

## Future Brain

When art teacher Emma Heke found herself a mum she soon realised that our children feed on a DVD diet of gloopy mush and decided to act



As a parent I am often taken aback by the garbage that is described as children's entertainment. Train engines calling each other 'stupid' and constantly seeking to outdo each other alongside the 'fat controller' wasn't quite what I expected from my preschooler's recent DVD selection. Local mother, Emma Heke, proactively sought to offer an alternative. As well as fostering a love of our natural environment, her new DVD – OURS™ – inspires wee ones to turn our trash into treasure.

At Emma's home, with a warm cup of tea in hand, I notice one of her five-year-old's recent creations: a robot made from tin cans, cardboard rolls, and sellotape. Emma also shows me some of the 'bricks' they have been making by stuffing tetrapaks with non-recyclables. These are being compiled for their next building project, a totem pole. Along with the organic veggie garden, the worm farm, and an endless supply of imagination, the Heke household is a hive of eco-activity.

Emma tells me that her current creative project was also partially born of necessity. "I was a high school art and photography teacher up in Whangarei, and then I got pregnant and had my little boy Connor. My husband walked

*"I found that there were amazing toys and book resources for children, but there wasn't much that I would want to show my child in the way of film."*

out when [Connor] was six weeks old. That wasn't part of the plan! I suddenly went from a great income to being on the domestic purposes benefit and that was a big shock."

"I didn't want to be a victim and I certainly didn't want to be on the DPB. I couldn't see how I could go back teaching and be a super teacher and a super Mum. So I knew I needed to do something that I could do from home and in my own time."

The process of raising Connor inspired her journey into children's film-making. "I found that there were amazing toys and book resources for children, but there wasn't much that I would want to show my child in the way of film. I saw this big gap in the market and thought 'I'm sure I can do something to fill that'. I didn't have any film-making or business skills. So with the help of my Mum I went to Polytech for six months to do a quick TV production course where the tutors allowed me to tailor the course to my project, and also did a small business management course one night a week for a year."

OURS™ was then filmed over the course of one year, via short bursts to film local scenes and dedicated trips further afield. The resulting documentary explores our land, creatures, and environment with accessible dialogue aimed at children between three and seven years of age.

True to Emma's philosophy, OURS™ has been infused with green principles in every stage of production. As well as using slimline DVD covers made from recycled materials, and re-using cardboard boxes from local supermarkets for packaging, \$3 is donated from the sale of each DVD to three conservation projects: The Orca Research Trust, Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre, and Nelson's own Brook Waimarama Sanctuary Trust.

Emma is now promoting OURS™ in early childhood centres around the country. And because she doesn't bear the costs of a retail outlet (OURS™ is available exclusively through her website, [www.oursdvd.co.nz](http://www.oursdvd.co.nz)), Emma encourages learning centres to use OURS™ as a fundraiser, keeping \$3 from every sale for their own projects.

With nine more ideas in the pipeline, Emma is just getting warmed up. Her enthusiasm and courage are infectious, and I am left with the feeling that anything is possible. "Sometimes I would look at the big picture of where I wanted to get to and I'd think 'one person can't make a big film'. But then I thought, 'I can do it!' If I just do one bit at a time, then all the elements will come together to make it. And they did. If you believe you can do something and you really want to, I think you can change anything and everything in your world."