



# BEST PRACTICE IN ADULT EDUCATION FOR A JUST TRANSITION

**Textile Up-Cycling Project**  
Producing Upcycled Materials  
for Sale

**JULY 2024**



Co-funded by  
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# Textile Up-Cycling Project

## – Producing Upcycled Materials for Sale

### Context and Initiative Details

Name of the initiative	<u>Textile Up-cycling Project, Roscommon Women’s Network</u>
Geographical scope	Local
Sources of funding	Environmental Protection Agency’s Green Enterprise programme
Duration of the initiative	The initiative evolved from a 2019 pilot project. The basis course covers 8 weekly sessions.
Target audience	Women of all ages from across Co. Roscommon particularly those from the most marginalized and vulnerable communities
Social justice focus area	Just Transition
Goals of the initiative	This project trains individuals and groups in the repair and reuse of materials and produces upcycled items for sale as part of the circular economy. By upcycling waste and unwanted textiles through its training and its fledgling social enterprise, WECAN raises awareness of the Circular Economy, as well as educates and empowers women to generate flexible employment opportunities while protecting the environment in a rural context.

### Good Practices Description

#### Stakeholder engagement in the process

Roscommon Women’s Network have a charity shop in Castlerea, Co. Roscommon and back in 2018 the volunteers who ran the shop queried what happens to the textile items that don’t sell or are slightly damaged and unsuitable for sale. Like most charity shops, those items were collected in bulk by an external company and the final destination for the textiles was mostly unknown. The women volunteers thought more could be done at a grassroots level to solve the problem of textile waste and following a fact finding mission to the Rediscovery Centre in Dublin, proposed RWN coordinate training in upcycling textiles. The RWN manager, worked with the Local Authority Environment Awareness officer to secure funding to run a Pilot Upcycling Textiles Training Programme which ran in 2019 for 8 weeks with 10 participants.

#### Methodology used

The course focuses on building the skills and confidence of the women in repurposing waste materials, and so is very practically based around demonstration and practice. This is balanced with knowledge acquisition around sustainability, textile waste, the practice of re-using and fast fashion.

#### Teaching approaches

- Practical demonstrations
- Sewing and design techniques and practice
- Video input on textile waste
- Group discussion around textile waste and fast fashion

## Challenges and outcomes

### Key factors contributing to success

Success was based on developing skills and knowledge that the women could use immediately and see practical results in terms of items for themselves and their families, but also items that through sales gave back to Roscommon Women's Network. The women learned in a supportive environment and gained a real sense of empowerment. Women joining later iterations were also inspired by the success of their predecessors.

The success of RWN CycleUp stems from this environmental social enterprise having developed from a training need identified at a grassroots level and implemented by a well-established and trusted community development project that is Roscommon Women's Network.

### Encountered difficulties and challenges

When CycleUp began, there were barriers to securing sustainable funding at the time as environment initiatives were not really being included in many training or social enterprise funding calls. There was also a difficulty in finding suitably qualified and experienced tutors in the area of upcycling textiles, so RWN was keen to get its own former participants and volunteers trained as tutors and attached to the project.

### Recommendations

RWN has learned that when delivering courses and even half day workshops there is the task of changing customer perception about purchasing second hand and upcycled items. This is a micro level recommendation.

### Impact

The participants are women of all ages, but particularly those coming from the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in society. The upcycling textiles tutors are former trainees themselves and have subsequently joined RWN's social enterprise as production volunteers and have also gained a tutoring qualification. Through this process the tutors have become a working example of the circular economy allowing trainees to see sustainable development in action.

Additionally a social enterprise has been set up – CycleUp – which has its own online store ([CycleUp Store - Roscommon Women's Network upcycled fashion \(rwn.ie\)](#)) and also carries out commissions for organisations to produce environmentally friendly items such as souvenirs, aprons and bags. Through this enterprise the learners have gained confidence and self-esteem and are able to pass on key messages about recycling and reusing to still wider audiences. RWN has just been awarded funding by the Irish Government's Dept of Rural and Community Development to grow production in the CycleUp social enterprise.

Learners communicate their learnings about textile waste and the opportunities it presents to the wider community, their family and friends, leading to more people interested in doing training and people purchasing products via the social enterprise.

We make a conscious effort to make sure our 2 free 8-week courses that we run every year are primarily targeted at women who come from a marginalised and/or disadvantaged background.