

Repair Café Toronto Aims for Less Disposable Society

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Group of volunteers planning a 'fix it' gathering Jan. 11



Volunteer fixer Daniel Medeiros, foreground, and Susan Sussman check a vaccum cleaner during a recent Repair Café Toronto event. - Photo/COURTESY

While many people may have the urge to simply throw out broken appliances, jewelry and electronics and replace them with newer versions of the same, a small group of volunteers is looking to make today's society less disposable.

For the past six months or so, Repair Café Toronto has been offering free volunteer-driven gatherings where others can bring in broken goods and have them fixed for free.

The idea was spawned out of a similar movement in Amsterdam, with Toronto residents Paul Magder and Wai Chu Cheng looking to rid their fellow Torontonians of the urge to just get rid of anything and everything once it breaks.

“We’re trying to change the mindset of the throwaway society and helping people become fixers,” Magder said.

Repair Café Toronto includes a number of volunteer “fixers” who specialize in fixing various types of items. The repairs are free, though the Repair Café does ask for donations to help cover the costs of promoting their services

“We have people who can fix anything from computers to home appliances like lamps, irons and toasters, to clothing to jewelry,” Magder said. “The idea is not just fixing things. Our volunteers go through the process of troubleshooting. Often, the people who bring things in to get fixed will actually do the repairs themselves.”

Magder pointed to the extreme throwaway nature of society by citing the example of an acquaintance who purchased a paper shredder from a major retail chain. When the item was delivered in non-working condition, the acquaintance called the retailer to complain and was told to throw it out and a replacement would be shipped.

“It turned out there was just one part that was installed wrong,” he said. “It was an easy fix, but the first reaction was ‘just throw it out.’”

Guests can bring their items in the day of the event and register to have them fixed, with fixers taking on tasks on a first-come first-served basis. Free tea, coffee and pastries are provided as people wait.

Of course, not everything brought in can be repaired. Magder estimates about 60 per cent of the items brought in can be repaired on-site, with volunteers telling many others exactly what to do to repair the item at home in cases where additional parts need to be bought.

“We do have situations where items are not going to be repairable,” he said. “But most people walk away with their items fixed or at least knowing what they have to do.”

Repair Café Toronto’s monthly events have mostly taken place at Skills for Change near St. Clair Avenue West and Bathurst Street, with one offshoot event at Wychwood Barns. In the new year, the organization plans to branch out with events at the Toronto Reference Library and North York Central Library.

The next event will take place at Skills for Change, 791 St. Clair Avenue West, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 11. For more information, visit www.repaircafetoronto.ca



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