# Lauren Mason’s Retribe tackles festival tent waste with sustainable upcycling



When Lauren Mason volunteered for a festival cleanup two years ago, she had no inkling that this experience would chart a new trajectory in her life. Witnessing a staggering number of discarded tents left behind, she realised that the problem was far graver than she had anticipated. Growing up, she had always viewed camping equipment as valuable, belonging to a time when sharing resources was the norm. However, at the Creamfields festival, about 80% of the tents were abandoned, simply bulldozed to be sent straight to landfill. This stark reality is echoed by the Association of Independent Festivals, which estimates that a staggering 250,000 tents are left behind each year.

Mason captured the disheartening scene in a TikTok video, which unexpectedly went viral, garnering millions of views. This online moment sparked the formation of Retribe, a venture co-founded with her friend Benjamin Harman to collect these discarded tents and transform them into a range of sustainable products, including tote bags and clothing. Their mission highlights an urgent need for awareness regarding the environmental toll of such waste; tents, made from nylon or polyester, can take centuries to decompose. For Mason, the stakes hit close to home—she reflects on her two young sons, who can’t fathom why perfectly usable items are abandoned, querying if the police intervened.

The culture of overconsumption, particularly following the Second World War, has fostered a sense of disposability in consumer behaviour. Today, the UK generates roughly 1.7 million tonnes of textile waste annually, with many discarded clothes polluting distant shores. However, recent trends indicate a shift towards sustainability. The secondhand clothing market is booming, now expanding at a rate 2.7 times faster than traditional retail clothing, according to research by resale platform ThredUp. Furthermore, initiatives supporting upcycling are thriving, bolstered by the popularity of programmes that champion repair culture.

Mason observes, “People are learning at the minute... We’re all waking up to the consequences of the last 50 years of our habits and what can be done post-consumption.” Retribe’s efforts resonate deeply in this climate of change, as even saving a single tent from landfill can prevent around ten metres of fabric from polluting the environment. “If we can convert that into something useful, we’re creating a ripple effect,” she states, evoking the essence of their motto: “Small and mighty.”

With the goal of upcycling over 500 tents, Retribe's operations are grounded in sustainability, yet the practicalities of running a green startup are fraught with challenges. Based in Sheffield, Mason and her team strive to produce only what is necessary, often crafting products on an order basis to avoid overproduction. Despite the limitations on funding opportunities for sustainable initiatives, Mason remains undeterred. “There’s insufficient support available,” she laments, highlighting how larger companies with greater visibility often secure grants that small enterprises struggle to attain.

In addition to designing, Mason dedicates time to teaching others how to upcycle. Her workshops have empowered numerous participants to find value in discarded materials, effectively transforming waste into functional items. The community engagement surrounding upcycling projects continues to grow, further promoting the message of responsible consumption and creative reuse.

Retribe stands as a beacon of hope in the broader movement towards sustainability, reflective of a collective recognition of the impact consumer choices have on our planet. As initiatives proliferate across the globe—from NRS Relief’s #TentTotes project, which converts tent fabric offcuts into practical totes, to independent designers upcycling festival waste into stylish attire—the narrative surrounding textile waste is shifting. Mason's work exemplifies this shift, demonstrating that through creativity and community engagement, even the most seemingly insignificant actions can culminate in meaningful change.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/30/small-and-mighty-thats-what-we-are-the-team-turning-discarded-tents-into-bags), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c886dl0eg4po)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/30/small-and-mighty-thats-what-we-are-the-team-turning-discarded-tents-into-bags), [[4]](https://fashionjournal.com.au/fashion/tote-bags-made-from-discarded-festival-tents-is-the-definition-of-a-circular-economy/), [[5]](https://good-search.org/about/en/upcycling-festival-waste/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.nrsrelief.com/news/tent-fabric-offcuts-turned-into-bags-through-tenttotes-upcycling-project/), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-66867452)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/30/small-and-mighty-thats-what-we-are-the-team-turning-discarded-tents-into-bags), [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-61986739)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/30/small-and-mighty-thats-what-we-are-the-team-turning-discarded-tents-into-bags), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-66867452)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/30/small-and-mighty-thats-what-we-are-the-team-turning-discarded-tents-into-bags> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c886dl0eg4po> - A Sheffield-based business, Retribe, co-founded by Lauren Mason and Benjamin Harman, upcycles abandoned festival tents into clothing items. After collecting 50 tents and 30 sleeping bags from festivals, they aim to raise awareness about the environmental impact of discarded tents, with an estimated 250,000 tents left behind annually at UK music festivals, most of which end up in landfills. The company uses all parts of the tents, including mesh, to create unique, sustainable products.
3. <https://www.nrsrelief.com/news/tent-fabric-offcuts-turned-into-bags-through-tenttotes-upcycling-project/> - NRS Relief launched the #TentTotes project, upcycling tent fabric offcuts into durable, waterproof tote bags. These bags are made from polycotton and mud flap fabric, materials used in UNHCR-standard family tents. The initiative promotes a sustainable humanitarian supply chain and raises awareness about responsible consumption and production, aligning with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 12.
4. <https://fashionjournal.com.au/fashion/tote-bags-made-from-discarded-festival-tents-is-the-definition-of-a-circular-economy/> - Textile designer Rachel Kelly upcycled discarded festival tents into unique tote bags, highlighting the environmental issue of festival waste. After collecting tents left behind at festivals, she transformed them into functional accessories, promoting a circular economy and sustainable fashion practices. The project aimed to raise awareness about the impact of textile waste and encourage responsible consumption.
5. <https://good-search.org/about/en/upcycling-festival-waste/> - Various initiatives are upcycling festival waste to promote sustainability. For example, Hamburg-based designer Katrin Rieber founded 'tentation' in 2017, creating rain jackets from abandoned festival tents. Similarly, the Tent Collectors group collects discarded tents, sleeping bags, and mattresses to repurpose them for refugees and disaster relief, addressing the issue of festival waste and its environmental impact.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-66867452> - Sustainable fashion store owners Josefin Wanner and James Fenwick upcycled abandoned tents from Leeds Festival into clothing. After the festival, they salvaged hundreds of tents and other equipment left behind at Bramham Park, transforming the materials into useful items to prevent landfill waste. Their initiative highlights the environmental issue of festival waste and promotes sustainable practices in the fashion industry.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-61986739> - Grace Reeves, a fashion graduate from Lincolnshire, upcycled old tents and clothes left behind at Glastonbury Festival into new clothing items. Distressed by the waste left after the festival, she transformed the materials into brand-new clothes, promoting sustainability and responsible consumption. Her initiative addresses the environmental impact of festival waste and encourages creative reuse of materials.