

Repair as a driver of community-led behavioural change

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Keywords: Social resilience; Repair-led design; Commons; Social impact; Co-design.

Abstract: Repair has been at the epicentre of place-based approaches led by communities/commons in order to sustain resources and address socio-environmental challenges. This paper presents the initiative Creative Industries, Social Enterprise, Repair and Restoration (CISERR) situated in regional Queensland, which is providing practical and social skilling to at-risk young men by employing creative repair practices. CISERR adopts repair as a wholistic approach targeting not only material restoration but also self and community renewal. To capture its social impact, all phases of the initiative were evaluated through an evolving Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework. The paper focuses on the third round of CISERR for which, the methodological approach and findings were divided in two parts. The participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI) methodology was used for the first part while the Participatory Scenario Planning (PSP) method and a facilitators' workshop were employed for the second part. Interviews and visual data collection were conducted for both parts. The findings combined demonstrated how CISERR facilitated the development of adaptation skills related to possibilities of employment by exposing at-risk young men to creatively repairing and reusing local resources. They additionally made evident how CISERR's wholistic repair approach created the circumstances for a community to use its lived experience and place-based resources to support at-risk youth. The paper concludes with CISERR as an example of repair driving community-led behavioural change; the latter being a response to the growing need for social resilience and an antidote to the failed efforts by governments to activate individual behavioural change.

Introduction

In the past few decades repair has been gaining ground in the sustainability discourse as a response to built-in obsolescence (Salvia and Cooper, 2016; Dewberry et al., 2016) and the brokenness of ecosystems (Jones et al., 2018). Within these ecosystems, communities/commons and grassroots movements have been advocating for repair to contest the growing exhaustion of natural resources but also the social injustices stemming from a lack of access to repair (Bartram, 2023). In this context, communities/commons' initiatives have created circumstances of repair varying from repair cafés (Ozanne, 2024) to cities (Bianchi, 2023) that demonstrate its all-encompassing nature. These efforts have manifested the importance of making visible fragility (Denis & Pontille, 2015) and the unnoticed work of maintenance along with the innovation lying in repair (Jackson, 2014). Furthermore, these initiatives have put forward repair-led design, described as socio-material manifestations of care that

derive from the place-based, lived experience of collectives (Kalantidou et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, repair becomes an instigator of community-led behavioural change triggered by community-driven action and grounded in place-based capacity, human and material. In conditions of environmental and social crises, individual behavioural change is failing to make a difference. Nudging, which has been employed by governments to promote individual behavioural change, has been questioned in relation to its effectiveness and its ethical (Kuyer & Gordijn, 2023), legal (Lepénies & Malecka, 2015) and human rights (Zeilstra, 2024) implications. Climate change cannot be alleviated by nudging alone, especially when its impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions is not really measurable (Siipi and Koi, 2022). By comparison, community-led behavioural change's social impact is usually manifested in the locality where it is situated and it can also spread through trans-local connectivity (Vélez-Torres & Agergaard, 2014). As a case in point,

the Right to Repair movement, which started in Massachusetts, has gained momentum as a driver for legislation change around the world and forced technological companies to revise their Intellectual Property practices (Perzanowski, 2022).

In addition to the growing need for resource maintenance, community-led behavioural change catalysed by repair, answers to the need for social resilience. Communities/commons have been employing their place-based, lived experience in order to determine the resources that need to be repaired and the skills required for maintaining their livelihoods (Villamayor-Tomas & García-López, 2021). Examples involve The Little Mesters, a repair community in Sheffield, United Kingdom, which turned into commons to save and repair the building (Portland Works) that housed its businesses. In this case, commoning triggered repair-led design, allowing repairers to reclaim Portland Works in order to continue offering repair services to their local community and earn their bread and butter (Udall, 2019). Another instance is that of the Chilean Streets (*estallido social*) commons that became a vehicle to mend the collective wounds of a nation by using public infrastructure as a protest site. They showcased an ecological practice of reparation (Bonelli and la Cadena, 2024), entailing the “recognition that harm and recovery of environments and human societies are intrinsically linked” (Papadopoulos, Puig de la Bellacasa and Tacchetti 2024, p. 2). In view of this, repair receives a wider connotation than just being ‘a practice of fixing stuff’. It becomes an ontological position for adaptation including not only materials but also the self through cognitive challenging and re-skilling; the community via skills exchange and interdependence; and habitus by re-engaging humans with (their) nature (Kalantidou and Brennan, 2024).

This paper presents an initiative consistent with the aforementioned rationale, titled the Creative Industries, Social Enterprise, Repair and Restoration (CISERR), which is placed in regional Queensland. Since 2021, CISERR has been exposing at-risk youth, and specifically

young men between the ages of 15-19, to a wholistic approach of repair. These have been disengaged from mainstream education, had an interaction or have been identified as in danger of being involved with the Youth Justice System. While designing the initiative, repair was intentionally chosen as a manifestation of “caring for things within webs of material, social, economic, and political interactions” (Corwin and Gitwani 2021, p. 3). It was selected to broker community and transgenerational bonds, prompt skills exchange and enable circular economy practices via preservation and reuse.

Through creative repair and art workshops, literacy and numeracy, life and cultural skills together with collectively setting up a social enterprise, CISERR has facilitated a transgenerational exchange of skills, material knowledge and adaptation awareness. This paper focuses on the third iteration of CISERR¹, which was divided into two parts. Their respective findings are discussed below as well as their connection to repair and community-led behavioural change.

The Creative Industries, Social Enterprise, Repair and Restoration (CISERR) initiative

Repair as a concept of restoration and renewal is needed more than ever not only in relation to material resources but whole areas that have been depleted over the years of opportunities, services and means for young people to thrive (Hickey et al., 2024). Maryborough is a regional town situated in the Fraser Coast local government authority in Queensland, Australia, where a significant number of young people residing there has been impacted by systemic injustices such as higher than state average unemployment, homelessness, educational exclusion and intergenerational cycles of poverty. According to the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre (2023), 89 per cent of Australian regions have higher levels of socioeconomic advantage in comparison with the greater Fraser Coast population. In 2021, 17 per cent of 15–24-year-old young people on the Fraser Coast were disengaged from

¹ CISERR was based on a pilot study under the name Transformative Repair for Social Change (TRSC). A more detailed description of the MEL and findings from the pilot and two rounds are

provided in other publications (Kalantidou and Brennan, 2024a; Kalantidou and Brennan, 2024b).

employment and education, compared to 10.6 per cent in Regional Queensland (Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre, 2023). This reality led to the emergence of the Creative Industries, Social Enterprise, Repair and Restoration (CISERR) initiative, which was created by Testimony Arts, a for purpose company, and co-designed with the local community. The initiative provides alternative education through creative repair and life skills support in order to activate employability and community re-engagement pathways for at-risk youth. To evaluate CISERR's impact, a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework² was designed anchored in systems thinking, by employing a soft (interpretive) approach, involving a creative process of problem analysis (Jackson, 2001). From this perspective, emphasis was placed on gaining knowledge by using exploratory models of enquiry including predominately qualitative data and stakeholder participation. An Impact Map (Burkett et al., 2020), was adopted instead of a Theory of Change, as a more accurate representation of the perceptions, assumptions and expectations stemming from the initiative. This paper presents the MEL methodological framework and findings of the third round, which was divided into two parts, before and after the Christmas period of 2023-2024.

CISERR, Third round – part I: MEL methodological framework and findings

Methodologies and methods

The first part of the third round emphasised the need to further support the well-being of the youth participants as well as connecting their skilling in creative repair practices to employability pathways and the development of a social enterprise. The Impact Map (figure 1) from the previous round was updated to capture the shift to a scaffolding approach in terms of providing creative specialisations (visual arts, arts communication and creation, repair and restoration) to the youth participants. It was also

amended to reflect an emphasis on well-being, through the implementation of the Rage program, in order to explore communicating emotions and traumatic experiences in a safe environment among peers, delivered by a qualified youth worker. To evaluate the impact of these changes participatory evaluation was adopted in order to spark a co-production of knowledge with a shared responsibility of gathering and interpreting data. Hence, the Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI) methodology (Kurtz, 2014) was employed, which is a type of action research. PNI emphasizes participatory decision making through the sharing of lived experience stories and their interpretation by the participants. This methodology overcomes the interpretation of lived experience by the researcher by bringing it to the forefront through the person who holds it, the story-teller. In this respect, the story-tellers co-produce knowledge with the researchers (narrators) (Colla and Kurtz, 2024). Story-sharing, a method grounded in narrative research (Lee et al., 2013) was used to collect stories from the participants. Two story-sharing sessions were realised in Maryborough between the 13th and 15th of December, 2023, with the participation of 10 youth participants and 11 facilitators, respectively.

The participatory evaluations that took place with the employment of the PNI methodology were complemented by at-risk youth and facilitators' interviews and triangulated with visual data and quantitative data such as 500 workshop hours, production of more than 100 creative repair artefacts (figures 2 & 3) and 90 per cent attendance rate.

² This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Research Ethics and Integrity Office for Research, Griffith University (variation

approved 27/02/2023—GU Ref No: 2021/734). Informed consent (to participate and/or to publish) was obtained from individual participants and parents/guardians.



Figure 2. Repaired artefact. ©TammyBrennan.



Figure 3. Repurposing materials.
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Findings

The analysis of the stories was realized by employing sense-making, a method that allows for connecting the stories back to the locality, the participants and the research enquiry (Kurtz, 2014). From the sense-making of the youth participants' PNI emerged the following themes: Self-empowerment; future thinking for professional development; alternative educative options; and community engagement. In detail, creative repair and art practices with the addition of the Rage program helped them get self-empowered by being skilled and active, socialise and process emotions. Concerning their employability, the youth participants confirmed that the exposure to making a trailer (figure 4) and the skills they acquired from restoration and repair got them thinking about professional development, apprenticeships and future skilling ("I'd probably want to come back next year...I enjoy

the skills"). Most importantly, they recognised the program being an alternative to not going to school. What also came forth was their enjoyment of learning creative repair skills whilst they also expressed the need to further their skillset. In terms of community engagement, all young men spoke favourably towards facilitators, mentors and youth workers ("The mentors, they're really nice and respectful").



Figure 4. CISERR's trailer. ©TammyBrennan.

The facilitators' PNI stories focused on themes revolving around: mental health; skills' enhancement; entrepreneurialism; a three-year version of CISERR; and CISERR responding to the pain points of conventional education. Regarding the youth participants' mental health, the facilitators positively connected it to creative repair practices. They promoted the idea of a permanent home for CISERR and an at least three-year engagement with the initiative for the youth participants to build their resilience and grow their independence (the latter related to generational interdependence and examples of dependency and unemployment coming from their families). The facilitators also stressed the necessity of skills' enhancement through small groups, more exposure to making, as well as trial and error. What was highlighted through many stories was the effectiveness of individual mentorship and small groups where skills can be practiced ("I think that at the end, most of them felt like they were a little more stable than they were when they started and some of them found that they had skills they didn't really know they had"). There were also success stories regarding youth participants showcasing skills to their peers. Other aspects that were underlined by the facilitators were opening up to creativity with an entrepreneurial understanding of the creative repair products (saleable/scalable) and

connecting these activities back to strengthening skills, engagement time and attention span. Finally, a recurrent theme appearing in the story-telling was conventional education failing young people, manifested through youth participants coming to CISERR because of their disengagement from conventional education.

The youth participants' interviews reinforced the PNI findings by demonstrating how their experience of being exposed to creative repair and art practices contrasted conventional schooling. They additionally shared their conviction that the parallel behavioural support they received, helped them deal with difficult emotions and traumatic experiences. Likewise, the interview themes that emerged from the facilitators' responses were similar to the PNI themes. The facilitators' interviews revealed their belief that CISERR supports the youth participants building on creative repair skills and resilience so as to prepare them for employment.

The PIN findings combined with the interviews from both cohorts responded to the Impact Map in terms of the workshops altering the at-risk youth perception of what constitutes education and helping them establish bonds with their community by creative repair skilling. The at-risk youth and facilitators' assertion that creative repair skilling has sparked self-confidence, interconnection and material knowledge for the youth participants could render them as factors affirming employability and community re-engagement readiness. This, in conjunction with high participation rates and the production of numerous repurposed material artefacts by the youth participants. Creative repair's lasting effect on mental health and the potential of employability is additionally indicated by the return of over 50 per cent of the youth participants to the program and the growing number of apprenticeships (two to three) acquired after every round.

CISERR, Third round – part II: MEL methodologies and findings

Methodologies and methods

The second part of the third round was rooted in the MEL findings from the first part. The goals that were set were to continue scaffolding

pathways to employment and future thinking, establish a social enterprise through the use of the trailer and the production of creative repair artwork/artefacts, as well as reinforcing positive behaviours.

For this part, the MEL was designed to evaluate the readiness for the creation of a social enterprise centred on creative repair practices; CISERR's sustainability as an initiative; and the development of future thinking by the youth participants. As a component of this process, the Participatory Scenario Planning (PSP) method was selected, due to being a multi-stakeholder approach designed to enable an understanding and collective interpretation of place-based conditions with associated uncertainty. This method involves a collaborative process guided by the researcher in order to imagine future scenarios related to specific aspects of a condition, problem or initiative (Oteros-Rozas et al. 2015). The PSP process was realised between the 9th and 10th of April, 2024, in Maryborough Queensland.

Two PSP actualisations occurred. The first, with the participation of seven facilitators (youth workers, artists and tutors) who were given some guiding questions related to CISERR's sustainability-future planning; building community involvement; and securing a permanent home for CISERR. These questions emerged from ongoing MEL findings together with the organic co-designing of CISERR.

Similarly to the facilitators' PSP, six youth participants contributed to the PSP that was organised for them. To actuate PSP discussions, the questions/issues that were put forward were: the creation of a creative repair social enterprise; opportunities for apprenticeships; what happens after finishing the program; what should change in CISERR; how a youth-led social enterprise should work; what are the barriers for being employed in a preferred job in Maryborough; and the youth participants' vision for their future.

In addition to the PSP process, 14 facilitators, five parents/guardians and seven youth participants were interviewed in respect to their experience of the program and their expectations moving forward.

Findings

The findings from the facilitators' PSP revealed themes such as: the necessity for a more active involvement of the local schools in supporting CISERR; recognition of the value of creative repair practices as alternative learning; the acknowledgement of CISERR as an expression of local culture through the establishment of a local festival; more support from local businesses; and engaging the community via initiatives such as a repair café and a physical/online marketplace. Regarding community involvement, it was stressed that the youth participants need to interact more with their community via the markets, and CISERR opening up to the community for repairing, exchanging and sharing artefacts. Finally, the necessity of a permanent home was addressed in order to pursue goals such as running workshops, a repair café, establishing cooking classes and having permanent storage space for artefacts and materials.

The youth participants' PSP demonstrated how CISERR has animated their future thinking by making them proactive about their future employment. Being part of a social enterprise or doing an apprenticeship were expressed as desirable in contrast to going back to school and poorly paid, precarious jobs, which are the predominant working option for young people in Maryborough.

Concerning the interview findings, the facilitators talked about unearthing the youth participants' ability to "see something that's needs restoring and then seeing a product". The parents reinforced the sentiment that CISERR has a positive effect on the youth participants via a wholistic framework of support (transportation, food, emotional and practical skilling, communication with parents) and that it is a rewarding alternative in relation to conventional schooling. In their interviews, the youth participants responded positively to how CISERR has contributed to their future aspirations by being willing to continue their skills development. They acknowledged the role CISERR played in them feeling as a part of a community, improving their socialisation and communication skills, and gaining self-confidence. The youth participants also found

useful learning how to use tools, building the trailer, upcycling and budgeting.

The findings of this round exhibited how CISERR gradually 'repaired' predispositions by preparing the at-risk youth, mentally and practically, to engage with the community and potentially become self-employed through the market trailer. The multifaceted preparation for this step was evidenced through the parents confirming the positive influence the support systems in place had on their children. Likewise, CISERR's emphasis on circular economy practices by working with reclaimed materials, incorporating creative repair skills and embedding education on resource preservation, made possible for youth participants to see discarded items as valuable resources. Further, it established repair as a means to create employability pathways by selling repurposed goods or providing repair services to the community.

Repair as a driver of community-led behavioural change

The brief presentation of the third round of CISERR evidences the potential of creative repair practices to address a number of environmental and social challenges. By combining repair with place-based knowledge and lived experience and embedding them in the design of the initiative, CISERR showed how at-risk youth re-engagement can be rooted in circular economy principles and activation of skills via the local community. The big learnings that came out of the third round were grounded in how repair can become a vehicle of transgenerational and cultural exchange, shape material awareness and instigate employability potential. To illustrate, volunteers from the Men's shed shared their repair skills and mentorship with young men, tutors and artists showed them their strengths and capabilities and public spaces opened up to house these efforts. Furthermore, culturally diverse young men got connected to Country with the cultural support of artists and youth workers and developed their adaptation skills by valuing resources through restoration and repair. By building a trailer to sale their creative repair and art artefacts at the local markets, the at-risk youth got a direct interface with the community to showcase their newly acquired skillset and get the community involved with CISERR, in some capacity.

Despite its long-term positive impact being hard to measure, there are strong indicators of how it has altered the prospects of the at-risk youth. Young people coming back to the program, expressing the need to continue learning repair skills, their behavioural change exhibited through attendance and hard work as well as their engagement with the community through the trailer and apprenticeships could be interpreted as steps toward employability and 'staying out of trouble'. Furthermore, CISERR, while being a small initiative, has demonstrated how regional communities can rely on their own resources to respond to social disadvantage and lack of services. Entrenched in place-based, lived experience rather than a top-down

prescription of sustainable behaviour, it has created a framework that can be implemented in other regional areas experiencing the same problems. In this light, it can also propagate the potency of repair to spark community-led behavioural change by enacting trans-local connectivity (Vélez-Torres & Agergaard, 2014). As a final note, the ongoing documentation and evaluation of CISERR's outcomes and impact could lead to policy makers acknowledging repair as a driver of community-led behavioural change. This, by bringing together people through collectively maintaining resources, inciting knowledge and skills exchange, and instilling a new understanding of local agency within communities.

Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners/Custodians of the lands on which we work and live on across Australia, and their continuing connection to Country (land, sea and sky). We pay our respects to Elders, past and present. The success of the initiative is attributed to its people; the volunteers from the Men's Shed, the artists and repair/craftspeople, the cultural liaisons, the facilitators and most importantly the youth participants. The knowledge presented in this paper derived from the sharing of the participants' lived experience, evaluation and reflections on the CISERR initiative.

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IF WE:	BY:	THIS WILL RESULT IN:	AND EVENTUALLY WILL LEAD TO:
If we expose at-risk-youth to alternative education models, they will engage with their communities.	1. Engagement in Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct 16 face to face workshops (Rage Program) over 10 weeks with max 13 participants. Over a period of 12 months (x2) to build skills in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpersonal skills Developing a work pathway Construction skills Gaining certification in Manual Arts skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-engage through soft skills, mentor-led education, scaffolded commercial training/activities. Opportunities to acquire interpersonal and professional skills Individual identified learning/training that supports a work experience pathway, or return to education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged with skills development/learning opportunities in community e.g. apprenticeships/ traineeships/ meaningful employment.
If we provide creative manual and repair skills training, at-risk-youth can get access to employability pathways.	2. Creative Industries Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct 3 face to face workshops over 8 weeks with max 14 participants. Over a period of 12 months (x2) to build skills in 3 streams: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Visual Arts Arts, Communication and Curation Repair and Restoration Build relationship skills Develop communication skills Build connections to the wider community Build confidence in communication skills, which will assist with interview skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-engage through soft skills, mentor-led education, scaffolded commercial training/activities. Opportunities to acquire interpersonal and professional skills Individual identified learning/training that supports a work experience pathway, or return to education Social enterprise readiness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged with skills development/learning opportunities in community e.g. apprenticeships/ traineeships/ meaningful employment.
If we provide customised numeracy and literacy training to at-risk-youth, they will gain confidence in their ability to learn.	3. Literacy and Numeracy Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct 3 face to face workshops over 8 weeks with max 14 participants. Over a period of 12 months (x2) to build skills in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connections to the wider community Confidence in communication skills, which will assist with interview skills Literacy skills Numeracy skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with Education specialists to understand and improve the social-educational barriers and learning factors of the disengaged learners, Deliver a program specific literacy and numeracy support program Improve literacy and numeracy results Regularly engage with education Positive relationships with educators Successful educational outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a literacy/numeracy level to be able to undertake Cert II /above courses Independently complete MYGOV and other government administrative tasks Positive self-view as a capable learner with the ability to improve.

Figure 1. Impact Map round 3, parts I & II. ©EleniKalantidou & TammyBrennan.