

'Container ship' Clare Sams 2023 - Recycled textile collage

### **CLARE SAMS FOREWORD**

As Environmentalist in Residence I was able to experience the unique nature of the spaces offered by Suffolk Libraries to local communities. At their core each library is a place to access learning, making them an invaluable platform to explore the environmental impact of fashion and textiles.

Local people use their libraries for social and emotional support groups, which I visited to deliver inclusive and accessible textiles workshops focussing on mending and repair. Participants of all ages could learn new skills and build on existing knowledge of sustainability through these creative activities.

As a textiles artist the libraries nurtured my creative practice through research, development and exhibiting opportunities. Suffolk Libraries provides a safe and supportive environment which is accessible and welcoming to everyone in the community.

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### **MENDING AND REPAIR**

"Learning environments and environmental learning: How community spaces provide a platform for teaching sustainability through the lens of fashion and textiles."

By C J Sams



### SUFFOLK LIBRARIES' ENVIRONMENTALIST IN RESIDENCE

The Environmentalist in Residence project aims to share ideas and advocate for environmental action, acting as a catalyst for learning about conservation and sustainability. The project offers programmes, workshops and facilitated community conversations to advocate for a better and more sustainable future. Generously funded by Arts Council England the residency explores the cross-pollination of ideas between creativity and environmental responsibility.

#### **About Suffolk Libraries**

Suffolk Libraries is the charity which runs the county's library service. We nurture children's literacy, support vulnerable people, and promote wellbeing across Suffolk. Our libraries sit at the heart of the community, and we are nationally recognised for our work. We were officially granted National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status in April 2018 and the programme aims to develop libraries as accessible, creative community spaces.

The production of this book has been supported by Suffolk Libraries. We are thrilled to collaborate with Clare Sams and hope this book will provide opportunities to highlight the restorative power of textiles.

This research examines my residency at Suffolk Libraries 2023 - 2024. As Environmentalist in Residence my role was to research and promote environmental issues within libraries throughout the county.

As a textile artist my focus was on the issues caused by global fashion and textiles corporations as one of the most polluting industries worldwide. In the UK shoppers buy more clothing per capita than any other country in Europe. Millions of tonnes of clothing are manufactured, bought, and then thrown away every year for the sake of fashion.

This wasteful cycle leads to shocking amounts of textiles ending up being burnt or going to landfill, comparable to one rubbish truck every second. Less than 1% of unwanted fashion and textile waste goes on to be recycled in new fabrics or clothing.

A staggering 300,000 tonnes of unwanted fashion and textiles ends up in UK household waste, going straight to landfill without being reused or recycled. This is a significant issue to us all as consumers of clothing and textiles in everyday life.



'Maersk' Clare Sams 2023 - Recycled textile collage

There is a Ghanaian phrase 'obroni wawu' meaning dead white mans clothing. This reflects the expansive trade in second hand textiles which is sold in markets throughout Africa.

Much of this clothing comes from the UK, cast-offs which are bought from charity shops by rag merchants. These garments are then sorted, with low grade items being shipped to be sold to developing nations. Not all of this exported used clothing has a resale value, so will end its life in polluting the land in huge landfill sites.

This practice of exporting waste has a devastating impact on developing counties, albeit in the guise of charitable donations and recycling textiles.

CLCTHES SHOES

'Clothes and Shoes' Clare Sams 2023 - Recycled textile collage

The earliest known example of a sewn garment is the 'Tarkhan dress' which was discovered in an Egyptian tomb and is believed to be 5000 years old.

Before the onset of industrialisation and globalisation, fabrics and clothing were always highly valued, being tended and mended with care to ensure longevity.

The throwaway attitude to cheap fashion is a modern phenomenon which is leading to abusive labour conditions and polluting environmental practices.

Re-learning simple sewing and mending skills, which were previously commonplace, can act as a way to view clothing as worthy of repair rather than something disposable.





Participant feedback 2023





### "REMINDED ME OF MY GRANDMA."

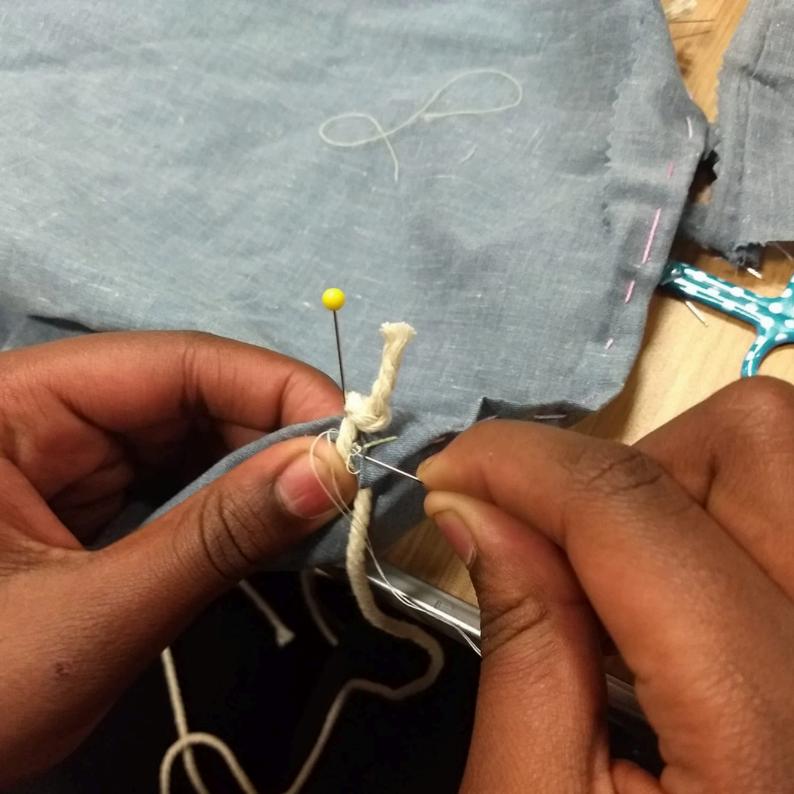
Mending helps us to develop a more meaningful relationship with clothing, household fabrics, and even soft toys.

The process of undertaking repairs creates an 'emotional durability', which increases each time the item is mended, with these acts of care adding to the narrative of the object.

Well loved clothing with visible repairs serve as significant symbols of the sustained connection with the garment, and a sustainable approach to fashion use, re-use, and repair.







# "REALLY AMAZING! INTERESTING CONVERSATIONS AND AN ABSOLUTE DREAM TO GET HELP TO RESTORE A VERY PRECIOUS OLD RAG DOLL."

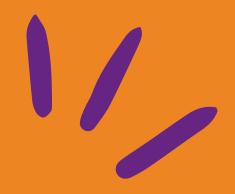




The practice of sewing is believed to help to improve physical and mental wellbeing. Whilst mending, these therapeutic benefits are paired with concepts of sustainability and reducing your individual impact on the planet. Thus, creating a holistic activity of both self-care and caring for the earth's resources.

These benefits aligned well with the 'Open Space' wellbeing sessions offered within Suffolk Libraries





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What a lovely way to spend a Saturday morning - sewing peacefully and chatting to fellow fans of mending.





Felixstowe Library was an ideal location to discuss the impact of global fashion and textiles, as the town is home to the largest international shipping port in the UK. Textile crafts act as a forum for discussing difficult subjects, whilst offering opportunities to learn new skills and improve confidence.

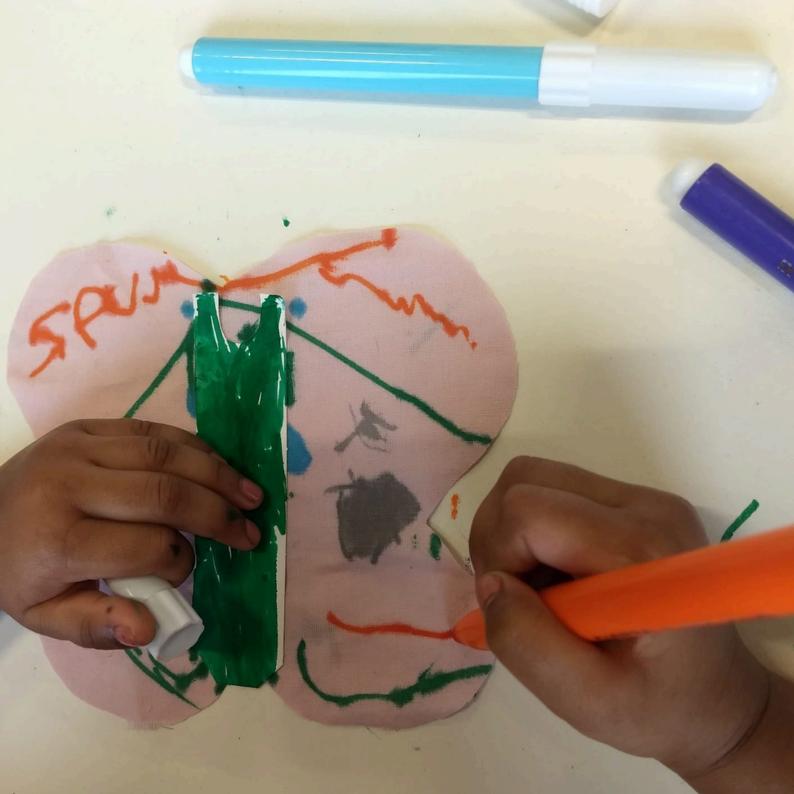
Participants enjoyed creating a large woven rag rug using old bedlinen cut into long strips. This collaborative textile artwork used shades of blues and yellows to represent the sea and shore of this coastal town. Alongside this activity there was the opportunity to create small hand woven bookmarks to take home, creating a lasting memento of their experiences.



Me and my little girl had a lovely time making butterflies together. Everyone at Ipswich Job Centre was super friendly and made us feel very welcome. Good use of everyday materials.



Participant feedback Joy at the Jobcentre 2024



# "THANKS SO MUCH FOR CREATING A SAFE AND FUN ENVIRONMENT."

Throughout the residency I became aware of the unique nature of the spaces offered by Suffolk libraries to local communities. As a place of learning, they were an invaluable space to discuss the environmental impact of fashion and textiles.

As community spaces they offered individuals and groups the facilities to learn new skills and build on existing knowledge through inclusive and accessible workshops.

Most importantly the libraries serves as safe spaces which offered a supportive and welcoming environment for everyone in the community.





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Great session, Clare got the girls very engaged.
There was no pressure to get a piece finished,
just having a go at sewing.

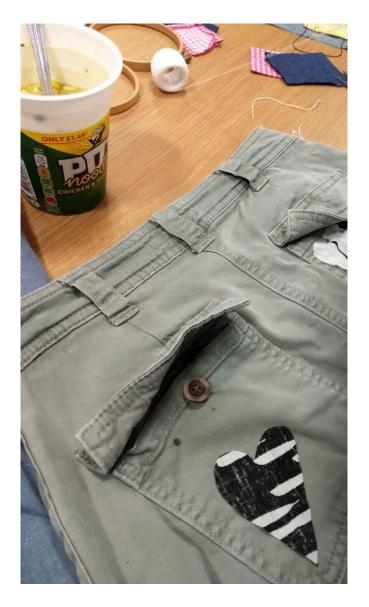
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Library staff feedback Girls Group session 2023

Libraries can provide safe spaces for young people to go after school or during the holidays. Gainsborough Community Library offers free creative activities for young people, and a hot snack too.

During my time with this group, we discussed the benefits of mending and recycling textiles through different perspectives: cost of living, the environment, and wellbeing. The young people tried a range of activities including mending, patching, and up-cycling old fabrics into something new.

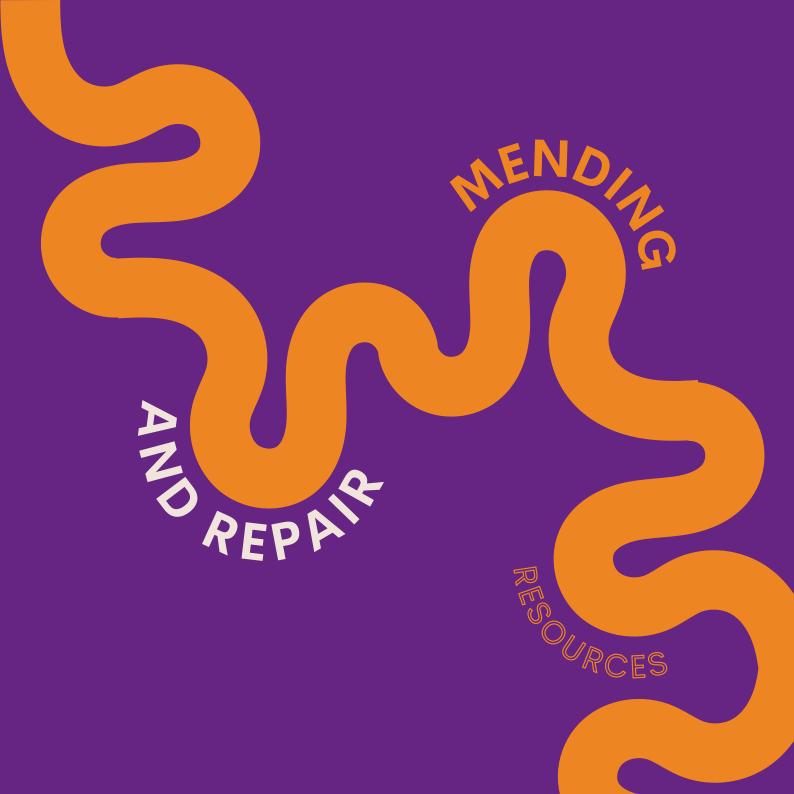


# "WONDERFUL TO HAVE THIS PROJECT ON THE MOBILE LIBRARY! GREAT TO LEARN A NEW SKILL AND HAVE SOMETHING MENDED."

Suffolk Libraries has three mobile libraries serving villages in the county. Mobile libraries can offer rural communities access to wider services.

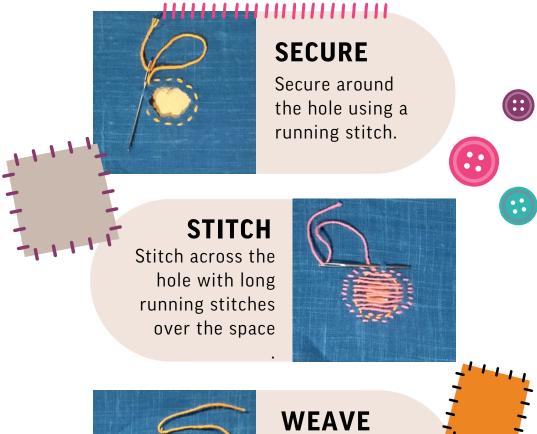
I spent time on one of the routes to demonstrate mending, and to engage library customers in conversations on the topic of the environmental impact of fashion and textiles. We also explored the benefits of mending clothing as a way to help with the cost of living.





## **3 EASY STEPS**FOR MENDING BEAUTIFULLY

### **MENDING A HOLE**





Weave over and under the long stitches to make a woven mesh.

### 3 EASY STITCHS FOR MENDING BEAUTIFULLY

### WHICH STITCH IS WHICH?



Running stitch -An easy stitch for patching and repairs





Back stitch -A stronger stitch which is good for mending seams.







Blanket stitch -A strong stitch to secure the edges of fabric.

## 2 EASY STEPS FOR REPAIRING A HOLE

### **WITH A PATCH**

