

Hutt South Timebank: Small Things Big Impacts



Jill Lawry is a member of the Hutt South Timebank. She's also a tetraplegic. This is a story of how the small things that a local network provides, make a major contribution to her life. It's also the story of how she in turn, contributes 'small things' which add up to the building of community.

In April, 2011, Jill fell from a garden bed head-first onto concrete, smashing one vertebra and compressing another. With numerous surgeries and seven months spent in Christchurch's Burwood Hospital spinal unit, she was confined to a wheelchair having only minimal use of her hands. Subsequently she moved to Lower Hutt to be closer to family.

Jill knew she needed a key into community re-engagement. Having worked previously as a food technology teacher she tried being back in the classroom as an assistant. It didn't work – she felt hugely frustrated – she wanted to teach, not help out.

Then she saw a local newspaper ad about Hutt South Timebank. It was a life-changing moment. She got in touch and began regular chats with coordinator Kirsten Gendall. The Timebank philosophy is that every human being has value and we all have skills and abilities that someone else can use. No skill is too small to make a difference in someone's life. The network uses a database to display the abilities and experience members are willing to offer each other. It advertises specific requests for help and records the time exchanged between members in hourly 'trades'. It is a cash-free system with an hour of any activity having the same value as any other. This a model where small, everyday interactions have proved that they can build the foundations of true community.

Through the network Jill began to meet locals and make trades. She offered her sewing skills, and time tutoring children with dyslexia. Timebankers donated fabric and helped her with cutting it. She's now able to sew aprons, tea towels and other items to sell and equally significantly, she's made connections. A gift of fabric pieces and the time to cut them out has little value in the mainstream commercial/social paradigm but the independence gained and relationships nurtured have had a huge impact for Jill.



Through Timebank she will soon have free access to a registered commercial kitchen and be able to resume another income-generating activity – baking. Both these product areas are part of the personal sales plan included in her aim of creating a co-op of craft-makers who will eventually have a village market outlet in Lower Hutt.

Timebank has received significant input from Jill, both in one-to-one exchanges and at an organisational level. She is a sounding board for Kirsten and was a key instigator in establishing the Timebank advisory group to help support Kirsten and the fledgling organisation.

In exchange of Timebank credits, Jill organises events for the network, including a birthday celebration at the Hutt river market where 365 cupcakes were given away to mark Timebank's first year in operation.

The reciprocity principle embodied by Timebank means that small exchanges have enabled Jill to rebuild her life. She's able to create once more, to earn income and to be connected with, and appreciated by others. As she's met, mingled and been befriended by her new community she's also used her skills to stabilise and enrich it. In the Timebank world view no person or exchange is too small to matter and Jill's situation is a keen example of the power of 'small and local'.

For more information about Hutt South Timebank:

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