

Girls and young women create fashion garments from reused materials and inspired by nature ^[1]

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During the 36 hours of training, which included five projects and numerous friendships, the participants not only acquired technical skills, but also self-confidence. (Olivia Maule)

Naiomy Román Massa, an 18-year-old passionate about animals and nature, found a new way to express herself: **fashion made from recycled materials**. Thanks to **Costureras Soñadoras** ^[3] - a nonprofit organization that promotes sewing, sustainable fashion and self-love as a prevention tool against **domestic violence** ^[4] - she began to intertwine her personal and professional goals with her desire to design clothing for dogs.

Román Massa was one of 15 participants in the recently concluded “Sustainable Fashion and Self-Love” summer workshop, facilitated by fashion designer Juanita Polanco Irizarry, founder of Costureras Soñadoras, in collaboration with **Apoyo Empresarial para la Península de Cantera**. The free workshop culminated with an exhibition of the projects created during its two-week duration. The participants - girls and young women - proudly displayed their pieces, handmade from reused materials.

“For me, sustainability is something that keeps me firm and tied to nature,” shared Román Massa, in an interview with El Nuevo Día. During the exhibition -at the Exhibition Hall of the Peninsula de Cantera Community Center-, the young woman wore a vest she created with eco-friendly textiles during the workshop.

But, as Polanco Irizarry explained, **sustainability in fashion is more than the use of eco-friendly materials**. Being sustainable, she said, also involves reusing clothes and scraps to

create new garments.

In one of the workshop activities, participants brought pants from home that they no longer wore to transform them into unique handbags, preventing those garments from ending up in a landfill.

In addition to learning sewing techniques, the young women got close to nature through educational visits, added Polanco Irizarry. In one of them, for example, they toured a vegetable garden, where they learned about native plants, the monarch butterfly and local birds. According to the founder of Costureras Soñadoras, these experiences served as inspiration to design T-shirts with patchwork decorated with the natural images that the girls and young women observed.

On the other hand, she pointed out that, for many of them, the approach to the sewing machine was a completely new experience. The space, she said, was more than a sewing workshop; it became a place to feel complete, confident and in love with themselves, as a result of creating their own garments.

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For Polanco Irizarry, investing free time in creative activities can transform the way girls and young women relate to their environment and to themselves. In her opinion, spending leisure time on social networks, or inactive, can give space to negative thoughts. Therefore, investing in creativity serves as a way to replace boredom with something that builds them up.

Such was the case for Roman Massa, for whom sewing became an escape. "It was a way to forget about everything. Here, I learned patience and relaxation," he said.

Creating that feeling was, precisely, Polanco Irizarry's hope in developing the workshop. "Don't be afraid to create," she advised. **"Through each stitch, you can also repair your heart. We all have that power, we just need to activate it."**

Although this was the camp's first year, the founder of Costureras Soñadoras hopes it will continue every summer. Her vision is to offer a space where the community not only learns sewing, but also has key tools for personal development, such as self-love, self-esteem and self-confidence.

The initiative was made possible thanks to the support of Ford Environmental Donations and Business Support for the Quarry Peninsula. For more information, you can visit the Costureras Soñadoras platforms on **Facebook** [5] and **Instagram** [6].

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