



Tools for Solidarity and Repair Café NI

December 2025



Tools For Solidarity
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Circular Resources Shared Learning

Case Study

Introduction

This case study explores a purposeful collaboration between two leading organisations in Northern Ireland’s repair and reuse movement. Repair Café NI and Tools for Solidarity. Centred on a dedicated sewing machine repair training initiative, the partnership aimed to equip volunteer fixers from Repair Café NI with the specialist skills required to diagnose and repair domestic sewing machines. The collaboration not only addressed a growing need for sewing machine repairs in the community but also fostered knowledge exchange, built capacity, and strengthened the fabric of the local repair network. This case study will provide an overview of the activity, background on the partners, a presentation of findings, an analysis of outcomes and impacts, and recommendations for similar initiatives.

Empowering Community Repair through Knowledge Sharing and Partnership

Background

About Repair Café NI

Repair Café NI is a grassroots organisation dedicated to promoting repair culture and reducing waste by connecting skilled volunteers, known as fixers, with members of the public who bring in broken household items. Through Repair Cafes across Northern Ireland, the group empowers individuals to extend the life of their possessions, fosters community spirit, and supports environmental sustainability.

About Tools for Solidarity

Tools for Solidarity is a Belfast based charity committed to supporting sustainable livelihoods in Africa and locally through the collection, refurbishment, and donation of hand tools and sewing machines. With decades of experience, their team has developed specialist expertise in sewing machine repair, running both local training workshops and international projects to increase access to tools and skills.

Nature of the Collaboration

Recognising an increase in requests for sewing machine repairs at Repair Café NI’s member cafes, the two organisations came together through NIRN’s Circular Resources Library initiative. Tools for Solidarity agreed to deliver hands-on training session to Repair Café NI’s members, volunteer fixers, sharing their technical knowledge and best practices. The initiative was shaped by a shared commitment to community empowerment, sustainability, and the circular economy.



Presentation of Findings

In December 2025, Tools for Solidarity hosted a full-day workshop at their Belfast facility, attended by six volunteer fixers from Repair Café NI’s members. The session blended theory with practical learning, covering topics such as identifying common faults, cleaning and lubricating mechanisms, tension adjustment, and safe disassembly. Attendees worked on a range of donated domestic sewing machines, guided by experienced staff from TfS.

Achievements and Measurable Outputs

- 6 Repair Café NI’s members volunteers trained in sewing machine diagnostics and repair
- 6 sewing machines refurbished during the workshop
- Creation of a troubleshooting guide for use at future Repair Cafes

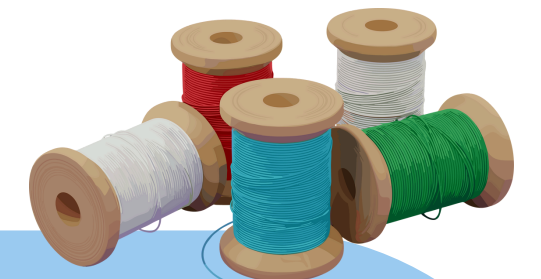
Quotes from Participants

- “The training was hands-on and practical. I now feel confident to tackle sewing machine repairs at our events.” – Repair Café NI volunteer
- “It’s rewarding to see our expertise being shared and expanded within the local repair community.” – Tools for Solidarity staff member



Benefits and Impacts

- Community Empowerment: The training has enabled Repair Café NI’s members to offer a new service, directly benefitting community members who rely on sewing machines for personal or creative use.
- Waste Reduction: The number of sewing machines repaired and returned to use will increase, diverting potentially valuable items from landfill.
- Network Strengthening: The partnership fostered stronger ties between local organisations, enhancing resource sharing and mutual support.
- Unexpected Outcomes
- Several fixers expressed interest in further specialist training.
- Lessons Learned
- Hands on, small group learning proved particularly effective, allowing for individual attention and confidence building.
- Ongoing communication between organisations is vital to address emerging needs and adapt training content.



Conclusion

The collaboration between Repair Café NI and Tools for Solidarity demonstrates the transformative impact of skills sharing and partnership in the community repair movement. Through targeted sewing machine repair training, they have empowered volunteers, increased the range of services offered, and contributed to waste reduction and community resilience. The measurable outputs, 6 fixers trained, dozens of sewing machines will now potentially be repaired. For other community organisers and networks, this case study underscores the importance of identifying local expertise, investing in hands-on training, and building lasting organisational relationships. By replicating and scaling collaborative models like this, repair networks can multiply their impact, nurture local talent, and accelerate the transition towards a more sustainable, circular economy.

