

**Transcript: Compassionate Making with Gina Seymour**

Hi everyone. My understanding is that a lot of you are, you know, using or incorporating makerspaces into your projects, and I wanted to talk a little bit about the why of makerspaces and focus on my particular why, or you know, our why, you know, what my library does.

So, I find that libraries and makerspaces give a sense of community. Makerspaces bring out creativity, whether it’s mentored or not. Self-expression: these guys almost gave me a heart attack when I saw them doing this, but it worked out. But you see all different types of creativity coming at you from different angles. And there’s also the, you know, that level of engagement that you don’t see in other activities. And the perseverance: when we have students, you know, who are willing to work on a project, to take it home. A student worked on this—one leg was done in 40 minutes. So, it just took her quite some time, and she also, you know, added these adorable little features like the hat and other things. So, I mean, you know, very often we don’t see that when, you know, with our students, so makerspace brings that out, and it brings out a certain level of problem solving that we do get to see. And also, it teaches life skills, which could be sewing, crocheting, and even just learning tools. What I, you know, when I ask the student, you know, pass me the needle-nose pliers or something, you know, or Phillip’s head, flat head screwdriver, whatever, and they look at me like I’m speaking a foreign language. It’s nice to know that, you know, we can have some influence on their learning in other areas as well.

And of course, my personal favorite, because I work a lot with special education students and also with English Language Learners—that ability to feel successful and to build self-esteem particularly among certain populations of students. I think it’s very, very important, probably the most important of all of these different reasons for makerspaces and maker movement. And also, I like to focus on being inclusive. So yes, my special education students, my English Language Learners participate. Everyone is invited. Everyone is welcome. Everyone is welcomed in the way that they need to be welcomed. And I find that the six-foot-tall Ferris wheel was a perfect project for a student on the spectrum, who kind of liked that repetitive, working alone-type project. So, you know, we can really make, you can make, make it work for any student, for any patron.

So, making is not new and compassion is not a new concept either. And I found that a lot of what I was doing tended to be more based on empathy and compassion. And that’s when I kind of came up with this idea of being compassionate makers or compassionate making. And maker-care programming was born out of all of that. And what it basically is, is an area of the library within that large makerspace. There’s just this one small area table dedicated to service projects. So, all the supplies are right there. The instructions are right there. There’s sign-in sheets for anyone who needs to keep track of service hours, and that kind of thing. But sometimes we’ll do a project all together, or we’ll do it with another club. Or usually, like right now, this time of year in December, all of the ninth-grade classes would come in to sign up for a service project, and I, like, would nonstop be doing service projects with students. This year, because we’re semi-remote and having issues and whatnot, we’re not doing anything like that.

But here, you see a dog toy. It’s just made out of old t-shirts that we braided up. Last year we made them tennis balls as well. Those were really popular, and I got those from the school’s tennis team. So, the athletic coach gave me a whole garbage bag full of tennis balls, and we cut them up, and we’ve done them. I’ve done this project, you know, as a pop-up, I’ve done it at conferences. It’s a lot of fun and it’s free programming. So, I’ll, you know, I can share with you some, like expensive stuff you can do, but you know, this is just pure free programming, you know, other than you know the need to have scissors, you really don’t have to spend any money on something like this. So, your compassionate making, your makerspaces can run on no budget, or, if you’re lucky enough, you have some money to spend. By the way, if you have money to spend, spend it on stuff that you know, like you should balance your programming so that you’re not spending for every single project. I find that that works for me. I have a decent budget, but you know, why spend the money if this helps someone and it still works out.

We have a group called Helping Hands. Last year, we made these adorable little reindeer bags. So, you know, they were filled with, you know, holiday gifts, and treats, and that sort of thing and they would give them out, um, you know along with Christmas presents, and other things. But the kids had a fun time making these silly little reindeer and it was just really a nice idea. I have done a lot of sewing projects because I have a family and consumer science teacher who loves sewing, and she’s always looking for a project. So, we did this surgical caps for hospitalized kids. And that was, that was just you know again a way of having students, you know learn about helping others, and you know what a child might be facing if they were hospitalized. We had a staff member whose nephew has cerebral palsy, and she needed these bibs made and she asked, you know, because she saw all the other projects that we were doing, she’s like, we, you know, would you do that for me? And we’re like, sure, why wouldn’t we help you know, someone in our own building? Of course we would. But then that branches out too, we can still pair up with a community agency like the United Cerebral Palsy or support groups in our area as well. So sometimes something starts out as, starts out local, and then you engage in partnerships that are broader, and then sometimes you engage in, you know, organizations that are at the national level or state level, and then you realize it affects someone in your own community and you can help them along as well. But it’s a great experience for our students.

Comfort Pillows: very simple shape to sew, and, you know, it’s for post-mastectomy patients so that they’re more comfortable. A lot of projects, by the way, if you have a sewing club, if you have a home economics-type program, and a lot of partnerships that you can work with, a lot of mentors to be had in this area as well, so, if you don’t know how to sew. This was just something that we did for students who had extra time in their sewing class. It wasn’t for everyone, but you know, the teacher was always like, I need projects that like if the kids are over, you know, they need more time, but this is something that’s fun. And you can see how, that we’re using a lot of like leftover items here. I like to recycle, I like to upcycle, and not throw things out. That’s why my library looks like a recycling center almost.

And then of course, this year, our local county system turned their offices into a 3D-printing farm because New York was hit pretty hard last March, and you know, we were one of the first states to really struggle, you know, before you know, before we kind of had this down pat. So, this, you know, there’s a lot that you can do and there’s a lot that you can adapt to as well. So um, but this was a great project that, as I say, was done at the county level. Everyone sent in their 3D printers, you know, they went around, they picked them all up, and then the little white sheets that you see, that’s like each library’s printer, so they can keep track so they could return them and whatnot. So, and then they gave out the face shields to the local hospitals in the area that had pretty much nothing left and working with not much. So that was a great project.

I love talking about the projects. But it’s also the partnerships, you know building up those partnerships. You know, some years it works out, some years, it’s not going to work out. Like right now there’s certain things that I’d normally be doing that I’m not doing, and then there’s other you know, and then there’s other opportunities that present themselves. So right now, I, it’s probably terrible to say, but right now I’m focused more on grief and bereavement, and that sort of compassionate making. I’ll talk a little bit more about that in the next couple of slides.

So, for this year, I think we have to talk a lot about social-emotional well-being and that also is compassion to me, is, you know, “How are you feeling?” You know, “Are you well?” And a lot of our projects have to do with the well-being of our students now more so than ever, I have to say. So, we’ve already done this one as a take-and-make; normally we just do it, you know, in school right before midterms and whatnot. But this is one of the first take-and-makes that I did with the kids this year because um, they’re stressed out. It’s a strange situation for them to be in. So, these are just these little magic beans that you know expand and put them in the balloons and you just, it’s a stress ball. It’s just an idea that again works as a take-and-make. In our makerspace, I do have like a little iPad station set up and, on the iPads, not only do I have the apps for our robots, for Dot, Dash, and you know, whatever else, you know, the kids are using in the makerspace, but I also have meditation apps on there as well. So again, presenting that sense of well-being. So, I just wanted to put that out there, that you know, if you have the iPads in your makerspace, you can also do a few more things with them.

Color therapy: I think we’re all familiar with, where we all, you know, color and kind of like lose our mind a little bit and just, you know, relax and take a break. And again, this is something so simple but kind of goes a long way. I’ve done worry dolls a lot. And again, this, this will be another take-and-make that we do, but these worry dolls—and I’m at the high school level, I’m not sure if you guys realize that, but I’m at the high school level—and these simple activities, the kids actually get into it, and they like it a lot. And they are stressed. They might not be like stressed at the, you know, like the book shows, at the elementary level and whatnot. But they’re taking the SAT (or maybe not this year), Regents, that kind of thing, and they get stressed out. So, this is something that we’re kind of, you know, we work with them a lot with as well. Now, there are robots, social-emotional robots. This is what we, ours is called Bingo, and everyone’s so disappointed because Bingo is not out anymore. I had to put Bingo away because of COVID, you know, but we all miss, we all miss our cat, our library cat. Every library needs a cat, right? The cat responds. This is Hasbro’s Joy for All: they’re about a hundred dollars. They really advertise for like Alzheimer’s patients and older people for, you know, for them, for comfort, and to know, put on their lap. These robots, they respond to touch, they respond to talking, so they really do interact. And I could show you picture after picture after picture of students with this cat on their lap. They’re either reading to the cat. They’re just holding it and sitting there waiting for their class, you know, their next class or whatever. It really is huge. And when you have the adults in the building saying, “Oh, where’s the cat? I need the cat. You know that that’s something that is important, and I think you know, after, you know, everything that we’ve been through, we’re going to need a lot more types of items like this. I don’t know. That’s how I feel. So, grief and bereavement again, that’s a lot of what I’m focusing on right now with our compassionate making. I did write a blog post for Demco and also Teacher-Librarian has one of my articles on what we did with those button makings and how that program went along. So, if you’re interested in using the makerspace for healing, those are two things that I would recommend.

Right now, this was from last year, but right now I’m still focusing on crafting your grief for the Holidays. I’m doing a program on Monday night with our public library, and where we’ll be working on projects, a memorial object for the holidays. And this is, this year’s, it’s really hard. I have to say, we have these ornaments as take-and-makes, regular ones with, like, little Yetis and Santa and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and whatnot. But there’s the other ones that are part of crafting your grief, and I offered them to our staff, and I have to say I can’t tell you how many I’ve already given away to staff members because of their losses. And you know, it’s hard. You know, I feel like it’s a good thing if I can help someone out in this way. I just think it’s beautiful. So, these are some, again, some of our various activities and I’m also, on my blog, starting a crafting your grief series of posts where I’m going to do a different craft each week that focuses on you know, new traditions, healing, and that kind of thing. So, these are just some of the some of the activities.

Art Therapy: You can invite an art therapist into your library for free. It’s amazing because art therapy is a master’s degree program, they’re board certified, and they need clinical hours for their certification. So, they are very happy to be invited in anywhere. So, whether they’re in a, you know, nursing home or hospital or homeless shelter or wherever, they’re happy to come in. Their professor usually shows up with them. So, they’re supervised already. And again, these are graduate students who will come into your library. They will bring the supplies with them. So again, if you don’t have a budget, this could be a great partnership, a really great partnership. Again, if in your state you have, you know, you have a master’s program that needs those clinical hours. They did this program about masks being inside and out. So, they wrote things in, either inside the mask that only they, you know, could see, and then their outward-facing mask. It was really interesting, and they came over like two days. And the first day, they left my tables all covered in, you know, this paper with the markers all out, and they left questions for the kids, and the kids filled it in. And at first when they did that, I was like, kids aren’t gonna do this. This is crazy. But sure enough, the kids really got into it and I, you know, I just was really impressed by the whole program. And again, it didn’t cost a thing, and it was, it was very well done. So, if you have an opportunity to enter into a partnership like that, I would recommend it.

So, let’s talk a little bit about being kind to our environment. I have, we actually had an ornithology class in our school. So, I’ve done a lot of these projects with them as well, but, seed bombs, the birdseed ornaments, and we have a whole bug hotel outside of our, our live, in our Courtyard area. It’s really cool, with all the different bamboo weeds and such, and because we want to attract the birds, the bees, everybody, and because it’s, it’s good for our environment. It’s what makes the world healthier. So those are a few projects that we’ve done. This is a beautiful, beautiful book, it’s a beautiful story, too: this American Bald Eagle was shot, illegally shot, and lost part of her beak, and she was taken in for rehabilitation, and a 3D- printed beak, bill was built for her. The author has an incredible educational guide that’s free, that you can print out on her website. And even if you don’t have a 3D printer, a lot of the activities you can do without 3D printing. There’s also the cap program, where you can partner with a local wildlife rehabilitator. And if you have a 3D printer, you can actually help them out as well. So, these are some interesting ways again to be compassionate, not just to our neighbors and humans, but to animals anywhere. I love this story. This was done as a Big Read, where we read the book and then we talked about, you know, I’m not sure if you know the story, but William Kamkwamba basically scoured his local garbage dump to make a windmill so that he could have electricity in his house. And he also developed an irrigation system for his community as well.

And it’s just being innovative and it’s a great challenge for our makers. Say, here’s a bunch of junk. What can you make? You know, I mean, you know, the sky’s the limit, I mean. And it also gives, you know, their brains are working in a more interesting way through something like this. And also, I do like pairing literature and making as well. You can see from some of my slides, let me just throw a book in there. We’re librarians, right? We have to do that. I actually, some of the people at work call me the Plarn queen and I’m like, I’m not sure if I like that name or you know that moniker, but whatever. I do collect a lot of bags, I will upcycle any bag, whether it’s New York Times, you know, newspaper sleeve, or dry-cleaning bag, or you know, the grocery bags, whatever. I have made jump ropes with students for, when we donated them to school programs where they do the, you know, jump rope for heart or you know, just a wellness activity. And this is just upcycled plastic bags and a little bit of duct tape for the handle; again, practically free programming, it’s amazing. And this is, on this side with the book, this is a sleep mat for the homeless. So again, some kids learned how to crochet, some kids learned how to make plarn, whatever, but we did this with a marine biology class because we were talking about plastics in the ocean and whatnot. So, I’ve done this with environmental science classes and others, but these are great ways to help the community and, again, through some free programming. I love anything from KidCitizen, CitizenKid, excuse me, and the Kids Can Press; a lot of their books are very unusual. And this young man, it was a science project on solar power, so I always loved this solar pizza oven. I used to do this with my kids when they were little, too, would be you know, they’d, you know, be all excited that they, you know, three hours from now, they can have one cookie. Yeah, but the idea, you know, and considering you know, my oldest son works at SpaceX now, I think he, you know, I think I imparted a little, you know creativity on his part, you know. So, but yeah, so that’s a great publishing company.

And then of course caring for our communities could also mean being involved in our communities. So, I have our makerspace where we, you know, provide items for our students when they want to engage in civic endeavors, you know, so if it’s important to them, it’s important to us. So, whether they’re crocheting a cute little hat or they, you know, we have a local Students for Climate Change. Students...Oh gosh. It’s a, it’s a title. I can’t think of it right now. But every Friday they go to the town hall and they kind of stand there and I think it’s great. Personally, I just, I, I love it and I want to support whatever it is that they are passionate about.

So, let’s talk a little bit about inclusiveness, because I told you that that was very important to me, and it should be important to everyone who has a makerspace. Makerspace is not for the gifted and talented. It’s not for, you know, someone who’s artistic. It’s not for the computer geek kids. It’s for everyone. Making is its own thing, its own language. It attracts everyone. So, Hour of Code: I know it’s, we’re coming up on Computer Science and Education Week. A lot of us do Hour of Code. You can do Hour of Code in any language, pretty much; they have about 40 different languages you can choose from, so do not exclude your English Language Learners, anyone new to your, you know, your community, whether or not they speak English. They can still participate. Um, just remember your Dot, your Dash, any robot that can be programmed in English, can be programmed in any language. So again, you know, just because you have someone who is not, you know, a native English speaker or, you know, has difficulty, any language. I also use this for our world language classes because it’s kind of a fun way to do vocabulary with them. You know, because it’s like by now, you should know *derecha*, *izquierda*, whatever; you should know your left and your right, you know, you've been taking Spanish for three years, you know, give it a try. So, I also use it for, you know, those classes as well. But I love the fact that I don’t exclude anyone when we’re doing our code week. And your supplies should reflect your students. The Students Rebuild every year has a challenge. One year was, you know, the students had to make their own portraits and again, you know, what do your supplies say about your students and your program? So, they should see themselves. And in addition to being able to get around the space, I like to have triangular crayons and the colored pencils, as well, because they’re easier to grip for certain students who have other issues. All of my supplies are labeled. The black lettering on white, it’s easy to see, there’s a visual, there’s the written word. Again, some of our English Language Learners might not know the word for zipper or whatever. So again, I want them to be able to visually just see it and be, oh, that’s what I’m looking for.

And also speaking about colors…oh, by the way, you don’t want to be cutting everything for the left-handed kid. So, make sure you have left-handed scissors. Yeah, I learned that lesson like the first year out. I was like, yeah, this is not gonna work. So again, make sure your supplies and also your programming, so like, when we were doing crocheting, unless you’re a left-handed person doing crochet, it’s really difficult to teach a student. So, make sure you either have a YouTube video available on the iPads in your makerspace or I have a book that has, you know, left-handed on one side and right-handed instructions on the other side. And I’m like, okay. Look at this side. This is, this is for you. So again, you know support every student. And my personal favorite was, we were doing the snap circuits. I don’t know if any of you have those in your makerspace yet, but they’re all different color wires, and you know, like, even making has all the different colored alligator clips and what have you. And the students are like, okay, so Mrs. Seymour, I put the red here and I put the yellow there and I put the, you know, blue here. And there was one wire left, and he goes, “This one’s green, right?” And I’m, like, “Yeah, that’s great.” Yeah, because, of course, I could see that it was green. He couldn’t see that it was green. So be aware that there may be situations where you’re, you know, you’re thinking, oh great. Everything’s color-coded. They should figure this out. Well, it’s not as easy for your color-blind students and they don’t always broadcast, “Hey, by the way, I’m color blind,” particularly by the time they’re in high school. So, like with your paints and whatnot. You know just label them. Again, you know just be aware that that might be an issue.

I’ve also done a blog post for Demco on autism-friendly and compassionate-maker ideas as well. Some really great jewelry, the weighted blankets, you know. So, if you need some really, you know, fun ideas, it’s in there. I think I have kind of a whole section of it in my book. If you’re not familiar, I wrote *Makers with a Cause*. So, I have a lot of these, I have a lot of these in blog posts, all over the place. But if you want everything in one spot, it’s just, I don’t know. When I need to look stuff up, I just look at what chapter I need. But yeah, so these are great, and these are like little puzzle pieces that you just melt some hot glue in them, attach LED and battery, and light it up blue for Autism Month.

So just thinking about this, also. I hope I gave you a bunch of great ideas. Think about, you know, what can you do to increase inclusivity? I'm not sure if you have already thought about this in your makerspaces or what you’re already doing, but it is something that you really should, you should consider. Please consider it. You must consider it. I’m very passionate about this, so I would love, love you to, you know, think about what you could purchase or change that would make your program more inclusive. Your program needs to reflect your community. And for me, this is my community. And this is what we do. And this literally is in my makerspace, hanging up. This is why we do it, because Nice Matters. We want empathetic citizens, we want, we want our students to be compassionate, and the way you do that is through modeling these behaviors, supporting these behaviors, giving our students a way of achieving niceness. So that’s why we do it.

[Gina Seymour’s Compassionate Making Resources (PDF)](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/tslp/compassionate-making-resources.pdf)

*\*Small edits have been made for clarity.*