

STEPS IN STARTING A REPAIR CAFÉ

– by Janet Henderson, Pittsfield [MA] Repair Café Coordinator

1) Getting information from the Repair Café Foundation:

To get your packet of information from the Repair Café Foundation in the Netherlands on how to start a Repair Café, go to repaircafe.org and after reading the information on the website, click on Start Your Own. They now [October, 2014] charge a fee of 45 euros (about \$64 Cdn). They ask you to agree to use their logo, the name "Repair Café" and their website address. Follow the instructions from there.

They will send you a very good, very comprehensive packet of information with advice on all stages of holding a Repair Café. You and your group, if you have one, need to read over the information, so you have an idea of what to do to begin. At least one person needs to study it carefully and start taking the necessary actions.

What follows here is additional information/advice based on our experience with holding, so far, 17 Repair Cafés in Pittsfield, MA, USA. Please take what you can use and leave the rest.

2) A core group vs. an individual coordinator:

It helps if you already have a group of friends and acquaintances that you think might be interested in helping start a Repair Café. If you don't, you could talk individually to people you know, or send out an email blast to everyone you know locally, or hold an introductory potluck, where you explain the whole thing. You'll be trying to form a core group of people who can get behind the idea. While one or two people can do all the preliminary work, it helps to have a group of 3 or more people, so you can share the work.

My husband and I already had a core group of people who, as soon as we told them about the idea, were immediately enthused. I had found several online articles and videos to introduce it and we discussed it, but it didn't take much for them to agree to try it. They were all willing to help at the events and most had repair skills, but no one was very interested in doing the preparatory work to start it up. So my husband Tom and I did most of the initial organizational and planning work. We created the first flyer together, and he did most of the leg work of putting the flyers and posters out, with some help from others in our group. I wrote the press releases and other emails, etc. and did the coordination and communication.

The first year, Tom helped a lot with promotion and communication, but since he has been busier this year, I have done most of the in-between-event promotional and coordination work myself, with some specific tasks being taken over by others in the group, which is definitely the way to go. If as many volunteers as possible do just one task during the month, all the tasks will be taken care of fairly painlessly, although you will still need one person to coordinate and oversee and make sure that everything is done.

Bottom line, if there is only you, you'll have a lot of work to do. Most likely, even if you start alone, you'll find other enthusiastic people wanting to participate, as you go along.

3) Some decisions you need to make:

See separate document called "Questions for organizers to answer". One question that definitely

needs to be decided early on is: Are your repair volunteers/specialists going to actually fix the guests' items, or are they going to serve as coaches for the guests to fix their items themselves, as they do in the Netherlands? One option would be to ask what the guest prefers when they check in and do it "their" way.

When the volunteers are fixing the items, you can encourage the guests to watch, ask questions, and perhaps learn how to make future repairs. In our case, our volunteers fix the guests' items 95% of the time; occasionally, someone comes either for the emotional support or for advice and fixes their items themselves at the event. That always feels great!

We want to move in the direction of encouraging guests to help with repairs or at the very least instill the thought in them that perhaps they could learn enough to try a future repair themselves. With that in mind, we have a new question on our reception forms that asks: "Do you want to receive advice and instruction from our volunteers and try to fix your items yourself, or do you want the volunteer to repair them while you watch?"

Another question: Are you going to have a disclaimer saying that the Repair Café is not responsible for negative outcomes resulting from work done? If so, are you just going to have a sign saying that, or are you going to add that to your reception form with a place for a signature? If you think something more is needed to protect you and the other volunteers from litigation, you could check out insurance or try to get under another organization's insurance.

We have gone the route of having a disclaimer and requiring the guests' signatures.

4) Getting more volunteers:

Whether or not you have a core group, your first major task will likely be to get additional volunteers to help at the events. You can send out an email blast explaining the Repair Café concept and asking for volunteers. You can create flyers and posters and put them around town and/or hand out flyers at farmers markets, festivals, and other events. You can stand up at meetings or church functions and explain what you are doing and ask for interested people to get in touch with you.

By doing the above and sending out publicity, we ended up with 19 volunteers for the first event, about half repair people and half general helpers, which was really optimal.

Ideally, you'll have 8-12, or more, repair volunteers, who are skilled in various crafts, including both hand sewing and machine sewing, electrical and electronic repairs, carpentry repairs, bicycle repairs, blade sharpening, possibly computer repair, possibly jewelry repair, possibly knitting [for sweater repair], etc. etc. You don't need to have all possible repair skills; just advertise those you do have. And your offerings will change over time, as old volunteers phase out and new ones phase in, so be prepared to change the skills you list.

If you can't get that many repair volunteers, you will just have a smaller event. This is only a problem if you have too many guests bringing items. In this case, you can limit the number of items to one per guest or you can put a sign on the door, saying you are full up for the day. It's a balancing act: You want enough guests to make the work of the event to be worthwhile, and you want enough volunteers to be able to fix, or coach the fixing, of the items brought. Life is rarely perfect, so don't sweat it.

You'll also need 3-4 general helpers [what I call front-of-the-house volunteers], assuming you do as we have done and have reception and exit tables and fill out forms so you can welcome guests, keep track of how many guests you had, what kinds of items were brought in, whether you were able to

repair them or not, which towns guests are from, how new guests heard about your Repair Café, and so on. See the attached “Reception and Exit form”.

I recommend having a form that you save and that you collate the information from, onto a spreadsheet for easy reference. You can use the stats to see progress over time and to spot problems, such as a lack of repair skill in a particular area. You can use the information for press releases or to put on your Facebook page or website, if you have one, or for interviews with the press. You can also use the information in case you want to apply for a grant in the future; they always want stats.

Most important is for all volunteers to make the guests feel welcomed and comfortable.

Volunteers are also needed to direct guests to the appropriate repair person, to take photos [very important!], to run errands, and to help guests carry heavy objects, etc. Of course, the venue needs to be arranged with tables, chairs, food and drinks, signs, and forms before the event and taken down afterwards. And, if you're having drinks, or drinks and refreshments, you'll need someone to set out more drinks and food as necessary and keep the food area clean during the event.

You could possibly need even more volunteers up front, if you have a big event with lots of guests. Then, you might need two people at the reception table, two at the exit table, one or two to direct guests to the appropriate volunteer, one just to take photos/videos, one to handle the food, one to go to purchase supplies, etc.

You also need your coordinator(s) to be checking everything during the event. You might do better with two coordinators, one for the front-of-the-house and one for the back-of-the-house.

5) The Repair Café Coordinator:

Your coordinator needs to see that guests are welcomed and feel comfortable, know what to do, where to go, aren't being forgotten or left alone too long, have a chair, and know about the drinks and snacks and anything else you are offering.

S/he needs to make sure volunteers feel appreciated and wanted, have whatever they need, including tools and supplies and time to get a drink and a snack and to go to the restroom, know whose item to work on next, are comfortable with getting advice and help from other volunteers when they need it [a collaborative ethic is very good, where volunteers consult with each other and work together on difficult items], etc.

The coordinator usually is the one to talk to any media reps who come, and to other people who might want to volunteer [we have a sign-up sheet on the exit table], and to other people who want information on starting a Repair Café in their town [have them put their contact info on your guest sheet, which is a sign-in sheet for those guests who aren't bringing items to be repaired].

The coordinator in general needs to rove, chat people up, check that the food table doesn't look messy, make sure the reception and exit volunteers are being friendly and filling out forms correctly, make sure that photo opportunities are being noticed, etc. etc..

But it is equally, or even more important, for the coordinator to be cheerful, happy, relaxed, and enjoying the event, because that feeling spreads. And what is most important for the success of a Repair Café is for people to have a good time.

6) Deciding how often to hold the Repair Café, what day of the week, what time, and for how many hours:

Some Repair Cafés hold their events every month, some every other month, and some quarterly. Holding it every month is a lot of work, so you need to carefully consider if you have enough people to do the promotion and coordination work or whether you are willing and able to do it all yourself, without burning out. Easier is every two months. It's not just the day of the event that takes time; promotion, coordination, organization, communication can take another 2-3 days, or more, a month outside the Repair Café event.

My suggestion, unless you have considerable help with promotion and coordination, is that you hold the event every two months. We decided to hold our event once a month on the third Saturday so people would have a way to remember it. [We advertise it as being on "third Saturdays.] But each event follows very quickly on the heels of the last, and it's easy to suffer burn-out. However, here's a caveat: If your Repair Café catches on very quickly and you have more than enough guests at your events, since not having to do much promotion cuts way down on the preparatory work, you may be able to hold monthly events without too much effort.

Last year we took a break during November and December, because of the US Thanksgiving and Christmas and Hanukkah holidays, and we are doing the same this year.

Your venue might only have certain days/times available, so you might have to settle for less than your first choice, but consider that your volunteers and guests might like to sleep late if your event is on a Saturday, so 10 am or later is probably best. Also consider that it takes an hour or more to set up for the event, and even longer when you are first starting out.

I suggest Saturday for the day of the week and 3-4 hours for the length of the event. But it is possible to hold events in the evening for 2-3 hours, and that can be good if your area has lots of competing weekend events, as ours does. In retrospect, for a Saturday event, I recommend 3 hours if you are holding the event every month, unless you are in a big city. If every other month, probably 4 hours is good.

You want the event to be long enough to make it worthwhile for your volunteers to give up their afternoon, but not so long that they get over-tired and not so long that there aren't enough guests and items to be repaired to fill the time. You want there to be a long enough window of time so guests can manage to get there, and you want enough time to get a lot of repairs done, again to make it worthwhile, and so that guests aren't turned away too often because of insufficient time to do repairs. Generally, somewhere in the range of 3-5 hours would make sense.

7) Choosing a location:

Each town is different, depending on size and layout, etc., so you'll have to think about your town and what would be best for you. Venue possibilities include schools, churches, libraries, and community centers. I recommend, if you hold your event in a church, that you state prominently that this is an independently-run event, so people don't feel uncomfortable coming if they don't belong to that denomination or worry that they might be proselytized to.

We chose a church basement for our events because it was available, not too expensive, is in a central location downtown, is quite large, and has a kitchen and many large tables. It costs us \$75 for the afternoon. Ideally, you will be able to find a place that doesn't charge you anything, so you don't have to worry about getting enough donations.

Preferably, you can find a location on the first floor so people don't have to carry heavy items up or down stairs and so older and handicapped people have access. But if it is in the basement or upstairs, hopefully the building has an elevator you can use. You also need plenty of available parking. And you need a place that has electrical outlets, lots of chairs, good lighting, fans for the summer, and hot water for drinks in the winter.

We've stayed at the same location for the two years we've been running Repair Cafés. Once, we went to a barter fair and held a mini Repair Café, in addition to our regular event. That was interesting and made more people aware of us, but it was a little more work and not quite as satisfactory a venue, so we aren't likely to do that often. I think switching locations periodically could be a good thing, to accommodate people who live in other areas of town, but we haven't found it necessary or desirable, preferring that people be familiar with our location.

8) Getting the second packet of information from the Repair Café Foundation:

Once you have settled on a date and place, email repairCafé.org again for the second packet, which contains the logo, a sample press release, etc.

9) Promoting the Repair Café:

It's very important to get your publicity for the first event out there beginning a couple of months in advance.

Our experience: Each successive bit of publicity, including putting up posters and flyers, sending out a press release to local media outlets, and putting the notice on numerous websites, mailing lists, etc. netted us more interest and enthusiasm and more volunteers.

A couple of other mailing lists/blogs picked the announcement up and put it out several times. People saw the article and posted it other places, and then other people saw and posted it, etc. So, it really got around. And since everyone LOVES the idea, they helped to promote it. We got an invitation to be on the local talk radio show, which was a good opportunity to give more in-depth information and make it more personal. I had been given a list of a lot of local media outlets/ mailing lists, etc., so I sent the updated press release out again a week or so ahead of the event, and that led to a lot more interest, much more than we expected. By the day of the event, we were absolutely astounded at how many people had gotten in touch with us and at how enthusiastic they were. And we had a good turnout on the day of the event, as well as reporters showing up.

We had also advertised for sponsors and while we only got one, in addition to giving us a bit of money, they promoted it in their newsletter and on their website, and said they would have a volunteer there on the day, as well. We also got some donations from our core group of volunteers, so we were covered financially for the first event.

One thing to think about: You may want to hold a trial-run repair event that isn't publicized but where you personally invite a number of people, so that you can work through any problems and refine your procedures, and so that you can find out that you need certain tools or supplies or you don't have enough repair people or whatever is the case. That way, you'll have more confidence, and things will run more smoothly, at your first "real" event. We didn't do that, and I had a lot of anxiety going into our first event. As it turned out, everything was fine. But if you don't have prior experience with holding events, doing a trial run is probably a good idea.

10) Other promotion advice [so that you enough guests come through your doors to keep your volunteers busy]:

Choose your date carefully, considering other area events on that day, and be sure to get out plenty of publicity, and do it in several blasts. Also, be sure and send the information to online area calendars and newspaper calendars.

Since the initial event in January 2013, in addition to the above types of promotion, we have also handed out quarter-page flyers to people at other events, such as festivals or farmers' markets. We've given little 2-5 minute talks at various events, including during church services. But mostly, we've put up flyers on area bulletin boards and sent the notice to the media outlets. We've been on the radio several times and we've had a number of write-ups in area newspapers and magazines.

Having a presence online is really good, such as a Facebook page. Some Repair Café groups even create their own website.

We eventually created a Facebook page, which has been very good, but unless you are experienced with leveraging Facebook, it may not help to bring in either volunteers or guests, as it can take time to build. You want to have enough posts to keep people's interest up, but not so many that people "unlike" you, because they are overwhelmed by the number of posts. I am still trying to decide what that balance is. I post an average of about 8 posts a month, including photos. I occasionally include posts about other local groups' events and sometimes compatible articles from other websites that I want to promote.

Photos are extremely important, not just on Facebook, but to accompany press releases and email blasts and to put on flyers and posters, etc. They put faces to the volunteers and guests and motivate people to come, and they make people feel comfortable, because they can tell what the event is like from the photos. Videos, or course, are excellent, but we haven't gotten that capacity, yet.

In our experience, more of our guests hear about the Repair Café from the notice in the local newspaper calendar than any other way, and actual newspaper articles are priceless for helping to bring new guests in. A flyer on the bulletin board at the library also draws a lot of guests. So, if you don't have the time or money to do much promotion, try to at least make sure your local newspaper will print the announcement and put a flyer up at the library, and if there is a particular local hangout that is very popular, put an announcement there, as well.

We have a line on our reception form asking for guests' email addresses, if they want to be on our mailing list and get a reminder about future events. So, another bit of promotion is to add their emails to our email address book and send them an announcement every month. This is optional, depending on whether you want to take the time to enter all those email addresses and whether you want more return guests or you'd rather encourage new guests. We have a mix of old and new, with more old than new. At present, we get 44% return guests.

Having the next month's flyer prepared in advance and available at the current month's event means that volunteers and guests can take a few flyers to hang up, so that all the legwork doesn't fall to one or two people.

Note: We feel that it is important to make it clear in all our public communications that EVERYONE is welcome. People do not have to be low-income to come, because it is not a charity. While we don't really want wealthy people who are trying to save a buck to edge out low-income people who don't have the option of paying for repairs, we don't want to be patronizing, where those who have are

giving to those who don't have. That doesn't feel good to us. If guests repaired their own possessions rather than having volunteers repair them, this might not be an issue. But, as it is, we feel like we need to stress that this is a social mission, not a charity. We want to keep things from being thrown away unnecessarily and we want to promote the idea of community, of working together and of having a good time doing that, and we want to put the brakes on the commodification of everything: We are not consumers; we are human beings who can do good things for ourselves, others, and our world; we care, and we want to share whatever it is we have to offer.

11) Doing things YOUR way.

There is a fair amount of organizational work to set the Repair Café up so as to minimize problems and maximize positive results. I am going to attach a number of documents that could be helpful, at least in terms of saving time. You probably won't want to use everything; you might not want to even read everything. This information is meant to be helpful, not to induce stress.

Every Repair Café coordinator is different; every group of volunteers is different; every town is different; so every Repair Café will be unique in some, or many, ways, and this is good. Also, figuring things out for yourself might be part of the fun and satisfaction of holding Repair Cafés, so whatever you do, don't follow this advice too slavishly. Think for yourself and innovate. [And pass along your good ideas.]

We have made a lot of changes/improvements since the Pittsfield Repair Café started and will no doubt make many more in the future. It's a work in progress. Our changes have been in the direction of more simplicity, less worry, and more fun.

12) Communicating with volunteers:

Another one of the tasks that takes time is communicating with your volunteers before each event to find out who can be at the event. Sending an email blast to all your volunteers at once is more time-efficient, but sending a personal email usually gets an answer, whereas a blast might not. And phone calls are better than emails, since they are more personal and friendlier, but often people don't answer their phone. You'll usually end up doing follow-up emails or calls, if only to say "I'm so glad you'll be there!".

Also it's a good idea, after an event, to send a thank you email and a short report about how the previous event went, in terms of stats, such as number of guests, number of items repaired, donations received, and so on, and some positive comments from guests and a highlight or two, so that volunteers know their efforts were worthwhile. Mentioning volunteers and their contributions by name is always good.

Facebook is a good way to give volunteers some public recognition and appreciation, to let them know they are valued. It's good to have digital photos of all your volunteers, so that you can attach their photos to Facebook posts, as well as put them on flyers and press releases [with their permission, of course]. It is also useful to have a sheet(s) with your volunteers' photos and first names at the exit table, so that, when you have a new volunteer there who doesn't know all the other volunteers yet, they can show the sheet to any guests who don't remember the volunteer's name, and they can point the person out.

13) Repair Café event costs:

Repair Cafés don't need to cost much.

If repair volunteers have their own equipment, tools, and supplies, which they usually do, you don't need to purchase those. Eventually, you may decide you need some specific piece of equipment, such as an industrial sewing machine so you can replace coat zippers or work on cushions, or an electrical multimeter, or a soldering gun, or sharpening equipment, such as a grinding wheel, but you can probably start out with just the equipment your volunteers already have.

If some of your volunteers are willing to bake goodies or bring in one or two purchased items each, you might not need to spend much money on drinks and snacks. Or you can offer only coffee and teas and juice and no snacks, which is perfectly fine. Or you can charge a small fee for drinks and snacks.

Flyers and posters cost something to print, but you can often find a cheaper professional printer or do the printing at home. Printing is one of the bigger costs, though, if you use flyers, which I do recommend. You can make the flyers you are going to hand out quarter-page size, to save money and resources, versus the ones you hang up on bulletin boards, which should probably be full-page size and brightly colored. Starting out, large, glossy, colorful posters can be helpful to garner attention, but are probably not so necessary later on. If you use reception and exit forms or write up reports, etc., then there are printing costs associated with those, as well.

You'll also have some miscellaneous costs, such as name tags, table and wall signs, pens, tape, batteries for testing, etc. But, often volunteers will have name tags lying around from previous events that they attended and have extra pens they don't need, etc. So ask before buying, if you need to cut costs. And try to make things, such as signs, from available materials, rather than buying new materials.

For whatever you need, if you have the time, you can contact local business owners and ask for freebies, in return for a mention in your promotional materials. For example, you can ask local bakeries for baked goods; local fabric stores for notions; hardware stores for lamp parts or tools; etc. We have had baked goods donated by several different restaurants/coffee shops, but found that that can be more work than just buying snacks. Presently, one of our volunteers donates the food, since none of our volunteers want to make baked goods, although we have had home baked goods in the past, and they make for a more homey, more special atmosphere.

When you are just starting out, you might have to ask your group to put in \$5-10 each per month for expenses or ask other people for a donation to help you get started.

It is also common practice to put out a donation jar at the events. We put a donation jar on the exit table with a sign, but we never ask anyone for donations. To our way of thinking, free is free, so we don't solicit money at the events. As we have gone along, we have gotten more and more donations in our jar. What actually seems to have helped a lot is that we started having lamp parts on hand [lamps are very popular], so that we can repair them without the guests or a volunteer having to go out to purchase the parts. People appreciate the fact that they get the part for free, and the whole process is so much quicker, so they give larger donations.

Also, if it agrees with your group's philosophy, you can try to find a sponsor, such as a local business, like a hardware store or a coffee shop. Tell them that, in exchange for \$100/month [or whatever makes sense for you], you will have the name of their business front-and-center as the Repair Café sponsor. We did that a couple of times [a new bicycle shop in town gave us \$100 for each of 3 months] but ultimately we preferred not to, since it seemed to make the Repair Café more of a commercial endeavor. Plus, we have gotten plenty of donations. We were lucky enough to have one donor who gave us \$75/month for a number of months, which was extremely helpful.

It is also possible to get small grants. We were invited to apply for a grant but we didn't really need the money, so we haven't done so.

Note regarding parts: We always have had sewing supplies and notions available, most of which the volunteers themselves bring and donate, and some of which the Repair Café buys. For something like jacket zippers, though, the guests [or volunteers] still have to go and purchase them, since there are too many sizes and colors to stock. Ditto for parts for vacuums and other electrical items, for example. We tell the guest exactly what they need to buy and where it is available, or, if it's too specialized to be available locally, we look online for a website that offers the item for sale. That way, the guests can purchase the part and bring it to a future event.

14) Repair Café add-ons:

There are many other things you can add to your basic Repair Café, in addition to the drinks and snacks. You can have live music from local musicians. You can have a “really, really free table” where volunteers and others put out items to be given away. You can offer chair massages. You can have an information table with books about making repairs for guests to browse through. You can have a table with information about other local events and organizations, in order to help promote them. You can have paper and crayons or books or toys for children to play with and someone to oversee the children. You can offer workshops. You can have a computer set up on a table with videos of common repairs being illustrated [these are easy to find on YouTube]. And on and on. OR you can hold the basic Repair Café and be satisfied with that. There's no need for add-ons, unless it gives you, your volunteers, and your guests more energy and enthusiasm.

15) Regarding music:

Acoustical [or electrical on low volume] live music contributes so much to the pleasant and relaxing atmosphere of the Repair Café. While music is not a regular staple at Repair Cafés, we find it almost essential at ours, not only for the guests, but for the volunteers, as well. Soothing music is good, as is jazzy music and bluesy music; some faster tempo music is good interspersed among the slower tunes. Even though not a lot of attention is necessarily paid to the performers [who have to be OK with that] or even noticeably to the music, we have found it invaluable as a mood enhancer. It makes every Repair Café special. I recommend starting off a round of clapping periodically during the event, so that the performers get some appreciation and feedback. We have found it possible to get volunteer performers so far.

16) Setting up the venue:

There are, no doubt, many ways to set up a Repair Café. This is how we do it. Up front, we have a reception table to the right as people enter, and an exit table to the left. We have a “really, really free table” or tables in the front middle. To the right, in the area behind the entrance table, are the musicians. To the left, behind the exit table is another table with the food, next to a counter that leads into the kitchen, where we have our drinks, including the kettle plugged in for hot water. To the middle left, we have a table or tables so people can sit to eat or to read repair books or look at our Repair Café binder or for children to color.

The repair volunteers, as we have them set up, are in the back-of-the-house, with sewing volunteers on one side, bicycle repairers along with carpentry repairers in the middle back, and the electrical and electronic repairers on the other side. We have a large open space in the middle.

17) Regarding food:

We like to have food as well as drinks. Usually, we have individually wrapped tea bags, both black and herbal, and coffee bags. We have sugar and sweetener and ½ & ½. We also have bottles of a couple of kinds of no sugar added juices. We try to focus on healthy food without chemicals and low in added sugar, so we have small apples or other fresh fruit, fresh baby carrots, broccoli florets, hummus, usually some other dip, whole grain crackers, one or two types of cheese, usually chips, sometimes celery or cauliflower or green pepper strips or other fresh veggies, sometimes other crackers, sometimes raisins or dates, sometimes nuts, sometimes bakery bread, sometimes peanut butter and fruit spread, usually cookies.

We don't charge for snacks or drinks, just because we want everything to be free at our Repair Café. If we didn't get enough donations, we might re-think that, but probably we'd just cut back on the amount of refreshments we offer.

18) More on photos:

Photos are so important, for the reasons mentioned above, that it pays to take special care with them. If you have an experienced photographer(s), not necessarily professional, just proficient, then you probably are all set. But if you have inexperienced people, such as your reception or exit table volunteers, who taking photos as time allows, you might not have such good results: photos will have lots of clutter in the background or the foreground; shots will be at too great a distance; there'll be the same types of photos every time, etc. So having an instructional sheet about how to frame photos and a list of possible subjects could be good.

It can be hard to think of how to vary the subjects, so here is a list of some possible subjects: a guest with their repaired item, especially if the guest looks pleased; the guest, the repaired item, and the repair person; before and after of the broken/repaired item; the reception table; the exit table; the refreshments; other offerings, such as the musician(s), the free table, information table, etc.; children; old people; people of other ethnic persuasions; pets; a series of hands working at different tasks; a collection of items that were repaired at the event, both the same type, such as all lamps, and different, to show the variety; the outside of the venue; visitors who are just checking out the event; volunteers' faces; volunteers working; volunteers with the guests bent over the object being repaired, looking involved and focused; collaboration among volunteers; happy faces; a series of different stages of a repair from one step to the next to the next to the repaired item; the set-up of the tables; the tools and supplies on a table; a series of tools/supplies on multiple tables; etc.

19) Our biggest challenge with the Repair Café:

Our biggest challenge was something we didn't really expect: having enough guests with enough items to keep our volunteers busy at every event.

Perhaps we've had an exuberance of volunteers rather than an insufficiency of guests. :) In fact, we've been extremely lucky to have many wonderful volunteers who really enjoy being at the Repair Café. We're averaging 17 at each event. There have been a few events, though, where we've not been able to finish all the repairs and have had to ask people to bring their items back to the next event and/or have had to turn a few people away. My focus has always been to have enough volunteers so that doesn't happen, but, as I said, it is a balancing act.

Going back to possible reasons for fewer guests than we would like: Holding the events in a church building may have been a deterrent to some people coming because it reinforced the mistaken idea

that this is a charity event, and they thought they didn't qualify. And/or they don't want to accept "charity". And people can be suspicious of things being offered for free.

Another major factor is the amount of competition we have in the Berkshires [western Massachusetts] with so many, many events during summer Saturdays, plus people just want to enjoy the outdoors during our short summers. And, in the winter, the weather is often very cold and snowy, so older people, especially, want to stay snug at home.

Also, people are just too used to throwing out possessions that are no longer perfect or don't work, because they don't know how to fix them, and it would cost too much to get someone else to repair them, or there is no longer someone who does that kind of repair. So, it's a sort of uphill battle, to change people's habits.

20) The final word:

Our attendance and donations have been increasing and almost everyone has a wonderful time. We get many, many compliments and get to see so many happy faces. And, every once in awhile, someone is just so astonished and pleased and unbelieving about having gotten their items repaired and having been treated so well by the volunteers and having had such a fantastic time, that they glow and are almost levitating. [Not really much of an exaggeration.]

Let me know if you have questions. I would be happy to provide more help.

Best regards,

Janet Henderson
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