

# Ep 13 - Mid Oreti Mini Forest Movement

**Rachael Halder:** [00:00:00] Catchment Convos with Thriving Southland, your link to Southland Catchment groups and their impactful projects. Each episode will dive into grassroots effort by local farmers and communities that are driving change and sustainability in our regions. Listen in for inspiring stories and insight. Real people, real change, the Southland way.

Welcome back to Catchment Convos, where we dive into inspiring projects, passionate people, and grassroots mahi happening across our province. Today we're heading into the heart of Central Southland with two incredible guests, Ainsley Adams and Rosie Hunter from the Mid Oreti Catchment Group to talk about the community movement that's taken root and growing stronger every year, the mid Oreti Mini Forest Movement..

It all started with a simple idea between Ainsley, Rosie and Fiona. What if [00:01:00] locals could grow their own native plants and create small pockets of biodiversity across the catchment? Fast forward to now, the Mini Forest Movement has turned into a thriving project that's producing thousands of native plants every year, supporting schools, landholders and other community groups. Helping everyday people to build skills, confidence, and connection through the native plants and nature itself. In this episode, we'll hear how the idea came about, what it takes to run a community nursery, and how monthly drop-in sessions have led to workshops, school projects, and even native plant grant schemes..

We will chat about the regular faces who make it all happen, the lessons learned along the way, and some top tips for anyone keen to start growing their own natives at home. So whether you're a seasoned planter, a curious listener, or someone keen to start your own local nursery project, this one's for you.

Hi Ainsley. Hi Rosie. Lovely to have you guys on the [00:02:00] podcast today. How are you going?

**Ainsley Adams:** Yeah, good. Thank you, Rachel.

**Rosie Hunter:** Yeah, great thanks Rach.

**Rachael Halder:** So starting at the beginning, Ainsley, can you paint us a picture of how did this Mid Oreti Mini Forest Movement come about?

**Ainsley Adams:** So, back in the early days, it was quite a weird group of us. So, Rosie, Fiona Smith and myself. Fiona actually come up with the idea of, trying to break down some of those barriers around how do we get more plants out into the community? How do we promote, more planting being done across our catchment group? And definitely some of our core values as the Mid Oreti Catchment Group is to improve, biodiversity and also water quality across our catchment. The idea just came about as, hey, can we grow our own trees as a catchment group and get cheaper plants and promote , planting out in the community?

**Rachael Halder:** Cool. So if we were break down what the Mini Forest Movement is, Rosie, could you do that for us, for those people [00:03:00] listening and hearing about this for the first time? What is the Mini Forest Movement?

**Rosie Hunter:** The Mini Forest Movement , was started as, like Ainsley said, a project on how to grow our own trees, um be able to sort of sustain plants within the catchment that the community groups and also farmers and landowners can apply for . So it's a pretty simple process for them, a simple form to fill out , and then we had went through and said yes or no to projects. We had to cut some unfortunately. And then got a bit of support around the planting advice, and then they got the plants and planted them and we gave them a hand with planting too. So it was just, trying to streamline the plantings so it was really easy, it was very affordable. It was a dollar a plant for a landowners, and it was free for community groups, so a very, very cost effective way to get some plants in our community.

**Rachael Halder:** A hundred percent. So [00:04:00] how did it move from this dream of getting plants out into the community, and wanting to start a nursery? How did you guys as a group, turn it from this dream into an action?

**Ainsley Adams:** Initially , we pulled on , connections with a local nursery. So AB Lime has their own, native Tree nursery , and they were kind enough to donate us the first 1000 plants. So that really kick started it. Wow. Because, we had to start from somewhere and that allowed us to do five projects of 200 trees each. We gifted half of them to community groups and schools, and then we sold the other half to landowners at a dollar a tree. The reason we , sold some of them to private landowners is to get some sort of revenue going so that all of that money that was coming in from the \$1 a plant was actually going back into

materials to propagate more trees. So eventually the goal was to become, and is to become [00:05:00] self-sustainable and not rely on funding in the future. So the project has kept funding itself and keeps on going.

**Rachael Halder:** That is really cool because like you said, it's all very well and good to get things started. It's the ongoing, that's often really tricky. Right. When you guys reference a project, what does a project mean or what does that entail?

**Rosie Hunter:** I think the Mini Forest project is, setting up a framework so we can have a sustainable planting avenue for landowners and community groups to be able to access. We have the monthly drop-in sessions that people come to and help grow and maintain the plants, which are then sold to landowners to then cover costs, to grow more plants.

So it's sort of self-reliant keeps itself afloat. And is also providing a lot of ways for the community to come along, and help, like you've gotta feel good with helping out [00:06:00] with community projects and there's so many tips and tricks shared in these sessions.

**Rachael Halder:** So that's a part of your Mini Forest Movement is you host and run regular drop-in sessions. What happens at these sessions? Walk us through potentially a typical drop-in.

**Ainsley Adams:** They kind of vary month to month. Last month we run a seed collecting workshop. So we went and collected seeds from a, remnant part of native bush. We then did a couple hours of showing how you process the seed, how it's sewn, and then, we had some time to pot up a few seedlings into bigger pots. So it changes every month. Uh, there's always something to be done, so sometimes we're sowing seed, sometimes we're re-potting plants into bigger bags or pots, and then sometimes we are simply doing some weeding and having a good yarn. So there's always, something for anyone to come and do. Our open evenings are open to all ages. We have, uh, as young as three months come along, and right up to, well retired. They're , really open to anybody and there's something for everyone to do or everyone to [00:07:00] come along and learn.

**Rachael Halder:** Rosie, you've moved a little bit further away, but what do you take home from the monthly drop-in sessions and what does it mean to you?

**Rosie Hunter:** Yeah, I've been a little bit, slack with my attendance lately. I really do wanna show my appreciation for AB Lime and the AB Lime staff,

'cause they put work into it monthly. We're very, very grateful to have the AB Lime nursery as a place that, the plants are held so they are watered and looked after, and there's a place for them that's well maintained.

From the sessions I've been to, sometimes there's three people, sometimes there's six or 10. It really depends on the day and people's availability. And it's pretty cool to see other catchment group members come along. We had people from Balfour, all over the catchment 'cause they see the value in , learning. You know, it's a great way to learn whilst doing things at the same time. I've learned heaps of tips from different people through just chatting away while you're re-potting [00:08:00] things or weeding.

**Rachael Halder:** And that's the age old saying, as many hands make light work.

So, you guys have had some cool involvement and support from other sort of parts of the catchment too, right?

**Ainsley Adams:** Yeah. So at the moment, as of today we've put 3,680 plants in the ground across the catchment group area over the last three years, and 16 big projects and there's always a few here that go here and there for small ones as well. About 2000 of that's gone into private landowner projects. So they've gone into projects, some people are making wetlands, sediment traps, riparian planting, plant out wet areas and critical source areas on farm. And then, yeah schools have been absolutely great. I think every single school in our area has ended up, planting plants now, which is just fantastic to see. The kids really get into it , and they've done projects like planted around their pump track out at Lochiel and then right through to they're creating an area with the planting between St. Thomas's [00:09:00] school and Winton School at the moment, and then supporting Central Southland, to continue, planting out their little area. They've got an old pine block that they got given , along the Winton Trail.

A huge diverse, amount of projects and it's just really cool to see everyone's why and why they want to do these plantings and definitely the enthusiasm in it as well.

**Rachael Halder:** That is really cool. And having those schools on board is so awesome.

So have you guys started a plant pack scheme?

**Ainsley Adams:** Yeah. Actually we've just changed things up in the last, six months. We were \$1 a plant and we kind of put limits on the amount, so that we covered lots of projects, so small amount of plants for lots of projects. And then now, we've got plant packs for this year. We've gone up to a dollar 25, so inflation hit us. So at the moment we've got plants for private landowners. We've got plants, packs of 40 or 80, and they're \$50 or a hundred dollars respective.

We've done quite a few school plantings this year and community plantings already, but definitely still got some plants there. If anyone in our area is thinking of doing [00:10:00] a wee planting or community project or school planting, get in touch.

**Rachael Halder:** So maintenance wise, do you help from the way of advice. It's all very well getting them planted, but looking after them going forward.

**Rosie Hunter:** Yeah Ainsley might need to clarify, but we had, a lot of plant guards that we gave out with some of the initial projects, which are always helpful to stop pests and, make it easy and nice and visible of where the plants are. And then advice, like I can't give enough kudos to the AB Lime guys 'cause they're a wealth of knowledge, around spraying and just making sure we can take care of the plant so they can grow quick and then don't need our help.

But then that up to the landowner too, or, the community group to do that themselves. But, here to give advice.

**Rachael Halder:** And that's really cool, that you guys are just there to support where and what the community needs.

So Ainsley, the Mini Forest Movement is only one part of what the catchment group's up to. How does this [00:11:00] work with the likes of your wetland and mapping projects that the catchment's got going on as well?

**Ainsley Adams:** They kind of just work hand in hand. At the moment we are just, doing an extension project for our 'Marshalling the best' wetland project. So we've got, Craig Simpson is a consultant out on farms and showing local landowners the tool. And one thing that he's really promoting to them is that, hey if you wanna plant this out, there's support there at the catchment group for trees or plants to be able to do that. So, they kind of work hand in hand the biodiversity and the water quality projects that we've been doing. We are really promoting, if you wanna do something using the wetland bund and overflow

like critical source area tool and you really wanna do something in the area, we certainly have affordable plants to make that happen.

**Rachael Halder:** And for those listening, we talked about the 'Marshalling the best' project on an early episode, which was really cool. But you can find the link and the map all on the Thriving Southland website under the mid Oreti catchment group.

Furthering on, [00:12:00] you've started to see some of your regulars grow some of their own natives at home. You've started to see people bring seeds in. What's it been like seeing people take those next steps?

**Ainsley Adams:** I think that's really, I feel like a proud mom and dad moment really. It's actually been when I've gone to someone's place randomly to drop something off or I've gone for a field day there or nearby and, I've gone and driven past and I've been like, hang on a minute. You got a few little plants growing on and down in there in the grass. And they're like, oh yeah, I've just been pottering around a bit. So, we've got, quite a few now that grow their own , plants from seed and they really enjoy it. I've been really proud to see that, they're actually taking that away and enjoying it and finding this new hobby of theirs.

**Rachael Halder:** Building on that Rosie, what are you most proud of from those early days and those early conversations to where the projects got to now?

**Rosie Hunter:** I think the Mid Oreti Mini Forest project has just been so great in so [00:13:00] many ways. People can take what they value from it. There's some schools or community groups that want plants to enhance an area. There's some people that want to come in and learn heaps more to benefit them and their nursery, and probably their communities. Um, and some people who are coming and on a monthly basis just 'cause they really want to help a community project and they're really proud to support that. So there's just so many different ways that people can get value from it.

**Rachael Halder:** I think you have made it incredibly achievable and, accessible for everybody. Looking forward, what's next for the Mini Forest Movement or the Mid Oreti Catchment Group?

**Ainsley Adams:** Yeah, so , we're finally in a space now where we're about to become self-sufficient, so not have to rely on ongoing funding. So it's been the last three to four years we've actually had funding every year. So we've been very, very [00:14:00] fortunate to have funding from the likes of BNZ, Westpac



Landcare Trust, AB Lime, uh this year we've just had a grant given from Environment Southland. We're in this weird space now where we've been going for three to four years. We've got plants that the group have potted up, planted some seed repotted them, and they've grown to a point now where they're actually been planted out in the community. So this is the first year that we've had our own plants going out. So next year we should be in a position to keep producing the plants that we're producing now every year, without having to, find some funding at the start of every year to make it happen.

**Rachael Halder:** And hey, good things take time. Right? I think those monthly drop-in sessions and your dedication have been crucial to the success of this. So for anyone listening, thinking that sounds amazing, maybe we could do something similar in our catchment what sort of advice would you give them?

**Rosie Hunter:** Oh, good question. Just [00:15:00] do it, it was pretty easy to start up. We were definitely very lucky that we had the AB Lime nursery to be able to help, as a bit of a home base. But applying for some funding you wouldn't need too much. Like probably a thousand dollars would go quite a long way to be able to get you some plants to start. And then by collecting and starting to grow your own seeds to then make into plants to sell, has been a pretty good model for us. But I think the good part of it was we had plants to start with because I guess you've got a awkward two year gap to grow your plants. So to be able to have money to buy some plants, to get, the movement moving that was quite helpful.

**Rachael Halder:** And Ainsley anything to add?

**Ainsley Adams:** Yeah, a hundred percent what Rosie just said. It was, it was really cool to have, the first lot of plants to get some momentum going.

I guess some of the things just from doing this for the last few years was, it is really handy to have the nursery home [00:16:00] base. Like Rosie said, it's really handy to have. The facility there to one look after the plants, like watering is a big one. And, just to hold them in an area, to be honest, it sounds like a really simple thing, but it's, it's actually quite a big, if we didn't have that, we would've had to pay to put in that sort of infrastructure that, AB Lime does have in the nursery.

So that's definitely a saved cost if you can partner up with a nursery, or get that infrastructure in early on. Um, and keep the momentum up. So one big thing is always have the monthly sessions. Like we can't always make them all. Sometimes I have something on and can't make it. Like it's as long as it's still

happening and it's still the, if you wanna drop in and just help out, it's always on. Yeah keep that momentum up.

**Rachael Halder:** Cool. And for anybody who wants to join , where would they find that information?

**Ainsley Adams:** So if anyone wants to join along, just jump on our Facebook page. It's also advertised on Thrivings events page. First Tuesday of every month from 4pm - 6pm. You are [00:17:00] most welcome to come a bit earlier. You're most welcome to stay a bit later. And anybody's welcome any ages. Any level, from , never planting anything in your life even a vegetable right through to really seasoned in it. Feel free to come along.

**Rachael Halder:** And do they have to bring anything?

**Ainsley Adams:** Nope. Just themselves.

**Rachael Halder:** Very cool. And so maybe finishing parting some practical wisdom, top tips for anyone, if they're growing or starting a nursery at home.

**Rosie Hunter:** I would say from having not a very successful little nursery at home, that you really need to pick up an automatic watering system 'cause I can't be trusted. So even if it's just an automatic timer and just start small, you can get like a little, like a little tunnel house thing that's a meter, you know, those tiny ones for, to help seeds grow.

But the key is to water them.

**Ainsley Adams:** Definitely the watering is a major. Yeah, I can say that. I forget to water mine at home too, so that's a big one. And then also, definitely start off with [00:18:00] ones that you are familiar with. So if you've got plants that you're familiar with, and, you know grow everywhere like Pittosporums, um, Carex Secta, a few little ones like that , they're the ones that you're gonna have the best success with.

Google your fast five hardy plants, easy to grow from seed in New Zealand and, you'll start to see some real success with them straight away. And yeah, come along to a Mid Oreti session and just ask questions. If you, wanna grow your own natives, feel free to just come to one session or two sessions and ask all questions you like. We are more willing to share all that information.



**Rachael Halder:** So cool. Amazing work ladies. And the Mini Forest movement is something that all of Southland can be involved in. And I know you guys have had cross catchment engagement. And it would be so cool to see this replicated across the province and if not further, but thank you for your time and, we hope you see some extra people at your next drop-in session. And I look forward to joining you guys one day when I make it out there too. Thank you.

**Ainsley Adams:** Awesome. Thanks Rachel.

**Rosie Hunter:** Thanks Rachel.

**Rachael Halder:** [00:19:00] And that's a wrap for another episode of Catchment Convos, brought to you by Thriving Southland. A big thanks to our guests for being a part of the conversation on today's episode, and for you guys for tuning in. We appreciate your support. Don't forget to like, subscribe, and follow us wherever you get your podcast from so you can stay up to date with all the latest episodes as they're released.

For more information on this episode, check out the show notes or head to the Thriving Southland website where you can also learn more about the awesome work happening across the catchment groups here in Southland. And if you've got a project or an idea you wanna share, don't be shy. Reach out. So until next time, keep up the good work out there on the land and as always, stay connected and keep driving those changes for a thriving Southland.