



Ōtautahi Creative Spaces Trust

THE STORY OF OUR SPACE
Our space. Our words. Our stories.



“Well I have had a long period of mental health issues. Eating disorder, depression, anxiety. But I have all this stuff inside. Feelings from learning that I am okay and that I am a beautiful person. And that things happen, you know. In the earthquake I lost my house and my relationship. My family has moved away. It is still hard every day. But this art class has done so much. In my head, all of these things are going. I am just full of all these ideas that I want to do.

And the love. Even the love coming up the stairs this morning. It was so nice. I don't have a lot of close friends. They have dissipated through my journey for one reason or another. And I grieve. Especially my last friend. We had been friends for about twenty-five or thirty years. But I need to just move on. I can't let that hold me back, past relationships and things like that”

“I was very nervous about coming because I am not good at doing art with people around. And look at me now. So I was very nervous, but for some reason as soon as I came in here I felt as if I could experiment with whatever I wanted, and I knew nothing. There is a particularly unique atmosphere here. I don't know how they have come to that but it has been really good. It has made me feel as if I can go to other classes now and do more stuff in front of other people, which is a big breakthrough for me.”

“What brought me through to here. A complete breakdown after an experience, about 18 months or so after the quakes. My whole everything completely shifted and changed. I physically wasn’t physically coping. Neurologically I wasn’t coping with the ongoing trauma of every single quake and what that does to your brain. At some point I had this spectacular, complete, breakdown. And you have to go through psych services. Arriving at To Toi Rangata as part of Otautahi Creative Spaces has been my birthing place. And my blessing, really. It has brought me back to a completely different place in my life now. Brought me forward, really. So, I guess where people say that it’s not a breakdown, it is a breakthrough. **This is my breakthrough section.** So the hard road of the breakdown and then trying to get well enough to come through and to breakthrough. That’s been a journey.

I find that art is a dynamic way of connecting with self. It is very soft and gentle. With the trauma that I have been through, I was incredibly sensitive. And really really vulnerable. And I didn’t need anything being dug at. This way I get to move in my own journey, my own process, and in my own way, in my own natural timing. Which is really great. So, I had gotten to the stage where I had all this beauty inside of me, but I just couldn’t express it anymore...

I almost didn’t actually turn up for the first session. That’s how hard it was to come out of where I was, in such isolation.

But the desire to move forward was stronger, so I took the risk. And it was well worth taking. And some days are challenging. They are really challenging. But I know now, after being here for eight or nine sessions that I really have strength here. I know that even when I am feeling really really bad, I can come here and be really safe and actually just go about my day and my journey. I always feel completely different by the time I have actually left. A much better place. So, what makes it easy to be here is...that. Yeah, that. And getting to express myself. I am enjoying that process. And I guess **my kids are enjoying seeing me take flight again.**”



“I wanted to try to get past my past and move forward and have a **better future.**”

“I think I realized that I could have a creative outlet that was quite personal and quite maintained and internal. Because it is perfectly quiet. I have actually found it really therapeutic. I really missed the opportunity to be creative in my life, because at the moment there’s nothing much apart from raising my kid. And because that is quite an intense operation because of various difficulties he has, it has just been an opportunity to do something for myself, but also as part of a group. I think being part of the group is very sustaining. And also seeing the progress that people have made, because, you know, initially we didn’t know each other and we didn’t know what to expect and some people were at a different stage than others. And now everybody is producing stuff and it is really wonderful and diverse. I think it has helped all of us, really, and it is great to see that.”

“I just wanted to have something to do and take my mind off things. **And just see what happens,** if I could create something interesting.”

“When my house was stuck in the red zone and was going to be pulled down, the grief was immense. I had lived there for twenty nine years. One day I ripped pieces of wood off the fence. They were quite old, but they were part of my home. The only part that I actually have left. I have a piece of it, it’s got actually two beautiful knots in it. I am going to sand it down and paint lotus flowers, three lotus flowers, on it. The lotus flower for me is very important. I went to the Lotus Heart in town early on in my journey. The lotus flower to me was new beginnings.

To me that is the moving on part. Part of my grieving. But the lotus flowers are representing me moving on. And I am moving on. Coming here is so important to me. I love it. I love the people. I love the feeling. I love how you can just go look at someone else’s work. **It isn’t structured, just beautiful.”**



Our Space



“I just think people here are friendly and welcoming, and encouraging. So that makes it easier to be here..”

“I feel part of a group of people that have the same love to express themselves with art.”

“Well they have good materials and people seem happier doing their own thing. What they like to do.

Printmaking, painting, screen-printing

t-shirts. You can choose from a variety of things. Some people like doing collage, some people like drawing and everyone had their own ways that they like doing their art.”

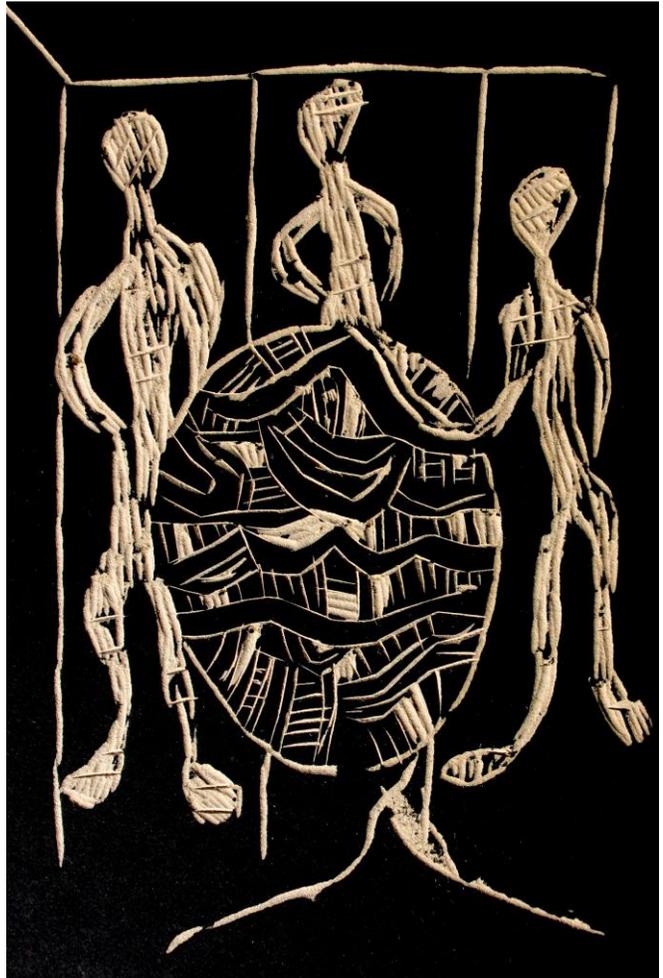
“I guess from what I have experienced myself and what I see with other people is that you can come in and work with any medium that you choose to work with. Which is really important. And you can test the edges of new things without feeling overwhelmed, which is really great. So, everybody has their own ideas. From bringing a piece of wood off their fence in a house they can't live in anymore because it has been redzoned, to things that they may have wanted to create and were always interested in but never had an opportunity to. **That is how this space works.** You have freedom to choose your project and to discuss what it might take, if you need to do that. And the planning. And then bring everything together and just move through your process. You have got support to do that.”

“I think it is great because it is a big area and light but we are all given individual space. We can be by ourselves if we want to be. Or at the table with other people if we

want to be. And we are free to come and go so if we are feeling a bit dodge, we can go out for a walk. It is not sort of incredibly structured...so you don't have to be there at this time and start at this time and lunch at 12:15 to 12:42, or anything. It

is just all very loose, but you know that there are people you can talk to if you need something.”

“I see their vision. Where they have their hub and they set up these satellite spaces that just go out and satellite wherever the community needs them to be. It is fantastic. A dynamic way of supporting the community. **This is not just about art. This is actually about the ability for humans to create and that you can take that creative process and you can live it. You can actually create in your world again.** And I guess that is where the break had happened for me. I didn’t know how to create anymore. I had lost that connection. And now I have got that back and I am starting to gain confidence in that and my ability to create. It means I can create again in my world. I had too much fear and trauma to have belief in that. So this has been powerful.”



“This morning I raced around, dropped the dog off, and came here. It is just good vibes. I am learning and bringing out things I hadn’t thought I had. Yeah, it is just very important to me. I have nothing else that is structured for me, other than counselors and doctor appointments, which aren’t like this. This is a total pleasure.”

“It just has an atmosphere where people really want to do something, and yet there isn’t any pressure. **It is quite unique.**”

“What I find when I come here is what a warm and welcoming atmosphere it is. **They make me, as a complete stranger, feel comfortable and enjoy talking to them.** If they do that to me, I am sure they’ll do that to the people coming here, and that is a good thing. We go to many places, and this is one of the most friendly places we go to.”

– OCST Community Partner



“It is difficult at home to get in the same groove. Because I haven’t got my little group around me, guiding me. So it is a little scary, because I am doing it on my own. So I can here and soak it all up, for the rest of the week. Because I didn’t come for a couple of weeks, it was empty. So I am soaking it up now. And suffering from depression, here is a big up. Because it is always up and down. And it has been like that for me lately, with new medications. **But it has made me feel so much better, coming here today. It has lifted a cloud from me that has been around because I haven’t been here in a few weeks.**”





“You are given enough space to be able to do what interests you. And given a bit of guidance when you need guidance and there’s quite a lot of inspiration with the books. And you are able to just be free and do what you like. Where other art groups that I have been a part of, they told you more what to do. It is a bit more relaxed than other art classes I have been to.”

“It is about really being able to afford to do it. Without this opportunity I would not have been able to have the finances to put forward to actually find out that this is what I could do. So with their support I would like to be able to continue. And I would like to take it as far as... whatever that journey is.”

“I feel happy here and I don’t feel any bad karma or anything. I haven’t even heard any voices when I have been here. It is a good place.”



Why Printmaking?

“Each stage of the (printmaking) process takes all of you. And it sort of draws you in completely. Which is really, really powerful. It has been great for me to be able to have that ability to come back and focus on something, which is something I wasn’t able to do very easily before. And to be moving from my left brain, from planning and organizing, to actually doing, creating. Going through that whole movement, to completion. I really needed that process. That is something that has been completely missing for me and my life since the earthquakes. **It is very hard to plan and organize something because everything is always shifting and changing so rapidly that it’s almost impossible to then go through and create and take it to a final movement. So this has been really powerful. I really needed that journey to be able to dream.**

To dream, and plan, and then create. And then to complete. I really needed that process. That is something that I was unable to do. So that is part of my journey.”



“I have always enjoyed print because it is not a direct thing that you do. It is something that you have some control over. When you start and make the design, and then you control the color when you put it on the board. **And after that it is filled with happy or unhappy accidents.** And I just love that. I think the degree of control when you start, works for me. It is a bit like working with fabric because you choose the fabric, you choose the thread, maybe a sketch the design, and then there is the sewing machine. It is all to do with skill and you get happy accidents with that as well. I think that is why the printmaking is so appealing.”



“I talk more now. I didn’t used to talk very much. I had trouble talking to people. I couldn’t communicate through speech.”

“I have noticed how people who said very little when they came, must have felt similar to me, because they opened up too. Which, that’s when it has been quite a privilege to see people relax and want to talk to you about all sorts of things. It has had a big effect on me. **It has been a real focus in a time of chaos in my life.** There are too many things I am not really used to and don’t enjoy going on in my life. Just, you know, like so many people, in Christchurch, the earthquake happening type things. It takes most of a whole day each week and a focus that stops you thinking about all that other stuff.”

“I didn’t believe that I would be able to do what I have done in here. I was a bit hesitant, I guess, about coming. I would be with all these arty people, you know. All the time I have done art. For a long long time. When I was in high school I used to do things. So it is bringing it back...

It is bringing back part of my life.”



“I have found that having this group come together has brought me out of isolation. Because having a huge experience trauma like that creates its own form of isolation. I guess the whole circumstances of the earthquakes. I have no friends left that live in Christchurch anymore. I had a group of about ten friends and everybody has left at some stage. That has massive impacts on how you actually function. And what support you do and don't have. I've moved four times in the last two and a half years due to the earthquakes. Not planned because of the quakes. And that is all incredibly stressful. And it had really taken its toll.

So this is about me claiming my space and my ground and coming into connection with my heart and Ōtautahi Creative Spaces really creates a place that is safe and there is a strength of connection and softness. And literally have your own process where you want to start and where you want to explore. And there is a lot of support. Everybody here has huge respect for each other. That is something that is really noticeable as well. It is a very gentle, safe, kind place to be. Which allows you to really get involved. And then there is the times where we all come together and we get very busy doing our own thing and then there's times where we have a lot of interaction with each other and we get creative and challenge ourselves and explore different things. Experiment constantly, really. Rather than worrying about the outcome of something. It is just a place to experiment, in any format that you want to. And that is really cool. That kind of freedom is really mind blowing.

So it has been completely mind blowing to see the whole process. To experience it and then to actually have a finished product. Something I can sit with and then something I can gift on to other people. It is really incredible. So it has been talents that have laid fallow really, until now. **This has given me the space to speak my heart and beauty out into the world. It is really really powerful.**

I have gotten wings and I have just taken off. I don't even know how it happened, but I think I have been waiting for this to come”



“I might be a bit more positive about my creative abilities. You get a lot of positive feedback here from the participants and also the tutors. I might be a bit **more confident about my abilities.**”

“I think it has been incredibly enlightening and also very therapeutic. I think I probably don’t have a lot of time in my life when I can focus on something I am doing for myself. It is always interrupted, or fragmented. It is quite a block of time to just do something that I am enjoying without feeling like I have to stop and do something else. And I think it has probably had a really good, I think it definitely has had a really good impact on my mental health. I think that is important. I am just having a really good time. And it has been really helpful for me. And I love seeing the difference it has made. People who may have started from a lower mood than I did. I was feeling down, but I realized people had a much rougher time than I did. I mean, I knew that anyway, but to be, to see people actually feeling safe and able to create and being encouraged. It has been really great.”

Will we see you in Phillipstown?

“Oh totally, yeah. Definitely. Especially through winter. Winter blows, so you gotta be with people and get inspired, soak it up. Be warm.”

“Yeah, I think I definitely will. I think I would really like to go to Phillipstown. I don’t really... I don’t really think I’d like to stop now. I think I would like to keep doing stuff, now that I have started. I think it is good.”



“I like to have some sort of community input all the time and that has sort of died down for me now that the immediate things I was doing after the earthquake aren’t needing as much. So as it grows, Phillipstown may be somewhere where I can be useful as well as enjoy myself. Well, doing something useful is enjoyable!”

See you there!