THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 5 – Episode 3

Fostering Creativity through Art with Sam

Ashley: Welcome to the Art of Resilience today with me, Ashley Costello, founder of The Resilient Kid, and we have a lovely guest, Sam Warburton. Good morning. How are you, Sam?

Sam: Morning. Yeah, I'm really good, thank you. Thanks for having me as a guest. Oh,

Ashley: you are welcome. You are welcome. So, the Art of Resilience, we'll get into what we mean by that.

In a moment, so just before Sam and I met on TEDx Northwich, Sam was one of our lovely speakers, literally a couple of weekends ago, very, very exciting. Have you ever done anything like that before, Sam?

Sam: No, no, I can honestly say I've never experienced anything like that before.

Ashley: I Don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, I've never experienced that.

Sam: Oh, definitely a good thing. It was an amazing experience. I think the whole team at Tenex Northwich really looked after us. I feel very lucky to be part of that.

Ashley: Excellent. And your kind of topic, which I'll let you, I'll let you , give us insight into that in a moment. Your whole topic kind of just got me right from the beginning.

So we often, as part of the speaker team, the coaching team, we often. Discourage, like PowerPoints or any kind of things like that. And, Sam had a flip chart and it was amazing. It was proper retro; it was really old school and we loved it. It was, yeah, it was just brilliant. So tell us a little bit about your, talk.

What was the essence of your talk, Sam?

Sam: Yeah, so, in a nutshell, it's challenging this idea that we have to be productive all the time to achieve success. So quite often we get bogged down with to-do lists and stuff that we have to do in a day and really, it's about Using art or creativity as a way to break up our busy lives.

So we don't have to be producing outputs all the time. We're allowed to give ourselves a break and be kind to ourselves and just do something fun and creative. And for me, I love drawing. That's my absolute go to and I think that a lot of other people can experience the joy as well from just a pencil and paper and it's so simple to do but a lot of adults in particular forget about it and as kids we love bringing home artwork to show our parents what we've done for the day and yeah, I just really want to spread that joy of drawing.

Ashley: And I think it's so important, because you're so right, when we're little and we don't have any concepts of what is good or bad, we just come home really excited with these pieces of artwork and we're like, look what, and it's almost like, look what I've created, you know, and it, okay, sometimes you might have to go, what, what is that?

Tell me about your drawing. Cause you're not quite sure because in their mind, it's a little bit different to our, I guess, social construct of what a spider is or a dog is or you know a garden or whatever

And I just think it's so lovely. And I think we as adults almost zap the fun out of that because we're wanting to put it in that very small box of all spiders look like this, or, you know, and it's just, it's really hard, isn't it? Cause we, we do that. And I think one of the things that really impressed me about your talk is a, this need this kind of real wanting to let go of everything's got to be perfect and, and also because that, that opened it up to me because I would, you know, traditionally say, I'm, I'm no good at art. How, because, and that, that comes from a couple of things, A, my husband's an architect so his drawing is obviously really good, we'd hope it is. But also, what it kind of allowed me to do is think it wasn't specifically about art, it was about creativity. And actually, in my job, I am very creative. You know, when I'm sat in front of either kids or adults, I am creative in that process. And I thought, just to be able to champion that was really lovely.

So, Sam, tell me what kind of, what led you to go in, we just need to stop because I know there'll be loads of teachers, there'll be loads of educators and parents who have got a to do list as long as there are. What led you to kind of go in enough, like something's got to give?

Sam: Yeah, I think it was my, my own experience really. There was a particularly tough time in a previous job that I had where I was working really long hours because my, my skills and contributions were quite undervalued. And I thought the answer would, to prove my worth was to work longer. But obviously that, that didn't work. The situation didn't really change, but it led me to having a bit of a breakdown really, had a panic attack at work, and I think that's, that's the moment where it really hit me, something needed to change, but that didn't happen in an instant, it, that was over a year long period, where I was overworking, and that was, it's only looking back now that I realized the dangers of doing that.

I think if I just had that time to step back, gone a bit easier on myself, that, that situation wouldn't have happened. And, yeah, I hope no one else has to go through that because it's, it's horrible. And for some people that can have long lasting damaging effects on your health, your mental health, your physical health, It's, it's amazing what a different mindset can, can do for you. I think creativity is, is really important for having that time to recharge, that time for yourself, not having to work all the time. Yeah, I, I think creativity is definitely an outlet to help with that.

Ashley: And Sam is a, Because I've seen her work, so, you know, I know that she is a really good, artist. But also, what I really loved about your message was, it doesn't, like, it doesn't have to be complicated. It can be just really simple.

Sam: Yeah, it can be as simple as a scribble on a page. It's, it's the actual act of creating that helps you to recharge and reconnect with your own well-being. It doesn't have to be a great work of art. You can rip it up, throw it away, or frame it if, if you want, but it's, it's just there for you. It doesn't have to have a purpose.

Ashley: And that's the thing, isn't it? It doesn't have to have a purpose. Nobody else needs to see it. It really brought me back to before your time, Sam. But when we didn't have mobile phones, this makes me sound ancient now, but it isn't, honestly, I'm not that old.

But, when we didn't have mobile phones, we would sit on the phone, like it was usually at the bottom of the stairs. There'd be a little table, there'd be a pad and a

pencil in case, you know, somebody rang and you had to take a message, you had to write it down or, you know, Aunty Pat called for you or whatever.

But actually, if you was on the phone to a friend, you would often pick that pencil up and just start doodling, you know, and I loved that about your, one of, Sam's talk, and hopefully it will be up very soon. So you'll, and I, we will share the links to that as soon as it is. But one of the things that I loved on the flip chart was you saying that story of that, you know, massive like productivity and you working, you know, you want it to get the recognition that you deserved and you started to work harder and longer.

And actually, I think what you said was, you put it much better than me, but you said you started to work. Get in before everyone else, leave before everyone else, and what happened, I'll let you fill that bit in Sam.

Sam: So I worked longer hours and I built a good relationship with the cleaner at the edges of the day, but not my boss.

Ashley: Yeah, absolutely.

Yeah, and, and, you know, you can imagine on the flip chart, Sam is telling this story and as she goes, you know, guess what happened? And she turns over and there's a picture of the cleaner, which is just brilliant, you know, but actually, you doing that and telling that story on the flip chart and actually going, you know, it can just start with like a little bird or a little sun in the corner.

And, and that really is reminiscent of those times where we stop. And, you know, I often, when I'm working with quite stressed out young people and it's getting younger and younger is go, okay, just Scribble on this page, just scribble all over this page and it kind of gets some of that angst out and then we get the colours out and as they're talking to me and kind of processing the feelings they'll start to colour in the gaps and we do that together, you know we'll do that together and it is, it's a real moment of like connection but it's also a real moment that there's nothing expected of them as well which is so important I guess from what you're saying.

Sam: Yeah, I think we put a lot of pressure on ourselves, and particularly at school. You're told to study hard, to pass exams, get into the next school, and then do all the extra qualifications, extra courses, activities. There's a lot going on in

young people's lives. And it doesn't stop because we keep that same mentality as we get older as well.

Ashley: So we, we started with the, art of resilience and that was a bit of a play on, words between kind of the two of us and stuff. How do you think that kind of being creative Sam has, has helped you with your own personal resilience?

Sam: I think for me, it's allowed me to recharge on a day-to-day basis. For me personally, it's also turned into a bit of a career for me.

So I have a full-time job and a freelance art job. And Some people might think, well, that's, that's a bit too much, but actually I find it quite therapeutic doing my own freelance art stuff alongside my day job. It never, never feels like a chore. I think that's because I'm doing something creative and something I love. It's, yeah, it's an opportunity to Kind of disconnect from screens and just sit in my own bubble of drawing and I think that's, that's what I needed and I hope it, it helps other people as well.

Ashley: And I think you're right there, I think for me there's, there's that element of mindfulness. You know, and that doesn't matter if you are doodling, if you're painting, if you're colouring in, and that doesn't have to be in the lines, you know, but just that real pen to paper physical action of, of being creative, whatever that is, and, and not putting any expectations on it.

I remember an art teacher in a school of my daughters and they were doing a self-portrait and he rubbed out the nose and drew it in Farah and that was it, that was the last time that she kind of really, I wouldn't say enjoyed it, but it was the last time that she thought, actually, I'm good. Because a, an older adult was correcting her work, and actually it's a self-portrait.

And I think we often forget that it's through our eyes, it's not through somebody else's. And he was obviously just trying to teach her. And bless him, he was a fabulous teacher, and he taught her way more about maths than she was ever taught before and so, you know, it swings in roundabouts, but I just don't think sometimes we understand the damage that we can do by correcting kids on that kind of thing. Especially with art because it is subjective, it is how we see it, how they see it, not how somebody else sees your piece. You know, we can all go in front of a big, you know, art museum and all stand in front of a famous piece and all come away with a different opinion, can't we? So, yeah, I think that's it.

That's kind of scary when we think about how our comments can change, like, a young person's perspective, for sure.

Sam: Yeah, I think when you're teaching art at a school, you're teaching, kind of, the craft and technical excellence, I think. Particularly in a school environment, sometimes it is better just to have that time to explore and be creative. But like you say, a lot of people hated art at school because of that reason. Yes. That's quite damaging.

Ashley: I, yeah, and, you know, and I know him and he was, he was a fabulous teacher and he, he would not have thought twice, he wouldn't have thought that that would've affected her at all but you know, it just did.

It just, it was just one of those things. So we know that. That is really good for kind of problem solving, isn't it? And, you know, when we think about the components of resilience, that adaptability, you know, the, the kind of stuff that we've talked about already around emotional regulation, how it just helps us just sit for a little while and, and be, and, and be ourselves and things like that.

But actually, I think one of the things that really came out of your talk, Sam, was that connection. As well, you know, because you had an audience of a hundred people all looking at you, listening to you, which was less than 10 minutes. You know, it was a less than 10-minute talk. And actually, I think everybody went away with that sense of, I could do that. I'm not saying as good, you know, as, as what you did, but I could take that time out. Have you, do you find that connection, drawing and that creativity helps you to connect with others? Because I think we think it's quite a solitary, pursuit, and it can be. But do you find that through your creativity you can connect with others?

Sam: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I'm a huge introvert and I think drawing has often been a way to kind of reach out to other people. So I'll, I'll draw something, show someone and they'll, usually the response is lovely. But it's nice to see what I've been working on in my little corner, hidden away.

It's a way to kind of. come out of my shell, I guess, as an introvert. But also, I think, I think that time spent drawing just sat together is really nice because it's nice to unwind together. And whether you show the other person or not, what you've been working on, I think it's just nice to have that quiet time together. Yeah, I've drawn quite a lot with my mum as well. We've been on the phone. We've been

on art courses together and my mum's the complete opposite. She, she hates showing her work. She absolutely hates it and she thinks she has to be completely perfect all the time with what she's drawing. And she gets really embarrassed when she has to share her work.

But it's, it's brilliant that she's just taking the time to, to draw. Like with me, I really appreciate it that we can do this together. And. Yeah, I think it just takes it. It takes quite a lot of bravery to show someone else what you've been doing, particularly if you're feeling a bit vulnerable about it.

Ashley: Yeah, it does. That's such a lovely thing to do with your mum though, that is so lovely.

Sam: Yeah.

Ashley: One of the things that we, we do, As a, as a family is sometimes, and this will be, if say, say we're going out for something to eat and it's quite busy, or if we're kind of just at home at a bit of a loose end after dinner and we'll, you know, we'll just do something before the kids kind of either go out with friends or, you know, they want to play on consoles or whatever, and we all get a piece of paper and a pencil.

So this is easy to take with you if you're. You know, if you're going out or whatever. And what we do is we, say. Like we all come up with something so it might be like a tree or a light or an animal and you hide it and you draw so you all draw a light whatever that looks like for you and it's really funny because like the hubby is It's really good at drawing, but it's not the drawing itself, it's what you've interpreted with that word.

So your tree might be like a tiny little seedling, or the light might be a light bulb, or it might be a standard lamp, or it, you know, it could be a floodlight from a football game. And it's really like cool to see how everybody around the table completely does it in a different way. And you can see the little bit at first, but yours is better than mine. Yeah, but I didn't think of that. Like you've just thought part of a floodlight. Like I wouldn't have even thought of that, you know? So it, and it kind of levels the playing field, but also gets over a little bit of that embarrassment of sharing because everybody's sharing and we're all sharing our idea rather than our actual, like pro production, I guess the actual finished article. So that's kind of a nice little thing that I do with hours and, and I'm not like, you know, I wouldn't

profess to be a great drawer, but I love that doodle kind of thing. Sam, have you got any tips to just get people putting pen, pencil to paper, I guess?

Sam: Yeah, I think, don't start with a blank page. So A little scribble in the, in the corner of the page, I like to draw the little bird in the top left corner and then the smiley sun in the top right and it just makes the page a bit less daunting to work on and I think don't be too neat with it if you can.

So for example, a lot of people don't like drawing circles because they're really hard to get the curve. But if you leave your pen on the page and keep going over and over it, eventually some of the lines will sit in the right place, but you'll have like a scribbly circle. I like doing things like that.

Ashley: Is really cool. And, so Sam's kind of favourite thing, I believe, to draw is teapots. And I had a little look at your website ahead of, ahead of us chatting. She's very good at teapots. They are very lovely. So, but yeah, and I guess that's another kind of tip, isn't it? Get something that you like drawing that you want to, because it's not about being Perfect, but I guess you can improve on the way as well.

The more, as with everything, is it, is it practice that kind of helps you just improve or change the way that you think about it?

Sam: Yeah, I think if you, the more you look at stuff, the better you'll be able to draw it. So I would start with small things and maybe sort of objects rather than people because it's really hard to get the likeness of a person, but an object is.

Probably an easier place to start. I also like drawing from other pictures. So if there's an illustration you like in a book or on a postcard or something, I would, I would recommend copying that to kind of see how that artist draws and see if there's any techniques that you like from that. I used to draw a lot of Beatrix Potter postcards.

Ashley: I love her.

Sam: But yeah, I think. The more you do it, the easier it'll get to start a new picture, and the better you'll get as well.

Ashley: And actually, that's so true. Sorry Sam, say that again.

Sam: Oh, it becomes more enjoyable, less of a chore.

Ashley: Yeah, and that's so true because Beatrix Potter, Like, if you look at her animals, they're not perfect, they're beautiful, we all recognise them, we immediately know her Peter Rabbit, don't we, for instance, we know, I think at one time when my kids were small, I could even tell you if it was a carrot drawn by her, because she has quite a distinctive style, but different than say her peers at the time, which was, you know, which is beautiful, isn't it? And it's distinctive, but it isn't nothing. I think they are fantastic. And I think everybody would agree, but they're not perfect all the time. They're not like what you imagine a rabbit is almost going to look like. And then all of a sudden, her drawing is what rabbits look like. They're just, yeah, I love that. I love that picking a, picking somebody who you like and then kind of copying their, their style. I remember at school we had to do, so I'm from, I was, my school was in Salford where Ellis Lowry was, born, raised, he used to live.

So his style was very different because it, again, wasn't what you would expect. And it kind of give you a bit of a license to be, doesn't have to be. You know, it doesn't have to be like what everybody else is expecting. It just gave you a bit of a license to be creative, I suppose.

Sam: Yeah, I think if you work on your own style, you don't have to draw the bits you don't like. So, in all my drawings, I don't draw fingers. I just, instead of hands, I just have stubs.

Ashley: Cool.

Sam: As long as it gets across the kind of visual you're looking for. I don't think you have to draw everything perfectly at all.

Ashley: And actually I've not noticed that about your drawings and I think that's because our brain often fills the missing bits and we know what it is so it, we, it doesn't point out there's no fingers there. We know that's a hand. So that's it. Yeah, that's brilliant. Sam did a beautiful, so when you do a TEDx talk, particularly in TEDx Northwich, we have a big round red rug that is, like the spot where everybody, and so I'd wanted to get everybody in to put their feet on there. Cause this was like, you know, you know, Beforehand and you know, you've got your foot on the red spot. You're nearly there. You're going to be, you know, this time tomorrow you're going to be standing on it and we took a picture and we just put it

in the group, like we have a little WhatsApp group with all the speakers and Sam went away and drew everybody's like foot on, on the red spot and put like a little label with the names on it.

And it was so cute and everybody loved it. So I just think you've done, honestly, you, your ability to take something and. And tell a story with it. Like that was, your drawing was so much more than that picture that we were trying to capture just, you know, for socials and, and to give you guys ideas of like, just visualize, but actually having that little graphic that you did was just stunning.

It was really lovely, really lovely. And I guess that's part of it, isn't it? Is sometimes we tell our stories through pictures. It's much easier than trying to articulate it.

Sam: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I think an illustration can capture a feeling better than a photograph can sometimes. Because that felt like such a magical moment, standing on that red circle.

But the reason I drew that one in particular was because, Jake wasn't there. One of the speakers was missing. I thought, he deserves to have that moment as well. So that's, that's why I did it. to include his foot and make sure he was part of it as well.

Ashley: And how beautiful that you would be able to, you were able to give him that gift because, you swapped out and, and put his foot on, didn't you? But you would be able to give him that because his car broke down. It wasn't like it just didn't turn up. His car broke down on the way when we were taking that picture. So, but how lovely that that's You know, that's a gift you've been able to give him. And that's just, you know, that's through your creativity and, and your storytelling. So that's beautiful. Really lovely. So what are you up to at the minute? What are you working on?

Sam: Oh, so much. yeah, I'm working with lots of new clients at the minute. I suppose one of the long running things I'm working on, I'm doing a lot of sketch notes for the London Book Fair.

Ashley: I see. They look so cool.

Sam: Yeah, so it's coming round again next year in the springtime, but with this year, we're kind of carrying on the sketch note series between the shows, so to keep up the excitement and share a bit of what was captured at the last fair. So, so far,

I've done an overview and a sort of, a bit of a guide for artists and illustrators who are looking to go to the fair, because it's a trade show, it's hard for creatives to kind of get stuck in and know what to do once they're there.

So hopefully that's a bit of a helpful tip guide for, for them. I'm also drawing a lot in my sketchbook. I'm absolutely bursting with ideas. I've been drawing a lot of memories kind of from the TEDx evening, so that I don't forget them and I've got something to look back on.

Ashley: Yeah, and t that's it, isn't it?

Because it's so precious, just like we were talking about you giving Jake that magical moment. Us, and particularly I think when we, you know, when we, often trying to write a diary is a bit of a chore, but actually just drawing out something that happened during the day, or something special that's happened over the weekend, particularly I think for kids is such a, you know, to look back on that and, and have, have those memories and also to see how far you've come as well. That's such a lovely idea of having that like illustrated journal, I guess.

Sam: Yeah, I'm sorry my dogs barking in the background.

Ashley: It's okay, it's usually mine. It's usually Paddy's barking. Don't worry, don't worry. Yeah, so I guess, so do you do that a lot, like with, or is it just like big events like this that you normally sketch out?

Sam: So I sketch any time that I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed as well. I like to just sit down and, draw what I'm feeling. So I have a little, it sounds a bit strange. I like to draw myself as a mouse because I like scribble out the fur and it's the way the pencil kind of flips on the page, but it helps me kind of process what I'm thinking, what I'm doing.

And I like to draw bits from, from holidays. Kind of like, again, like the special moments that pop up that I will forget later. And I think a lot of sketching helps me with my, my job as well. If I'm working on a new project, I'll think, oh, I've drawn something that might be helpful for that. I'll, I'll incorporate that into it. So I, I sketch for lots of different reasons.

Ashley: And that's lovely. I love the idea of like you having like your own little character, you know, this little mouse that's going on its adventures. And I think as

well, just that, cause I'm quite a visual person. I've, I've seen some of your illustrations for the, like your sketch stuff for the London Book Fair.

And I was like, Oh my God, that, yeah, that's me. Like if, if you give me a load of text or you give me like a map, it just doesn't compute the same. And I was looking at, and I was literally like following the round and I was like, yeah, I love this because it just, it just speaks to that visual, person inside me, I think, so I absolutely love that.

And just, kind of as we finish, just to, that overwhelm, and just stopping for those few moments, that's so precious, isn't it? When you, when you are overwhelmed, do you know what you're going to sketch when you sit down and just try and, Like, calm all that down.

Sam: No, I have no idea what's gonna come out onto the page.

I just start with the head, the face, and then an expression kind of pops up as I'm drawing it. And then it'll kind of work its way into something that I kind of think of or see. As I'm going along. So it's, yeah, it's quite therapeutic for me cause I, I don't always know what I'm feeling at the time when I sit down, but I usually do by the end of it.

Ashley: Yeah. And, and do you know what, that's important because I think sometimes, we often. We often feel that we should know what's going on for us, but actually, particularly for kids, it's really difficult to, for them to articulate, you know, even teens for them to articulate what's going on or, or why they feel the way they feel.

And to just be able to express all that out on You know, on a piece of paper. And I think often we, we think with teens that, oh, you know, this should be over this bit, but, you know, we know that teens have meltdowns just as, and, and us as adults, we have meltdowns when it just gets all too much, but to have that outlet to just, you know, piece of paper and a pencil and just let it all come out, whatever that looks like. And it doesn't matter because it's not for anybody else, is it? It's just for you to, you know, just for us to be able to express how we feel. And by the end of it, know a little bit more about ourselves. That's amazing. Thank you. It is, honestly, I'm really in awe of that.

I often talk about when we have a lot on as a household, you know, we put a jigsaw route at the end of our dining table and then whenever anybody walks past, they're really like tempted to then put bits in and, and things like that. And actually, I think what I'm going to do is I'm going to, tape some Paper down, I'm gonna like blue ack some paper down and just leave some pencils and a little pot of pencils and just like, start off with that, literally like a little bird and a sun and a smiley face and see who goes past and adds to it. I think that's a really like, lovely idea and know that, I know I, I know straight away that, and I've never done that before, but I reckon they'll, they'll all, and plus. Both of my kids have seen your talk, so they'll know what I'm up to with it. I just think that's such a lot, you know, the summer holidays are coming why just give them that opportunity instead of going, go and get pen, go and do this, go and get that. You know, just leave it there ready. Having that open opportunity, I suppose, like an invitation to be creative, isn't it?

Sam: Yeah. You could. So I really like drawing food, I'm not sure why, you could start off with a table full of plates and everyone adds their favourite food on and things like that.

Ashley: That is really cool, and I like the idea of almost inviting them, you know, have something drawn out and get people to add to it. That's fantastic. Oh, Sam, thank you so much. Honestly, I really, really appreciate it. Now as you've heard, Sam does take on commissions and things, so we would I'm going to put all her links and show notes underneath here.

You'll check us out on the reels and stuff like that. But Sam, where can people find you if they want to have a look what you're drawing today, or just have a look at a teapot, they're amazing. But where can we, where can we find you?

Sam: Um, yep, so my website is SamWarburton.com. I'm also really active on Instagram and LinkedIn. I've also got a monthly newsletter on Substack, so if you'd like to subscribe to that, you can find the link on my website.

Ashley: Cool. Sam, thank you very much. Honestly, I've really loved Just exploring what it means to be kind of creative, I guess, what it means to be creative and actually how we can invite our kids.

But I'm going to say this, I think it's really important for our kids to do this, but more importantly, as adults, I think we need to return to this and just give ourselves

that five minutes out of the day, you know, particularly on a busy day to permission to just. Doodle, just get out there and sketch.

Sam: Yeah, completely agree.

Ashley: So thank you very much, Sam. Check out the show notes and don't forget to follow Sam on either LinkedIn or Insta or both and sign up for a newsletter, but we'll put all the details in the show notes. Yeah, watch out. Thanks very much, Sam. Take care. Thank you.

Sam: Take care.