire people's culture.)

So we walked up to the Rock n Roll McDonalds and we saw this:

[Refers to Powerpoint – picture of a gnome in front of the store]

We didn't put it there. We found out there were expat Australians that had been following us and they had come down to meet us to help us out.

There's the team [refers to PowerPoint], we basically had put together people that could think on their feet, and we had Tim there to send the video back, which became crucial.

Most of the stuff that was sent back to the *7:30 Report* was shot by Tim and uploaded, we worked 24/7.

We had to do a little bit of 'secret squirrel' stuff because our legal people were telling us that McDonald's would be likely to go and basically say to American immigration that we were there to break laws, which technically, you know, people from overseas protesting is deemed not technically legal.

We weren't going to break any laws, but we had to go on different planes. I went to a trades show for my work and got there early. We didn't want McDonald's to find out we were coming so they could do a pre-emptive strike to shut us down so I got there the Wednesday before we were going to hand it over.



I placed the ad, a full page ad, in the *Chicago Tribune*. It was on page 15 with their international news, it was a great position, it was black and white for impact and to save a little bit of money for the campaign, and it was seen by 470,000 people and the phone just rang off the hook.

The very next day we got coverage in the *Chicago Tribune*. This was on a Friday. My other colleagues were coming in over the weekend. We shot some video footage for Australia over the weekend and we decided that for the Americans, we had better do a stunt on the Monday morning and it was our plan for the Wednesday to hand over the petition.

Now, I had phoned McDonald's well ahead and said "I'm the guy that put the ad in the paper" they weren't very pleased about that. I said, "We'd like to come in next Wednesday and give you a petition" and they said, "That's fine, you can just mail it to us."

We said, "No, no, no we've come half way around the world we'd like to give it to you in person." "Oh there's no guarantee there will be anybody here" so we got all of this thing and we found out from the media later the media had contacted them and said, "Have you had any contact from the Australians?" They said "What Australians?"

So our first media stunt, and I literally picked up the two girls from the airport, they were jetlagged, and we called it Kangadeddon.

Americans love kangaroos so we inflated 50 or so inflatable kangaroos and put them out the front of the Rock n Roll McDonald's. McDonalds' security came out and told us we would be moved on if we went inside and we said, "We are not planning to go inside." They said, "We will be calling the police because you can't be doing this on the footpath."



A big squad car comes down; a huge big sergeant from Chicago police comes out and says, “What are you doing?” “We are setting up blow-up kangaroos.” “Knock yourself out, guys.”

We inflated them and we had media from all over the place and luckily we had some expat Australians there, they jumped in and did the media interviews as well because we couldn’t keep up and it just kept going.

Then we had the papers, *Sun-Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, we were on the nightly news, that’s just some of them that came down [refers to PowerPoint] and we were sort of getting calls from radio stations to come in and do radio interviews etc. and the Australian media got onboard.

We did *The 7:30 Report*, *Today*, *Sunrise*, we did 3AW, Red Symonds, John Faine, *The Project*, I did *Drive* with some New Zealand show and we kept on coming back to this little studio in the John Hancock building about 50 floors up, all of the networks use the same studio, so you do the Green Screen and this was a bit of a joke by the Americans.

At 2am they gave me an Emmy for the most amount of crosses to Australia in a 24-hour period – I wish I could have kept it – so we now had some interest from the Americans, they were following us around, we swapped business cards, they promised they’d come out and see the petition handover, so off we went out to McDonald's headquarters to shame them.

We printed out pictures to humanise our community so we were going to set the pictures up and again McDonald's security came out, same line: “If you go inside, you won’t be allowed.” “We are just going to set up out here.” “You can’t do that, we’ve called the police.” The police came down, they saw what we were doing and said, “Have a nice day, where are you from in Australia? I’d like to go there one day.” So it was great where the police just treated us fantastically.

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We had ourselves and our helpers setting these up [refers to PowerPoint] so you can see right down the street out in front of the headquarters we set that up and then there were satellite vans hidden behind some bushes so that McDonald's couldn't see us and when they said that we couldn't come across, right on cue, we walked out with the petition, and we walked across with the media behind us and they couldn't stop us, so there are some of the pictures of our community up and down the freeway there.

And of course, we got the same people to cover it again and we did breakfast television and we went on the Jonathon Brandmeier program. He was really funny, he promised to put the girls on for, I think he said we would do seven to 12 minutes, and they stayed on for 34 minutes so that was great and he has got an audience of two and a half million in Chicago, so that was great.

Tim put together something we could send back to the people that had crowd funded Indiegogo. We wanted to give them a rap of what we were doing and this kind of encapsulates what happened in Chicago, it's another one of Tim's wonderful videos. I like this one, you can dance to it.

[Plays video]

He was fantastic. He just saw us in the shirts and asked what were we doing and we explained it and he'd seen the camera there and he said "Can I talk to the camera?" And we got that in one take.

I don't know what he does for a living, we didn't even get his name; he was terrific. So what Chicago did, we got our goals, it meant that the media was still interested, we got told by a New York PR firm that that investment of \$40,000 had probably netted us somewhere between \$3 million and \$5 million worth of PR. I don't know how they worked that out but I'm going to take that number and guess what? McDonald's dropped the law suits. Well, they agreed to

mediate so the mediation went ahead later, Julian Burnside (you might have heard of that up and coming young fellow), he agreed to mediate.

McDonald's had booked a mediation centre for two hours and I think he kept them in there for 10 and they dropped the costs against us, they agreed that we could go back on the footpath and protest and we had the right to legally and peacefully protest, so that was great, it was a huge win.

However, McDonalds' security continued to intimidate us onsite, they would say that we couldn't be there due to the Supreme Court rules etc, they continued to photograph us and to this day if we walk up there they still photograph us, they still have security onsite and the McDonalds' builder got a little bit creative. When we were in VCAT there were strict rules about how this store was to be built and one of them was the height of the thing that they put the big yellow M on, which they call the blade, and it had to be six metres. That went up. We got a laser device and we measured it and realised it was two metres higher than what it was supposed to be and we rang the council and they had to bring a team in and cut it down.

Unfortunately, the store finally opened in April and a lot of people say, "Well, you've lost" but we really see that the opening of the Tecoma store was just one battle.

Our campaign is "No McDonald's in the Dandenong Ranges" and we're going to stop them from doing anything further there. McDonald's. on opening day, to get a crowd, gave away vouchers. We had seen a big crowd of probably a couple of hundred arrive at 10:30 in the morning which McDonalds claim was 4000.

Now, we said, "We know what a crowd of 3000 looks like". This was nothing like it. For the best part of the week that store was ringed by public order response officers so again, your taxes paid to keep security at a McDonald's store and I think that's atrocious and at some point we would probably take it up with the

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police but I think for me this [refers to PowerPoint] is one of the most unsettling images of the campaign. McDonald's were handing out food to them at the back, so I mean, we have got to ask the Police Commissioner what's going on here? Now I'm not saying they got it for free, they may have paid for it, but if you're there working for public order I don't think that's a good look.

It's built, you've lost.

Well the week before opening, the Planning Minister finally signed off on C126 amendments with our group who had lobbied the council and the Planning Minister, which basically stops any sort of 'drive through' going ahead in the Dandenong Ranges, so we stopped them at Tecoma, they cannot do this again, so that was huge.

Going forward, just finishing up, what we have to do to remain relevant, to keep this campaign going and hopefully inspire other communities, is four things.

Lobby – create a financial disaster for the Tecoma store, so make people don't want to go there. At the moment, we are counting customers, we think it is probably doing 25% to 30% of what it should be doing, so it's well down and most times you go past there it's empty which is great, no one from the Dandenong Ranges is supporting it.

We need to export the revolution. Not a week goes by where some other community doesn't come and talk to us because McDonald's are doing this all the time. There is one happening in Mandurah in Western Australia at the moment. I am seeing that as Tecoma 2.0 – exactly the same thing has happened. The council has said "no" but they have gone ahead. They are saying, "We are going to supply you jobs and most people want this."

So we need to show McDonald's if they do this to communities they are going to get another Tecoma reaction so we need to export that. More importantly too, we need to record our history so people can learn from this.

With the lobbying, we have been going to council meetings, we attended a Cabinet meeting and got to talk to the Premier and the Planning Minister. We have been lobbying MPs and ministers, we have attended political functions and some of our campaigners spoke in this room a couple of weeks ago to a Labor Party meeting to talk about how the VCAT laws should be changed to basically reference third-party interests.

We attend events like this, I've done others, the Chifley Institute, Oak Tree, we have been creating opinion pieces for newspapers, magazines, etc. So there is still interest there. We are the "go to" guys when it comes to protesting.

Create a financial disaster for the store – well that's about maintaining a presence onsite, so we regularly protest there, to highlight its lack of success. We do that by social media, talk to the general media.

We are not allowing McDonald's to buy our community. They are trying to give vouchers to our netball clubs and our football clubs and we are saying, "No, we look after our community, not you."

We are working with food networks across health to promote businesses. There is a food frontier group about healthy eating and one of the ones I'm really excited about is something we are working on called the 'Burger Off Trail' where we are actually going to promote a website, brochures and a smartphone app so if anybody comes into the Dandenong Ranges and they say "I want a burger" it will take them to where they can get a healthy burger.

It will take them basically anywhere but McDonald's, so again, that will be used to inflict a little bit of financial pain against them.

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In terms of exporting the revolution, we need to speak to other communities and become the gold standard, and I thank you for giving us the opportunity to do this today, talking to you is what it's all about, getting our message out there.

We are talking to students, I have spoken to primary schools, in a couple of weeks I'm doing Year 10s and Year 12s at various secondary schools, we have been lecturing at universities on PR courses, on marketing courses so again, they are asking us how we did it, what did we do that was different, so that's important.

To record our history, Tim is producing a film which will basically tell the story from 'go to woe' which is great and you are all part of it today.

The State Library contacted us some time ago and they asked could they do a digital archive of our website so if the website ever comes down, at least there will be a digital archive at the State Library. So, you know, there are going to be generations in hundreds of years that will read about this campaign, which is great.

Some of the ladies in the campaign are putting together a photo book because we've had some great photographers. John Weekes is one of the photographers, beautiful work. Glenn Stevenson is another and there is another one, I forget his name, but there have been great people that have just come out and just helped us out.

We had a gentleman come up to us and say he wants to create a young adult fiction novel based on our campaign so we are going to have Year 12s reading about this in their English courses, we hope.

The other day I was contacted by a textbook publisher in Brisbane. They are going to use parts of our campaign in a year eight book on civics, which is great.



The Museum for Australian Democracy at Eureka is curating an exhibition about our campaign later in the year so we really feel it's great, we seem to be a textbook 'grassroots' campaign.

I thank you for your time. Thank you very much and from Tecoma and my people here, thank you too.

