



How to run an Upcycling event – The jam jar challenge

What is upcycling?

Upcycling is a way of updating or re-creating pieces that will give them a new lease of life. During your session, people should expect to upcycle one simple item that they can take away but you also want to inspire them to think creatively and try other ideas out at home.

This session focuses on a task involving jam jars and is designed to give those taking part a flavour of what can be achieved with an everyday object and a little imagination. However, upcycling can involve absolutely anything and, if you have a keen upcycler in your volunteering network, you may want to consider a different format.

Upcycling furniture, clothes, storage boxes and lampshades all make great upcycling projects. Have a browse through the photo galleries at <http://www.diynetwork.com/upcycle-repurpose-refinish/package/index.html> for ideas.

TOP TIP

It's a great to have some examples of upcycling on display at your session if you can. You could even follow PACT's idea by digging out old gents' ties that are filling up a drawer and turning them into a circular rug or throw – but bear in mind that one throw uses 90 ties so it'll take some preparation!

[Source: <http://www.penrithact.org.uk/upcycling-workshop/646>]



Why run an Upcycling event?

Recycling materials is great for the environment but reusing an item is better in that it doesn't need to undergo any carbon intensive industrial process to turn it into something useful again. Your event will reduce the amount of perfectly good items ending up in Cumbrian bins as you raise awareness within your community about the benefits of upcycling.

Furthermore, something one person has finished with could well be adapted by somebody else and given a second life. Reducing the need to buy new and saving the community money makes it an all-round winner!

This session should take no longer than 2 hours.

What things do I need?

- A practical venue, taking into account numbers of people you might expect
- Jam jars – Ask people to bring their own along but it's always worth having spares just in case. These should be washed out with the labels removed.
- A selection of paint and paint brushes. If you can get hold of any craft / chalk paints then great, otherwise any paint will do.
- Plenty of scissors, glue, decorative pieces, coloured twine for those finishing touches.
- Tables and chairs for carrying out the upcycling.
- Refreshments (depending on the venue).
- And if you can...previously upcycled items on display or images of upcycled items for inspiration.

Running the session

Before the event

Gathering materials

Gather together pots of paint, paint brushes, twine and other small decorative pieces. Also collect some jam jars: ask people to bring their own but a few spares are good in case anyone forgets. As well as these items, you will need to provide sheets to protect tables and floors and cleaning equipment. All this could be quite expensive so get your volunteers to ask around for whatever can be begged or borrowed – it's often worth approaching businesses to see if they will donate any of the necessary materials and equipment.

Managing risk

Undertake a risk assessment on the upcycling activity and ensure you implement the actions needed to reduce any risks. This should include checking any tools are fit for purpose and providing safety equipment where needed – see Resource A for an example risk assessment.

It is also good practice to display a disclaimer along the lines of:

“Persons taking part in a community upcycling event do so at their own risk. For your own protection, please take all reasonable measures to check the condition of any items or tools used. [Cumbria County Council] accepts no liability for any claim or loss resulting from any repairs or alterations made during the event.”

But remember this will not absolve you of responsibility if you have not taken adequate steps to prevent incidents.

On the day

1) Introductions and icebreaker – approx. 5 mins

By way of icebreaker, ask people to introduce themselves and say if they have any experience of upcycling. As a group, see if you can agree on a good definition of upcycling.



2) Setting the scene – approx. 15 mins

Give a short talk on upcycling. You could start with the following quote from a local upcycler:

“Upcycling furniture started me thinking about all the things that we throw away on a daily basis and the fact that these still had a useful life span ... I soon discovered it wasn't just furniture that was discarded but all sorts of interesting things that could be repurposed....Today no skip, scrap yard or old barn is safe from my eagle eye!”

(Ursh Stevens, Refunk'd, <http://www.refunked.com/home.html>)

The rest of your talk could cover the following areas...

- What can I upcycle? Describe how upcycling helps both the environment and the community, using information from the introduction to this guide. State that, while this session focuses on the jam jar task, upcycling can be applied to almost anything, any room in the house and everything is a potential project.
- What do I need to get started? Talk about the tools needed and the type of paint – usually chalk or clay paints are best for furniture, although craft paint is fine for smaller items.
- Where do I get items? Explain that signing up to freegle gives people access to items being advertised for free in your local area and suggest local charity shops.
- Where do I get further inspiration and information on techniques? Point people towards setting up a pinterest account, looking at the upcycling hour on freegle or other websites listed below.

3) Jam Jars task session 1: Painting - approx. 30 mins

Give an explanation of what they will be making in the session, keeping it short and simple. Then get stuck into the practical task:

- Select your jar and your preferred colour of paint.
- Paint it – demonstrating how, as well as straightforward painting with a brush, you can also create patterns by cutting interesting shapes from address stickers or masking tape that can be removed once the paint has dried.
- Leave the jam jars to dry.

4) Refreshments – approx. 20 mins

5) Group discussion 1 – approx. 15 mins

As the jars are drying, lead the group on a discussion around upcycling that they have already undertaken and ask them to share their experience with the group. This could be a good moment to outline some principles for bigger projects like furniture upcycling. People will want to know:

- What they'd need – sandpaper, clay paints, good quality brushes and a screwdriver to remove handles, along with a piece of furniture (eg from freegle, ebay or a charity shop).
- How to go about it – the basic process is to sand the item down and clean it; apply thin layers of paint or a wash of watered-down paint for a more subtle look; and then protect it with thin layers of varnish.
- Interesting ways to finish pieces, such as distressing with sandpaper or creating crackle-glazed effect by using a hairdryer.

6) Jam Jars task session 2: Decorating - approx. 30 mins

This is where the fun really starts. Encourage people to be as subtle or extravagant as they see fit by adding brightly-coloured twine, ribbons or stickers, for example. Finish by applying the decorative touches to the jam-jars. If you can get hold of any artificial flowers then a photograph of the vases produced will be great as a memento and for your marketing!

7) Group discussion 2 and take away task

Set a challenge for the group to take on a bigger challenge and upcycling a larger item of furniture of their choosing. Go round the group and ask each if they have an item that could use a facelift and as a group discuss the type of upcycling that could be used. Also encourage the group to agree to share any tools or other resource between themselves.

Once done, suggest they take a photograph and share it on the group's facebook page or by another means appropriate to your group.

8) The team photo

Just before you end your event, ask everybody to pose with their jar for a team photo. Again add this to your facebook page and share it with us so we can promote your success.

Further information and support

Impact Furniture Services have second hand stores across Cumbria and they often have events or displays of upcycled furniture: <http://www.impacthousing.org.uk/impact-furniture-services>

Freegle is a great place to get things for upcycling. Find your local group at <http://ilovefreegle.org/>

Penrith Action for Community Transition lists events happening locally, including upcycling workshops, at <http://www.penrithact.org.uk/events>

Riversmeet in Cockermouth have news and events on design and upcycling – they may have some upcycling events coming up at <http://riversmeet.org/design-reuse>

Right2Work are a social enterprise bringing a new lease of life to old furniture, while providing employment and training opportunities for disabled and disadvantaged people across South Lakeland. They run a collection service from their workshop in Kendal: <http://www.right2work.org.uk/>

Annie Sloan's website has instructions on a range of painting techniques for upcycling furniture: http://www.anniesloan.co.uk/acatalog/copy_of_How_to_use_the_paint.html

Get inspiration for upcycling furniture at **The Woodshed** in Kendal. You can view some of their products online at <http://www.woodmad.co.uk/woodshed/woodshed.html> ...

Or browse through the photo galleries at <http://www.diynetwork.com/upcycle-repurpose-refinish/package/index.html> or <http://www.facebook.com/freegle> for ideas and instructions.