



Background information on Repair Café

In this document you will find background information on the Repair Café concept, and how it and the Repair Café Foundation came to be. This information can be used for communication about your own Repair Café, for instance when you want to explain to others what your local initiative entails exactly, where the initiative originated from and what the relationship is between the Repair Café Foundation and your local initiative.

What is a Repair Café?

Repair Cafés are free meeting places and they're all about repairing things (together). In the place where a Repair Café is located, you'll find tools and materials to help you make any repairs you need. On clothes, furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles, crockery, appliances, toys, et cetera. You'll also find expert volunteers, with repair skills in all kinds of fields. Visitors bring their broken items from home. In the Repair Café, they start making their repairs, together with the specialists. It's an ongoing learning process. If you have nothing to repair, you can enjoy a cup of tea or coffee. Or you can lend a hand with someone else's repair job. You can also get inspired at the reading table – by leafing through books on repairs and DIY.

Why a Repair Café?

We throw away vast amounts of stuff. Even things with almost nothing wrong, and which could get a new lease on life after a simple repair. The trouble is, lots of people have forgotten that they can repair things themselves or they no longer know how. Knowing how to make repairs is a skill quickly lost. Society doesn't always show much appreciation for the people who still have this practical knowledge, and against their will they are often left standing on the sidelines. Their skills are never used, or hardly ever.

The Repair Café changes all that! People who might otherwise be sidelined are getting involved again. Valuable practical knowledge is getting passed on. Things are being used for longer and don't have to be thrown away. This reduces the volume of raw materials and energy needed to make new products. It cuts CO2 emissions, for example, because manufacturing new products and recycling old ones causes CO2 to be released.

The Repair Café teaches people to see their possessions in a new light, and to, once again, appreciate their value. The Repair Café helps change people's mindset. This is essential to kindle people's enthusiasm for a sustainable society.

But most of all, the Repair Café just wants to show how much fun repairing things can be, and how easy it often is. Why don't you give it a go?

Who thought up the idea?

The Repair Café was initiated by Martine Postma. Since 2007, she has been striving for sustainability at a local level in many ways - as a journalist, publicist, local politician, entrepreneur, citizen and consumer. Her special focus has always been to decrease the amount of waste we produce as a society.

When and where was the very first Repair Café held?

The first Repair Café was held in October 2009 in Amsterdam West. Martine Postma organised this – initially one time – meeting in cooperation with the Municipality of Amsterdam.

How did it continue after the first meeting?

The very first Repair Café was so successful that Martine Postma continued the endeavour. In 2010, she organised several Repair Café meetings at different locations in Amsterdam. These caught the attention of more and more people and the media all over the country. That is why Martine decided to establish a project that would give the Repair Café a footing all over the Netherlands and beyond. This project has led to Repair Cafés being organised in many hundreds of places all over the world. And that number is growing daily!

When and by whom was the Repair Café Foundation founded?

Martine Postma founded the Repair Café Foundation in March 2010. The foundation is based in Amsterdam.

What are the goals of the Repair Café Foundation?

Repair Café Foundation aims to a) reintroducing the art of repairing to the modern, local communities; b) retaining and spreading repair knowledge and skills; c) to promote social cohesion by bringing together neighbours from very different backgrounds and motives in a setting of inspiring and accessible meetings.

The repairs at the Repair Café are free. Isn't that unfair competition for professional repairers like seamstresses and bicycle repair shops?

The people visiting the Repair Cafés at the moment are not customers of professional repairers. They are people who are now tossing out their broken bedside lamp, blender, chair or coat because getting it repaired is more expensive than buying a new one. By helping people in the Repair Café in return for a voluntary contribution we avoid them having to buy a new one. In that sense, we are not competing with professional repairers but rather with the manufacturer who wants you to throw away your old stuff and buy new ones. Furthermore, visitors of the Repair Café learn that their items can be fixed a lot more easily than they might have thought. That way, the chance that they will bring their broken items to a professional repairer in the future will increase rather than decrease. And finally, people used to repair all kinds of stuff at home while there were also professional repairers at work. The thought that repairing items yourself is competition for professional repairers, is not based on experiences of the past. The reason that professional repairers are struggling and disappearing is subject to reasons found elsewhere in our economic system. For example, in the fact that the tax on raw materials is very low whereas tax on labour is high. This is what needs to change!