

Card for Humanity - Repair Cafes

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Repair Cafes

Our society has been termed the “throw away society”. It is often easier (and sometimes cheaper) to buy something new rather than fix it. The trouble is, some of us have forgotten that we can repair things ourselves. We don’t know how to or we are just time poor. In addition, there’s no doubt that repairing some products such as electricals is getting tougher. Modern manufacturing hasn't helped as it makes items less repairable (e.g. special screws, expensive spare parts) and repair information is increasingly restricted.

The idea of planned obsolescence is nothing new, although the landscape is changing. Driven by consumer advocates and repair professionals, we are seeing repair cafes pop up and an increase in online DIY advice sites and tools such as [iFixit](#). “Right to repair” groups are pushing for legislation in this area. And, yes, there is copyright on repairing some of your goods!.

There is one group that is helping change people’s mindsets and habits with the launch of repair cafes around the world.

Who are they?

Repair Café originated in the Netherlands in 2009. Martine Postma started out by sharing tips on how to produce less waste in our daily lives, but she realised that many of the tips were to do with repair. In 2011, the non-profit organisation “The Repair Café Foundation” was born. Since then, professional and volunteer support has been provided to local groups in 32 countries wishing to start their own Repair Cafés. There are now 1875 Repair Cafés worldwide, with 37 in Australia. You can find them [here](#).

What are they?

A Repair Café is a local community space where people repair household electrical and mechanical devices, computers, bicycles, clothing etc. They are organised by, and for, local residents. The core of the concept is that you do the repair with the help of a “skilled volunteer”. Those wanting to start a group in their local community may register with the Repair Café Foundation or, as some have done, branch out on their own. It is a free service providing tools and materials with the objective to reduce waste, share repair skills and strengthen social engagement.

Where are they?

There are 37 Australian repair cafes registered with the Repair Café Foundation. Here are a couple in Sydney...

[Repair Cafe North Sydney](#)

Member of Repair Café Foundation. Work with items such as jewellery, ceramics, shoes, toys, clothes, zips, bags, small woodwork repairs, and household battery-operated items. People are also welcome to watch and learn. All free, though donations are welcome and contribute toward the ongoing cost of materials needed for repairs.

[The Bower Reuse and Repair Centre](#)

Offers Repair Café (free) and a repair service (fee charged).

Located in: Green square, Parramatta and Redfern.

Rent-a-Bench: A service where you can work on a project of your own with the assistance of a skilled Bower staff member.

Some benefits of Repair Cafés

- Learn skills and techniques to repair items.
- Valuable, practical knowledge is shared and passed on.
- Longer life given to products repaired; reducing landfill.
- Social engagement and community focus.

Statistics so far

According to a 2017 report from the United Nations University, the production of e-waste grew to 45 million metric tonnes globally in 2016 ([1]). E-waste is often highly toxic, leaching heavy metals and dangerous chemicals into the soil around landfills and releasing greenhouse gas and mercury emissions when burned.

The latest [YouGov Omnibus](#) research reveals the extent of clothes waste in Australia. Three-quarters of Australian adults (75%) have thrown clothes away at some point in the past year and two in five (41%) have thrown unwanted clothes in the bin ([2]).

Other common reasons for Australians to throw clothes away are because they're damaged (52%) and because they have developed a fault (40%) ([2]).

The global average water footprint for 1 kilogram of cotton - equivalent to the weight of one shirt and a pair of jeans is 10,000 - 20,000 litres, depending on where it is grown ([3],[4]).

Repair Café International analysed the 2018 data entered in [RepairMonitor](#) the online tool for repair data collection. The data was entered by volunteer repairers at 34 Repair Cafés in the Netherlands, the US, the UK and Australia.

Here are some key highlights:

- 65% of all repairs were successful. For many cases, items were not broken but mainly needed maintenance. Simple tasks such as cleaning, descaling or lubricating were often enough to make a product work again ([5])
- The most common item brought to the Repair Café in 2018 was the coffee machine. Also vacuum cleaners, bicycles, lamps, trousers, sewing machines, clocks, coats, irons and laptops ([5]).

[International Repair Day](#) was established in 2017 to promote the value and importance of repairing. The event occurs annually, on the third Saturday in October and is celebrated at a range of community events, including [Restart Parties](#).

References

- 1 Baldé, C.P., Forti V., Gray, V., Kuehr, R., Stegmann,P. : The Global E-waste Monitor – 2017, United Nations University (UNU), International Telecommunication Union (ITU) & International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), Bonn/Geneva/Vienna.
- 2 YouGov AU. Fast fashion: Three in ten Aussies have thrown away clothing after wearing it just once. December 2017. Accessed July 2019. Available from: <https://au.yougov.com/news/2017/12/06/fast-fashion>
- 3 Valuing our clothes. The cost of UK fashion. July 2017. Accessed July 21st Available from: http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/valuing-our-clothes-the-cost-of-uk-fashion_WRAP.pdf
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