

## Sewing for the Environment

The AAWE Environmental Task Force's first sewing session took place on a rainy Friday afternoon in December in Claudine Kouidri's professional *atelier*. The idea was to create reusable tote bags using donated fabrics, and at the same time learn (or enhance, for certain) sewing machine skills. Having never even touched a sewing machine in my life, I decided this was the perfect opportunity to get some hands-on experience, with the added plus of being able to go home afterwards

with something useful that I had made myself.

I was not disappointed. Of the five of us signed up for the session, two were complete beginners on the sewing machine. The first exercise Claudine had us do was on paper. She drew a straight line, a box, and a zigzag. She then showed us the basics of how the sewing machine works and left us to guide our paper so that the needle (without thread) followed the lines she had drawn. Going around the corners of the



box was the first challenge, but I was quickly able to figure out how to make sure the needle ended up in the corner, and not outside or inside the box. We repeated the second exercise on fabric and using thread. It may seem trivial to those of you who sew, but it was an exciting moment to admire my first real stitches, the majority of them neatly lined up exactly where they were supposed to be!

Now came the time to create our tote bags. Claudine had a pile of donated fabric (old curtains, sheets, random pieces of fabric, rolls from store overstock), and she helped each of us measure and cut what was needed, place the pins to hold the pieces together, and set us

up at our machines, ready to go! It was a fun learning process, especially with Claudine's good humor and positive attitude, and I didn't see the time go by. Our jovial teacher was always there to guide us, but left us with enough independence to give us the confidence that we could manage semi-autonomously! And the result is wonderful – I have a lovely tote bag and every time I use it, I will think fondly of that afternoon in Claudine's *atelier*, spent in great company with my AAWE sisters, laughing and learning.

I am eagerly awaiting session two. Three cheers for the Environmental Task Force! On to more great ideas!!