

Thinking of Setting up a Repair Café?



This 'How to' guide looks at setting up repair cafés in Cumbria. A repair café is a community initiative that bring together people with skills to repair and those who want items repaired. People are invited to bring their broken or damaged items for repair, and volunteers attempt to fix them.

A repair café is a fun, social community event that values the expertise of volunteer craftspeople and helps to reduce waste and consumption.

Anyone can set up a repair café with their own branding and logo and some groups prefer to go down this route. However, the majority of repair cafes are linked to the Repair Café Foundation. The international Repair Cafe movement kicked off in Amsterdam and now there are over a thousand Repair Cafes around the world. The Repair Café Foundation can provide a digital starter kit in return for a donation. The kit includes a manual of practical tips to assist in setting up a Repair Café, templates for posters and flyers as well as forms to cover liability and collect feedback from people who visit your Repair Café. For more information visit <https://repaircafe.org/en/>.

The manual covers: finding a suitable site, locating the expertise to make repairs, choosing tools and repair materials, generating publicity to attract visitors and getting financial backing. It also deals with ensuring continuity and safety and improving your local Repair Café through evaluation.



"It's so much better to fix things if possible, rather than chuck them out and buy replacements."

What can be fixed?

All sorts of stuff can be fixed, repairs to small electrical goods and clothes tend to be the most popular but the list of possibilities also includes:

Furniture upholstery

Tool and knife sharpening

Old cameras and slide equipment

Photographic and digital images

Textiles – sewing, knitting, darning

Garden equipment

Wooden items

IT support

Pottery

Toys

Jewellery

Electronics

Welding

Cobbling



You can also add in occasional or seasonal themed sessions such as: a garden seed swap / plant swap, tool repairs, bike repairs, workshops such as learning how to make plastic free wax food wraps and 'UNIFORM share' events where families can swap school uniform for the new school year.

If things come in that require longer than the Repair Café's time to fix individual volunteers can offer to take the items away and fix them in their own time – that's an agreement between the volunteer and the bringer.

All photos supplied by Alston Moor Greenprint project unless otherwise labelled.

Planning your repair cafe

There are quite a few things to think about when planning to set up a repair café. The sections below run through the main topics briefly but you will find more detailed information in the repair café manual.

Venue

You need an accessible venue, or a venue with a lift for bigger repairs, along with plenty of tables to work off, floor space and sockets for electricals. Most venues are just borrowed or hired for the day but a permanent venue allows you to have some storage space to keep tools, fabrics etc.

The venue must have its own current Public Liability insurance.

If there isn't a first-aid kit, take your own. If there's a defibrillator, familiarise yourself with it.

Ensure access to the venue's main fuse box just in case a faulty appliance trips the fuse board. Using RCDs (residual circuit detectors) will prevent faulty electrical appliances tripping a fuse in the venue.

It's also desirable to have:

- WiFi so repairers can search the internet for spare parts /information.
- Good natural light or else desk lamps.
- Outside space can be useful if you are asked to repair outdoor equipment such as lawn mowers.

Dates

In most places a monthly repair café is sufficient. Pop-up repair cafes can be run in smaller towns and villages where there is only a need for an occasional event. These can be held in conjunction with other events such as a WI or a Macmillan coffee morning.

Saturdays are the most popular day but weekday evenings can also work well.

People

Running a repair cafe needs a co-ordinator, a set of volunteers with various skills, a volunteer to meet and greet and catering support.

“Funding isn't as essential as people power! You can do a lot with just handy folk who want to get on with it.”

The co-ordinator has the hardest job as they do most of the preparatory work. They are often a volunteer but the role can also be part of someone's job or a work placement. For example, an employee or a trainee in a neighbourhood centre. The coordinator usually makes agreements with participating organisations, maintains contact with everyone, recruits volunteers and generally

keeps an eye on everything that has been done and that still needs doing.

Your repairers are of course key to a repair café. You will probably want a few people happy to tackle sewing repairs and small electricals as well as people with a range of other repair skills. Your repairers may have a huge amount of skill and experience to share and take great pleasure in making things work. Some are keen to teach visitors how to do their own repairs, others prefer to concentrate in peace.

You will also need someone to greet visitors as they arrive, see what sort of repair is needed, check it is practical in the time available and direct them to the right repair station. They also inform visitors of the house rules and ask them to fill in a registration form. When visitors leave the receptionist collects the registration form and notes whether or not the repair was successful.

If the café is busy it is also helpful to have a liaison person who can ensure visitors are seen in the order they arrived as the appropriate repairers become available and keep customers informed of progress particularly if there is a queue forming;

It is important to brief all your volunteers immediately prior to your first session to ensure that each person knows exactly what will happen and what is expected of them.

It is also suggested that you ensure volunteers have tea, coffee and sandwiches on the day. Listen to their suggestions or comments and thank them afterwards.

Most cafes only run for 3-4 hours once a month so the volunteer time commitment is not too onerous.

Promotion

Good promotion is important, particularly as the repair café is getting established. Try to get the word out widely through:

- Posters and flyers
- Local newsletters and social media promotion. Community organizations including CAFs may be happy to help spread the word.
- Your mailing list
- Word of mouth

It can be useful to piggy back the Repair Café's onto other events where you know there will be attendees and share the promotion – for example a regular jumble sale or school event. In Alston Moor the Repair Café is run alongside a Big Community Breakfast.

Running Costs

Running costs vary but you will need to cover some costs. Venue hire can be the biggest cost although many cafes find free venues. Cafes usually provide free refreshments for volunteers as well as the cost of any materials bought and used at the café and possibly volunteer travel expenses.

Although Repair Cafes are usually free to enter, they generally request a voluntary contribution for any repairs. Have a donation box visible and clearly labelled with a card letting people know the Repair Café needs funds to operate.

Sales of refreshments and possibly hand-made items such as draught excluders can also help raise funds.

Legal issues and paperwork

Public Liability Insurance (PLI) will be required. The venue should have its own public liability insurance but do check what this covers. It may not cover all the risks involved in running your repair café in which case you will also need separate cover. A comprehensive risk assessment should be carried out prior to each café and it is best to have a qualified first aider on site.

Visitors should be asked to read and sign a form with Disclaimers and House Rules on arrival – before any repairs are carried out. This will explain there are no promises and no guarantees, but if something can be saved the repairers will give it their best efforts.

Volunteers must provide emergency contact details. Note that you will need to make sure all personal data is collected and held in compliance with the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

For any electrical repairs you should have a PAT tester and some volunteers who have attended a PAT tester accredited training course. Small electrical items can be PAT tested before and after any repair is carried out.



Getting Started

If you decide you would like to start a repair café you will need to get potential volunteers together to discuss: how the café could run, potential venues and the list of available skill sets. It is helpful to start by filling out volunteer forms / emergency contacts.

You will then need to define what you can fix and what you can't as a group and promote accordingly.

You also have to think about data protection and how you're storing information. You may want to share emails and form an email group.

Linking up with other organizations

Repair Cafes in Cumbria get support from a whole range of organizations who offer help ranging from providing a free space to hold the café, to providing tea and cake, to helping to identify volunteers, to providing funds for equipment. If you ask around you may well find other organizations happy to provide some form of support. For example, Keswick Repair Cafe was set up by members of Keswick Lions, the Lions agreed to provide support in running the monthly event and some funds to buy tools and equipment. Other cafes are supported by the W.I. with refreshments or local supermarkets providing a convenient space.



Funding

Setting up a repair café does not require that much funding but you will probably need a few hundred pounds to:

- Purchase some equipment, most volunteers bring their own tools and equipment but you may need to fill in a few gaps and will probably need to buy a PAT tester.
- You will then need to ensure a few people are trained to do PAT testing.
- You will need to buy some consumables.
- You may need insurance.

There are various funding sources that can be applied to. For example, Ulverston Repair Cafe used a grant of £500 from Town Lands Trust to buy equipment including a heavy-duty sewing machine, a vice and a portable workbench. The Repair Cafés at Alston Moor were funded by Cumbria County Council's Waste Prevention Fund and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Information and Support in Cumbria

Repair Cafes in Cumbria

At the time of writing the following repair cafes were active in Cumbria. If we have missed you out or you have started up recently do let us know.

Alston Moor - Quarterly Repair Cafés are held at Nenthead along with a Big Breakfast event. Alston Moor Partnership now host the Repair Café's. Events are advertised on the Absolutely Alston Facebook page and on posters.



Carlisle Repair Café is held monthly on the 2nd Saturday of every month from 11am-1pm. It is held in a yard on Caldewgate, behind KC Superbikes. Details are shared on the Carlisle-Repair-Cafe Facebook page.

In **Kendal Simply Repair South Lakes** holds repair events on the first Tuesday of every month from 4.30– 7pm at Castle Street Centre, Kendal. Food is provided by Kendal People's Café. They also hold events such as a 'UNIFORM share' event where families can swap school uniform for the new school year.

Keswick Repair Café aims to meet monthly on the first Saturday of the month. The cafe is held in the Riverside Bar of the Conservative Club in Keswick, with refreshments provided by Keswick W I. Details are shared on the KeswickRepairCafe Facebook page.

Penrith Repair Café aims to meet one Saturday a month at The Old Fire Station, Bridge Lane, Penrith, CA11 8HY. Details are shared on the PenrithRepairCafe Facebook page.

Ulverston Repair Cafe is held on the first Monday in the month at the Ulverston Booths Cafe, from 6:30pm to 8:30pm. They have a website: <http://ulverstonrepaircafe.org/>

This guide has been produced with support from SLDC.



CAfS

CAfS has been supporting communities across Cumbria take action to improve their sustainability for over 20 years. As an independent charity we are proud that our advice is professional, practical and impartial. Whilst our mission is ultimately to tackle climate change, we appreciate that the solutions often involve far broader motivations – which is why we get involved in projects ranging from reducing heating bills in village halls to helping communities grow their own healthy food.

We believe that sharing the experiences of those we help enables us all to learn what works, what doesn't, how much things cost and what pitfalls to avoid.

Green Build Festival – CAfS run a Cumbria Green Build and Sustainable Living Festival every September which is a wonderful opportunity to visit other places which have taken action and learn from them.

Green Build Festival Tour, Photo by Sophie Murray

CAfS newsletter and events. The CAfS newsletter is a great source of information on sustainable news and events such as the Green Build Festival. Sign up at: <https://cafs.org.uk/>

Other Organizations

ACT –ACTION with Communities in Cumbria is a charity that works with communities. They particularly support the formation and early years of organisations that serve Cumbrian communities. They can advise on setting up as a constituted organisation. This will be required to apply for funding as a community organisation.

<http://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk/>

Cumbria CVS – (Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service) offers help, advice, training and support to third sector groups throughout Cumbria. They can help with tailored searches for appropriate funding, planning and writing funding applications, business and financial planning and developing funding strategies. <https://cumbriacvs.org.uk>