

scope

Contemporary Research Topics

health & wellbeing 9

November 2025

Photo Essay

<https://doi.org/10.34074/scop.3009011>

REKINDLING OUR INNER RESOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, craft practitioners from Resourceful Craft (formerly Rekindle) have journeyed from Ōtautahi / Christchurch to Ōtepoti / Dunedin to facilitate a long weekend of workshops. These are hosted by Otago Polytechnic and Res.Awesome, a company that supports businesses, community groups, events, and individuals to become zero waste.

Founded in 2010 in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland by Juliet Arnott, Rekindle relocated to Ōtautahi / Christchurch in 2012. Rekindle has since evolved to include more than 10 projects such as *Necessary Traditions* (Rekindle, 2018) and *Whole House Reuse*. All have focused on resourcefulness by engaging with local natural and upcycled materials through mindfulness and skill sharing. Resourceful Craft is an offshoot of Rekindle. Its workshops are currently based in community venues in Ōtautahi / Christchurch and Rikona / Lincoln, with additional opportunities in Whakatū / Nelson and Ōtepoti / Dunedin (Rekindle, 2025).

As the hosts, we are a small group of crafters and regenerative practitioners who have become close friends as a result of this ongoing collaboration. Jackie is an occupational therapist and senior lecturer at Otago Polytechnic; Pam is an artist from the Dunedin School of Art with a social collaborative arts-research practice, and Fiona is a zero waste practitioner and chocolatier. The workshops bring together our host group's values of inspiring social and environmental connection, active resourcefulness, and supporting community resilience to improve health and wellbeing for the planet and people. Through valuing and transforming natural resources that are often neglected as waste or deemed a nuisance, we have observed how the workshops teach people to engage with their inner resources, building relationships with each other and connecting to the environment. We value this ongoing exchange which strengthens our own sense of the entangled nature of all life on Earth. We learn new skills in crafting and acknowledging our connection to land. The pieces crafted in the workshops are valued for being handmade as well as useful.

In this photo essay, we share aspects of past workshops from our perspectives as both observers and participants. Photographs by Pam McKinlay.



Figure 1. Tutors 2023 (top left to right): Gemma Stratton, Douglas Horrell, Simone Bendsdorp, and Diana Duncan.

CONNECTING

When thinking about the social aspects of crafting, for this essay, we settled on the theme of "connections" as a way to encompass the many aspects of the workshops. We asked ourselves: what does it mean to make connections? What kind of connections are being made? What are the processes of the connections being made? How does making connections deepen our understanding of the world around us and strengthen the commons in our communities?

A connector is something that links two or more things together. In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell talks about connectivity as a way in which ideas are passed on—how traditions are shared among groups of peers and from generation to generation (Penn, 2019). In our workshops, this role is taken by a tutor who shares ideas and skills. Over the past five years, it has been our pleasure and privilege to come to know Rekindle tutors Diana Duncan, Simone Bensdorp, Douglas Horrell, Gemma Stratton, and Hannah Wilson Black as they travel the country with their philosophy of promoting traditional crafting skills and resourcefulness and connection through their eco-crafts workshops. *The New Zealand Curriculum* recommends that students be encouraged to value, connect to, and care for the natural environment, and that an approach through crafting (which is recreative, skilful, and immersive) “is a natural fit for supporting this goal” (Education Gazette editors, 2014).

Rekindle honours and acknowledges tangata whenua and tikanga. While they are not teaching traditional Māori ‘crafts,’ they acknowledge the whakapapa (genealogy) of the natural resources in our backyards and teach people to value these as taonga (treasures) instead of treating them as ‘weeds’ and ‘waste’ destined for landfill. The workshops not only create opportunities for learning new skills but offer a lens for re-looking while creating. The ‘making-knowledges’ shared by hands-on instruction offer a way of looking at what we can create by looking at all life around and within us. To connect to life is to connect to every aspect of our lives. Most important of all is to connect to ourselves, and to our own movement within life.

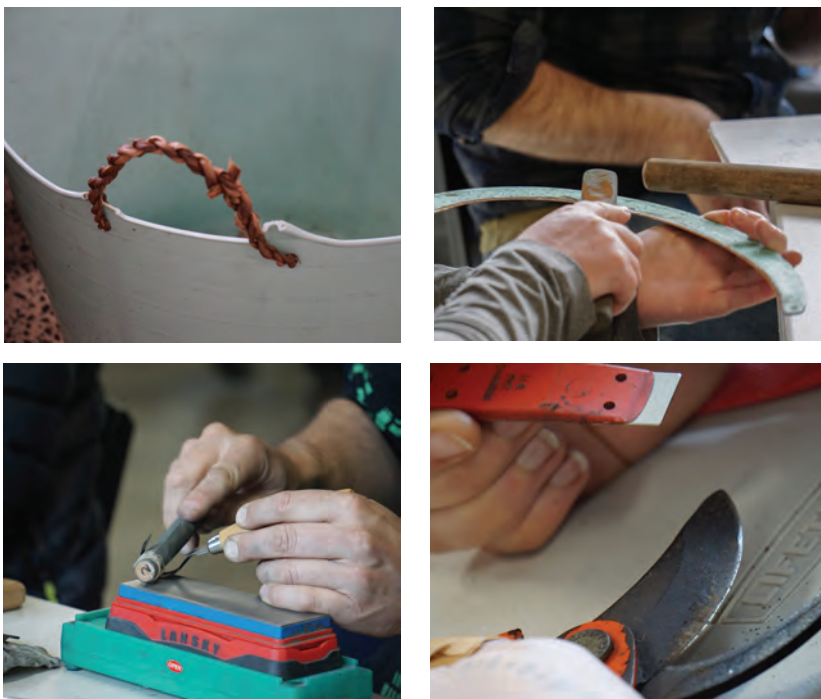


Figure 2. Composite image of a variety of materials used in workshops. The unrefined imprints of nature are apparent in the materials such as the bits and insects in the wool.

RESOURCEFULNESS

The word resource was originally derived from the Latin *resurgō* meaning to rise again (Rekindle 2025). Being resourceful means rethinking our connection to our planet and our culture of over-consumption. The fast-paced quest for the latest off-the-shelf consumer goods not only places an environmental burden on the planet, but it also fails to meet our psychological needs. Home décor items are often marketed as interior ‘fashion’ to change with the seasons. Disposable design fails to consider the energy and cost investments in materials, and products designed to have short life-spans are often destined for the tip, as the next ‘season’ of products rolls out. In this economic and social environment, we need to consider ways to make, mend, maintain, and to reduce our consumption. Investing our time in learning and creating hand-crafted items is a way to exit the psychological demands of consumption and to instead fulfil our personal needs.

We learn from our Rekindle visitors that being mindful of resources means being aware of the seasons, times of harvest, and the uses of materials in their various forms, or their preservation and preparation for other uses. Are the leaves we are gathering green or fresh fallen or weathered; is the bark green or over-wintered? How should we select for lowest environmental impact? When is the best time to harvest materials for natural dyes, what parts of plants are best to use, and what plants need protecting and should never be used? What plants will give us fibres for use in string, what parts of the plant can we bend or carve into useful tools and objects? Where can we gather and where not? For example, with *tī kōuka* (cabbage trees), we only gather the fallen leaves, in order to protect the native cabbage tree moth, or *te pūrēhua noho tī* (Manaaki Whenua, n.d.). What are other overlooked resources in our back yards, our ‘waste-lands’ and forest edges that can be transformed with patience and skill into crafted objects which are both useful and beautiful, for instance ivy, or blackberry bramble? These ideas imprint upon us a whole world of previously unseen but readily available resources.



Figure 3. Composite image of variety of materials used in workshops. The unrefined imprints of nature are apparent in the materials such as the bits and insects in the wool.



CIRCLES OF ENGAGEMENT

Being truly resourceful connects us within communities as we share the resources we have. Working with natural materials using traditional technologies is a way of reconnecting to the world around and within us (Shrestha et al., 2025). Last year Fi (Fiona) introduced us to the kaupapa (the correct way of doing things) of Hua Parakore—the Māori Organics Framework (Hutchings, 2021). This means being mindful of what is in the local environment and how it grows, and the mantra of stop, watch, listen. Where does the sun rise, and where are the prevailing winds? Where is the rain shadow? What is the tikanga (the right way of doing something) of gathering? All parts of the plant material gathered are honoured. Nothing goes in the ‘rubbish bin.’

We are mindful not only of the gathering of materials and resources, but in providing the processes that allow the connections and mahi to occur. It is the way in which spaces are set up for mahi and for kai. Kai (food) is another connector, through a shared lunch with people often bringing dishes prepared from food they have grown in their own gardens. Kōrero (conversation, discussion) around the table furthers the building of relationships which in turn allow for working together. People are open as we share stories of why we have come together to experience these workshops: having a go at something new, personal growth, supporting a friend who is coming, ‘me’ time away from family, or a restorative break from stressful life events such as death and illness.

All the workshops take place in one open space, with groups of tables where a hard surface is required. Sometimes we work in circles. Participants and practitioners stand or sit wherever is most comfortable for the tasks at hand.

Crafting is way for people to get into a “flow” state by dis-connecting from intrusive daily thoughts (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2005). It is a state where we are so involved in the task that we don’t notice time passing. We aren’t simultaneously thinking over other things—making plans for the future or rehashing the past (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2005). Although she did not use the term ‘flow,’ occupational therapist Mary Riley identifies the same attributes as having positive effects on mood in her address for the 1961 Eleanor Clarke Slagle Lecture: “Man, through the use of his hands, as they are energized by mind and will, can influence the state of his own health” (1963, p. 18).

We begin by connecting hands to the material and having an awareness of others engaging in a shared task around us. Mark Jones, senior lecturer and outdoor education coordinator at Auckland University of Technology, points out that ‘relating to others’ is a key competency of The New Zealand Curriculum:

Crafting often requires students to help one another, as well as share knowledge and skills. Inevitably, crafting creates a medium through which students can get to know and understand others. Crafting also presents the opportunity to coach others, to assist them, to gift a crafted object to someone else, and simply to engage with others in a common task. (cited in Education Gazette editors, 2014)

Crafting requires patience, focus, persistence, and problem solving which are essential in building inner resilience (Einarsson, 2021). Engaging in a common task such as a workshop enables people to get to know each other and to understand other points of view. The finished items are embedded with memories of the creative process and personal experience. They become “echo objects”—a term invented by Barbara Stafford in *Echo Objects: The Cognitive Work of Images* (2007). For Stafford such creative pieces can evoke emotional and cognitive responses for the maker by sensory means. The objects not only embody the maker’s physical gestures but invite the viewer to connect by not only looking but also through touch, texture, and appreciating the material presence of the item.



Figure block 4. Composite image of workshops in progress, circles of engagement.

CRAFTING

Traditional craft objects are designed to accommodate the shape, movements, or needs of humans. Crafting does not celebrate the 'creative genius,' but the creativity of everyday life. It is an embodiment of the interconnections between tools and hands, and resources.

Research into creativity in makerspaces found there were three distinct practices, described as crafting, connecting, and commoning (Einarsson, 2021). "Crafting," Einarsson writes, "is an individual, recreative, skilful, and immersive practice that connects to an individual's personal workspace" (Einarsson, 2021, p. 1). The makers' practices inform a discussion of the agency. "Connecting" is "creative [and] object-oriented" with the potential to connect to everyday life situations, while "commoning is a social and communal practice that connects" makers in and to the community (Einarsson, 2021, p. 1). The Rekindle workshops are inclusive spaces open to all levels of skill and ability, from those who have never made anything before to experienced crafters who are adding a new technique to their skill set. A crafted item can assist in transfer and retention of learning not just about making, but about putting ourselves into the making.



Figure block 5. Composite image of hands-on skills and hands-on mahi with workshop materials.





LAST THOUGHTS

Being resourceful means rethinking our connection to our planet and how our culture of over-consumption and depleting natural resources both defines us and fails to meet our social, psychological, and spiritual needs. To be truly resourceful we must develop healthy relationships with, and become intimately connected to, the places and people around us and the resources around and within us.

People are social beings with a need to collaborate, share, and develop relationships to both sustain life and to live a meaningful life—one where the things we do define and build our own identity and contribute to our communities' identities, values, and beliefs. Such a life is one where we can acknowledge our connectedness with nature, where nature is us and we are nature.

As October rolls around for another year, we look forward to inviting the Resourceful Craft tutors to Ōtepoti once more to share in their mahi of rekindling through crafting.



Figure 6. Composite image of items ‘made from scratch’—from resource to product.



Pam McKinlay (Tangata Tiriti) has a background in applied science and history of art. As an artist she works in collaboration with other artists locally and nationally, in community outreach, and education projects around the theme of climate change, sustainability and biodiversity. She is an independent curator and convenor of the Art+Science Project based in Ōtepoti Dunedin, New Zealand. Her writing has been widely published including, in 2024, a book on her ArtScience and Community work, *Flows Like Water*.

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Jackie Herkt is an Academic Leader and Principal Lecturer in the School of Occupational Therapy at Otago Polytechnic. After working for many years as an occupational therapist working with children she moved to working with adults and later into teaching roles. She is an avid weaver and since 2020 has helped Pam McKinlay with hosting Rekindle Eco-crafts workshops in Ōtepoti Dunedin, using materials such as ivy and cabbage tree leaves which are often overlooked as “waste” materials instead of being valued as resources.

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Fiona Clements (Waitaha, Kāti Māmoe, Kāi Tahu) is the former director of Ōtepoti / Dunedin based business Res.Awesome, a company that supported businesses, community groups, events and individuals to become zero waste. In 2022, Fiona participated in the Cacao Emissary training in Ōtautahi and in 2023 set up as a chocolatier manufacturing cacao and dark chocolate in Waitati under the brand Ka kā wā Confectionery.

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