

Celebrity hands blueprints for survival of endangered species.

particularly in a recession. She may not have much money left, but her brainchild is well and truly off the ground.

Artists For Life has already spread to America and Hong Kong. Enlisting celebrity help initially required innovation and Ms Davson rose to the creative challenge.

"When 'New Kids on the Block' was in Australia I went to the press conference, as I couldn't contact the band members directly," she said.

"I stood up in front of the media pack and asked them how concerned they were about endangered animals... but I was the only person speaking through a puppet!

"That certainly got their attention and they've been big supporters ever since."

The puppet, dubbed Brian, is an appropriate representative he is the spitting image of a golden snub nose monkey of China — an endangered species.

The willingness to innovate and work hard, has helped by-pass bureaucratic red-tape which would usually have bogged such an ambitious project in a recession quagmire.

"To conceive a project like 'Hands Up' and to run an organisation that's in more than one country you have to be very creative!" Ms Davson said.

"Celebrities wanted to be involved and the hand print is the most simple form of art known to man, plus it's unique since no two hands are the same."

"We are raffling them off regularly. Last week Ian Chappell's hand raised \$3,500 for a research weather station to help protect the last 100 Northern hairy nosed wombats in central Queensland."

But celebrity hand prints are just the start. There are greeting cards and new products including cat collars designed to warn wildlife of approaching domestic predators.

Australian members of the organisation already display art work at the Kirribilli Theatre. The grand finale will be an international touring art exhibition that will be a focal point for thousands of other artists to create works in simultaneous exhibitions.

Ms Davson's creativity will no doubt be tested even more as eventually, Artists For Life will extend to as many countries as possible. Even the poorer nations will be encouraged

to set up local branches of the charity because it is often third-world environments and species that are most at risk.

"Even in our own backyards we may be damaging the natural ecosystems," Ms Davson said.

"For instance, in my suburb, Cherrybrook, new home blocks are often totally cleared of native plants.

"When people move in they may replace them with different varieties — that destroys the environment for any native animals which may be living there."

But Ms Davson doesn't get to see all that much of her suburb — or her husband, Terry Barker, an air force officer and pilot. Her 14-hour, seven-day-a-week commitment to the charity leaves little time for other interests.

Both agree, however, that the dedication is worth it. Ms Davson views the destruction of three species a day worldwide as evidence that we are not only losing our animals but our cultural heritage.

She intends to return to the east one day — there is still plenty of demand for her work. But at the moment Ms Davson's priorities lie firmly with endangered animals.

"My philosophy is that if I only had six months to live what would matter more — my art or this work?"

"Well I think the world can really survive without another Sharon Davson original, but I could help society and the environment through Artists for Life. □

Artists for Life. □

A CHILD-LIKE hand imprint by Paul Newman could be worth a fortune and one

day it will belong to a charitably-minded Australian.

The legendary actor dipped his hand into the paintbox to show his support for endangered animals and became one of a growing legion of celebrities to donate their paw prints.

Other famous hands that have been covered in paint in the name of charity include super-model Linda Evangelista, singers Neil Diamond and Tom Jones, Beverly Hills 90210 heart-throb Luke Perry and the late Fred Hollows.

It's a unique and eye-catching venture that is destined to become a big charity money-spinner at a time when many fundraising groups are suffering.

The "Hands Up" concept is the publicity tool of Artists For Life — an Australian-based group using art to raise awareness of the plight of endangered species.

The driving force behind the organisation is North Shore woman, Sharon Davson. Three years ago Ms Davson, 39, gave up a thriving art career and dove headlong into the unknown.

She gave up a \$3000-a-week income as a painter to work for nothing, and indeed donate her own money to save the world's dwindling wildlife.

It was a risky venture and her many critics said it couldn't be done — to start up a major charity through one person's sheer determination —

Neil Diamond, Tom Jones and Linda Evangelista are among the big names getting behind a unique charity.

LIZ BENNETT reports

Clockwise from top: The helping handprints of Linda Evangelista (life-size reproduction), Luke Perry, Tom Duffin and Sir Jack Brabham.

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Artist For Life, Sharon Davson.