



## Guide for planning and running a successful recycle swap shop

**Aim of the Guide: to support prospective operators of new swap shops.**

### Background

A swap shop is generally defined as a place linked to a **regular occasion or event at which articles that are no longer wanted can be exchanged for desirable articles.**

In South Africa the concept idea is promoted by both community activists and environmentalists viewing it as a way to raise awareness and positively influence a historically wasteful consumer culture by increasing the recovery of recyclable materials.

A swap shop provides **a shopping alternative to a money-based system.** In the format we are discussing in this guide, it allows people to exchange goods and services through a **point system** linked to the quality and quantity of recyclables they bring to the shop.

#### NOTE:

The collection of recyclable material cannot and does not equal the value of items made available in the shop by the redeeming of points earned in the programme. This means that in no way can the operation of these swap shops be a profitable venture in the normal (monetary) sense of exchange of value.

Different kinds of swap shops serve different kinds of people. Some are designed mainly for children, with a heavy emphasis on environmental and basic financial education (specifically the benefits of saving). These typically offer rewards in the form of stationery items. Others cater for poverty-stricken adults, and allow the elderly with little pension access to heavily discounted day-to-day basic consumables in exchange for bringing in recyclables.

The specific model chosen for a new swap shop should be directly linked to the day-to-day needs of the target group. It has to provide beneficiaries with a 'hand up', rather than 'handout' support.



**Plastic bottles are not trash**

The general motto is that it is a place 'where you are asked to bring something in, in order to be allowed to take something else out'. In this way, it incorporates education relating to recycling, and represents a mechanism for people to practice recycling.

Some swop shops accept any kind of recyclable material, while others are highly specialised in terms of what they accept. All existing Recycling Swop Shop (RSS) operations accept PET bottles, and some exclusively collect this material since PET bottles have attractive monetary value, offer steady demand, are easy to be transported by children, and are shatterproof (thus avoiding injuries). They are also very easy to convert to points on a bottle-by-bottle basis.

This supports the fact that items such as used PET beverage bottles are not trash, but are valuable resources. This is why PETCO supports the swop shop model and the vital linkages and assistance they provide in rural and marginalised communities.

*This PETCO guide is intended to support prospective operators of new swop shops about the core steps to follow when starting out. It builds on the experience of existing swop shops in various communities, and shares key lessons learnt with regards to the challenges and opportunities to expect from a financial, social and environmental perspective.*

## Basic considerations for setting up a swop shop

Marilyn van der Velden, the original founder of Recycling Swop Shops (RSS) in South Africa, compiled a Start-Up Handbook for Recycling Swop Shops (download from [www.recycle-swop-shop.co.za](http://www.recycle-swop-shop.co.za)) that looks specifically at the shop in Hermanus. Below is an excerpt from this handbook, to which we have added a few additional points.



### **WHY? Be clear about your motives to start a RSS.**

This is the most important basic question to answer. In order to give that 'hand up', the shop's success will depend on the specific intentions, together with the dedication of the people who manage, organise, volunteer and donate their time, energy and resources.

Decide what the main objective(s) of the RSS will be e.g.:

- A clean, litter-free community environment;
- Access for the poor to food items, clothes, cosmetic articles etc. at a large discount in a moneyless environment;
- Educating children about the importance of recycling, while providing materials (stationery, etc.) that they will need at school; and/or
- Teaching basic mathematic principles and/or teaching people how to save.



**Plastic bottles are not trash**

## FOR WHOM? Be clear about who will benefit from the RSS

Do your homework and establish the real needs in the community by formally asking how people in a target area would feel about the idea – don't simply assume. The first RSS were set up to serve only children at primary school level. Alternative RSS models now successfully operate from other locations, such as from a high school where it serves adults from the surrounding community, but with little interest or support from the scholars of the school.

## WITH WHOM? Identify members of your future RSS support network

Identify key people and organisations who could help cover all vital functions, expenses and activities to run a RSS in a successful and sustainable manner. Ideally, you should work to secure all of this support before starting your operations.

Your network could include, but needn't be limited to:

- A person, organisation or local authority to provide a **location** from where you can operate your swap shop (see more about this below)
- **A local private sector buyer for your collected recyclables.** Don't start collecting any type of material before you have not established a stable demand and a reliable pick-up service.<sup>1</sup> Ideally you should aim for a service provider that offers you a 'one stop service' to collect mixed recyclables and offers you a set price based on weight or volume. If pre-sorting is required from your side, this service should also provide you with basic sorting infrastructure including bags for temporary storage etc.
- A **source of sustainable financial funding** e.g. a private donor or trust to compensate volunteers at least on a basic level for their efforts assisting with sorting, weighing. Funds would also be needed for special services, such as making and providing soup and bread for people visiting the RSS<sup>2</sup>
- A network of people and local businesses to approach for regular donations of articles for your swap shop. Without such donations, there will be nothing to swap for the recyclable materials. Donations could be wide-ranging and consist of people's time (e.g. volunteering to do charity drives to source funds and quality clothing and other items), goods from retailers (such as stationery, clothing, blankets or staple foods free, or at a discounted price) and other companies donating suitable items to swap at your RSS.
- Where relevant, specific influential representatives of the **local community** should form part of your network to smooth communication and ensure cooperation

---

<sup>1</sup> Some RSS (like the one based in Hermanus and Gansbaai) are assisted with pick up of recyclables by their municipalities. Although this means reliable collection, it also means the RSS earns no revenue. Hence there will be more pressure to secure donations to keep operations viable.

<sup>2</sup> To get you started in terms of finding and approaching donors, , consult the City of Cape Town's comprehensive directory with advice and relevant contact details. Download it from [https://www.westerncape.gov.za/text/2007/8/city\\_of\\_cape\\_town\\_donor\\_directory\\_07.pdf](https://www.westerncape.gov.za/text/2007/8/city_of_cape_town_donor_directory_07.pdf)



Plastic bottles are not trash

## WHERE? Identify a suitable location that is available in regular intervals



The site from which you operate will depend on local conditions and a suitable partner to make the space available. Existing swap shops are based in a variety of spaces of different sizes and property characteristics. Swap shops have been successfully set up and are run from venues such as church grounds, schools and community halls. Some are even operated from shipping containers.

- Ideally your swap shop should be roofed and protected from the elements
- The place where the swap goods are stored and traded in against points should be furnished with basic shelving and a trading counter. Its dimensions should be at least that of a 30 m<sup>3</sup> shipping container to allow convenient, but controlled, access. It should be lockable, secure and central and convenient for the target group to reach, especially if aimed at children who can only carry limited amount of recyclable materials
- Most importantly, your RSS area should provide ample space for individuals arriving with their recyclables, for a pre-sorting corner and also safe temporary storage (ideally in a lockable cage or container) until picked up by a buy-back service provider or the municipality
- Provision for an area to safely accept and store recyclables should be made at every location. Alternatively, arrangements for the immediate removal of the recyclable materials will be necessary, and reliable arrangements (financially and practically) for the transport of the shipping container will be necessary

## WHEN? Establish the best operational time and frequency for your RSS programme

Depending on the target group intended to benefit from your RSS, and on the support you can secure from your volunteer team (at least 3 to 4 people will be needed at all times), you could consider to run your RSS ideally on a weekly basis, but no less than monthly in order to keep some the momentum and interest going.

- **Choose a suitable day of the week.** The best days have mostly been proven to be Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. On Mondays and Fridays you may find it difficult to secure adult community attendance, especially around long weekends and for religious reasons.
- If you target children, it is advisable to open your RSS **shortly after school hours**. On your operating days, your RSS could provide them with a basic lunch in the form of a soup or a sandwich - something that will be particularly welcomed in poor communities
- **Opening times** could be as creative as the circumstances or venue allow. For instance, the RSS in Ceres works very well on a Sunday after church, where community members attend the church service before they bring recyclables on to the premises for a weekly swap shop exchange



**Plastic bottles are not trash**

## HOW? Identify the methods that work best

The ways in which your RSS could potentially serve the community will be driven by your creativity, vision and passion. How you operate it will, however, depend on the particular environment, as well as financial and social challenges. No two RSS operations in South Africa follow the same methodology throughout. Nevertheless, some key elements are generic to all or most of them:

- Recycling swop shops are set up to encourage targeted members of a community to collect and exchange recyclable materials for useful goods ranging from clothing to stationery, basic food items, and blankets/duvets;
- All swop shops require ongoing and intensive volunteer commitment to run smoothly;
- Every new RSS should decide upfront which material(s) they will recycle by doing the necessary research about how to handle the material(s) after collection (Read more below about PET beverage bottles in particular and how they can be collected at shop shops.);
- All goods at the swop shops are available only through a non-monetary based, point-based system;
- The point system is linked to the amount (in kg) or volume (e.g. calculated in shopping bag sizes) of recyclables received (see the RSS Start Up Handbook for practical calculation examples);
- People are not allowed to buy with points 'on credit'. They can only spend what they have earned, but are encouraged to save for bigger and better things available in the RSS;
- Different colours of paper for redeemable tickets bearing points each week, and using a different colour of marker could prevent forgery of tickets;
- A swop shop is often used as a means to a bigger end, which includes feeding hungry people through a 'hands up' approach, teaching basic numeric and banking skills, and even as a platform to educate, inform and advise other pertinent social issues and programmes. By using different kinds of points (e.g. for sorting, counting, calculating, weighing, budgeting, saving and banking) as part of the educational process, those life skills could be practiced and reinforced. Most RSS operations capture weekly statistics for each individual who brings in recyclables and also motivate continued participation by rewarding and showcasing their best regular performers.

## What could you learn from others?

A visit to an existing RSS near you could be very valuable before setting up your own. Observe their facilities and how they how they work. Also ask questions about their operations and day-to-day experiences. If there is none nearby, then phone some or correspond with them via e-mail to find out more about the lessons they have learnt.

Here are some recommendations based on the approaches and strategies that have been successful for other RSS systems:

- Only start if you have secured enough volunteers, plus back-up volunteers and a collector that provides a one-stop collection service;
- Primary schools with dedicated headmasters seem to be the optimal departure point for the operation of many RSS systems;



**Plastic bottles are not trash**

- If you target children as the beneficiaries of your RSS, ensure that the items offered to swap are what the kids want (include some toys and treats) and need for school (check with the school). The focus should be on them, not their parents or older siblings;
- Optimise opportunities to partner with other NPOs and existing community projects from the outset. Conduct some research to establish who else is operating locally – this will help avoid duplication, while benefiting from one other’s strengths and programme objectives. For instance, the Somerset West RSS: Beaumont school officially partners with Sir Lowry’s school, thus bringing together kids from different social backgrounds and cultural upbringings to work together to make their RSS a success;
- Start you RSS project out as simple as possible. You can expand it strategically when all elements and stakeholders are optimally in place and operating;
- Start simple by only counting (shopping) bags or bottles received rather than weighing with a scale;
- A mobile baler may be a good idea, especially if it is shared and moved around for various RSS initiatives and there is enough volume to warrant it (balers are used to compact sorted material in order to generate better return/ value when material is sold to intermediate collectors);
- If you wish to eventually expand, have different days for different schools and use a mobile swap shop housed in a shipping container to move around.

There are currently around 20 RSS operations, most of which are in the Western Cape and Eastern Cape. The table below provides contact details for some of the most successful ones. Also visit <http://www.recycle-swap-shop.co.za/community.htm> for information about some other known managers of swap shops.

| FACILITY/<br>PROGRAMME           | LOCATION  | CONTACT PERSON  |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Dunoon RSS</b>                | Inkwenkwezi Secondary School<br>Off Potsdam Road;<br>Dunoon | <b>Maria van der Westhuizen</b><br>074 194 5332<br><a href="mailto:maria@beyonded.org">maria@beyonded.org</a><br><a href="http://www.beyonded.org/projects/swopshop">www.beyonded.org/projects/swopshop</a>   |
| <b>Hermanus<br/>Zwelihle RSS</b> | Zwelihle Township   | <b>Marilyn van der Velde</b><br>Hermanus Swop shop<br>028 312 1242<br>084 240 7425<br><a href="mailto:marilyn@hermanus.co.za">marilyn@hermanus.co.za</a><br><a href="http://www.recycle-swap-shop.co.za">www.recycle-swap-shop.co.za</a>                      |
| <b>Kleinbaai RSS</b>             | Kleinbaai<br>Masekhane<br>Township                          | <b>Inge Altona-de Klerk</b><br>White Shark Projects<br>072 619 1374<br>028 312 3347<br><a href="mailto:office@whitesharkprojects.co.za">office@whitesharkprojects.co.za</a><br><a href="http://www.whitesharkprojects.co.za">www.whitesharkprojects.co.za</a> |
| <b>Jeffrey’s Bay<br/>RSS</b>     | CMR Community<br>Centre Pellsruss                           | <b>Tanja</b><br>084 684 6771<br><a href="mailto:wvjbay@mweb.co.za">wvjbay@mweb.co.za</a><br><a href="http://jbayrecyclingproject.org">http://jbayrecyclingproject.org</a>   |



**Plastic bottles are not trash**

|   |                  |   |
|---|------------------|---|
| Port Elizabeth<br>RSS<br>Rainbow Nation<br>Club Recycling | Helpline Seaview | <b>Penny Anderson</b><br>041 378-1207<br>082 511 3534 |
| Ceres RSS   | N'Duli           | <b>Ms. Cobie Coetzee</b><br>082 468 1486              |
| The Uitenhage<br>Recycling Mula<br>Swop Shop              | Uitenhage        | <b>Quinette Goosen</b><br>0828463327                  |

## How can PETCO help you?

PETCO can *in principle* assist RSS operators. The amount of assistance will depend on the required budget (and given the project viability on a case to case basis if agreed by the PETCO Board) in the following ways:

### Equipment

- Bulk bags
- Bins (various sizes)
- Trolleys
- Cages
- Protective equipment, gloves, boots and overalls

### Education

- Workshops
- Training

### Operational support

- Put you in contact with buy-back centres and intermediate collectors in your area
- Provide assistance with setting up linkages with local authorities and NGO's

## What is PET plastic?



PET is the short name for **Polyethylene Terephthalate**, the type of plastic labelled with the #1 polymer identification code (in a triangle) on or near the bottom of bottles and containers. It is recognisable as an imprint on containers (transparent, clear and/or tinted or any other solid colour). PET is mainly used for **beverage bottles** for (bottled water, carbonated soft drinks, milk, juice, sports and energy drinks), **bottles** for household, personal care and pharmaceutical products **jars, punnets, tubs and trays** for food items, as well as **sheet and film** for packaging.

In South Africa empty, thrown away PET bottles are collected, then flattened and bundled up into big blocks (baled) and delivered to the recycling plant where they are colour sorted, washed, chopped into smaller particles (granulated), re-washed, and extruded (melted



**Plastic bottles are not trash**

down and then made into long thin strings of plastic). Those strings are then cut into small pieces (pellets), before those are then re-used (as recycled plastics) for making a number of items we enjoy every day including fiber filling for our pillows, sleeping bags and winter coats, carpets in cars, fleece shirts but most importantly as recycled PET containers.

Once recycled, from either pre-consumer (such as factory off-cuts) or post-consumer (household) material sources, it is called rPET or Recycled Polyethylene Terephthalate.

## Why collect and recycle PET Plastics?

PET is technically 100% recyclable. It is lightweight and strong and can be transported efficiently and is superior compared to other packaging options with regard to its environmental footprint linked to energy demand in production and resulting Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions.

When recycled PET can further greatly reduce fuel use, energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. PET recycling creates jobs by providing a source of income and helps to save the planet's virgin resources.

The PET that is removed from the waste stream results in less waste going to landfill sites and reduces the amount of natural resources needed to make certain products, thereby reducing the impact on the Earth and environment. Recycling of PET fits very well into the concept of the Circular Economy, and closed loop thinking which looks at a cradle-to-cradle approach and aims to design waste out of a system by ensuring that waste from one product or process becomes a resource for another. This reduces the need for additional resource use and eliminates waste from the outset.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- 1 recycled plastic bottle saves enough energy to power a 60-watt incandescent light bulb for 3 hours.
- Five 2-liter recycled PET bottles produce enough fibrefill to make a winter jacket.
- The energy saved by recycling one plastic bottle will power a computer for 25minutes. Recycling 10 tons of PET plastic saves as much greenhouse gas emissions as removing more than three cars from

## Who is PETCO?

PETCO is a Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO) responsible for managing the PET industry's Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in South Africa. Our mission is to grow the collection and recycling of PET bottles after consumer use. We have done this for over 15 years and are funded by a mandatory EPR fees paid by Producers on the PET plastic that



Plastic bottles are not trash

they place on the market<sup>3</sup>. We invest all our funds in ensuring and encouraging visible recycling, through:

- Contracting and financing PET recyclers who collect bottles, process them into rPET in preparation for the manufacture of new products
- Consumer education and awareness (including schools and community groups)
- Training and joint venture projects (including those with municipalities)
- Equipment support and sponsorship (for collectors), and
- Providing guidance relating to Design for Circularity (for industry).

### Contact PETCO for further information

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Call toll free:</b> | 0860 147 738 (0860 1 is PET)                           |
| <b>Email:</b>          | info@petco.co.za                                       |
| <b>Twitter</b>         | PETCO_SA   |
| <b>Facebook:</b>       | PETPlasticRecyclingSA                                  |
| <b>Instagram:</b>      | PETCO_SA   |
| <b>LinkedIn:</b>       | PETCO, the South African PET Plastic Recycling Company |
| <b>YouTube:</b>        | PETCO South Africa                                     |
| <b>Website:</b>        | www.petco.co.za  |

---

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Section 18 Legislation: <https://petco.co.za/section-18-everything-you-need-to-know/>



Plastic bottles are not trash