

ADEPT PRESIDENT'S AWARDS CATEGORY 3 IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT, PROMOTING HEALTH

WINNER

Oxfordshire County Council – Electrical Repair Cafes

150 character summary

Oxfordshire County Council worked with the Community Action Group Project to establish a network of electrical repair events to reduce waste and create a more circular economy

500 word description

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) was keen to support community groups to establish electrical repair cafes to provide an affordable way of keeping electrical items in use for longer and reducing waste. Oxfordshire is well placed to deliver this with a strong voluntary sector working on sustainability through the Community Action Group (CAG) project, a network of over 65 voluntary groups taking action on environmental issues.

From the start the project was designed with sustainability in mind. A 'how to' guide was put together so that any new groups can easily run an event, kits complete with the equipment needed can be shared around groups and there are resources such as logos and posters which can be amended for use anywhere (see annex 1 and 2). Data reporting systems were set up and explained so that at each event the same metrics were reported so that the impacts could be measured

Since the first repair café was held the project has been extended to several towns across the county, diverting over 5 tonnes of items from being wasted and attracting thousands of attendees (see annex 3). This is helping to establish a circular economy and instil a culture of reuse and repair.

Additional benefits:

- Social benefits of meeting people in the community, making connections and reducing isolation. Increased community involvement and integration has positive benefits on individual well-being and mental health.
- Saved money for residents who didn't have to buy new items
- Funds raised for voluntary groups through donations, which could then be invested locally into future projects
- Improved electrical repair skills for both volunteers who have received free training, and the public, who are encouraged to watch the repairs so that they can learn basic fixes for future.

The existing model has already started to develop further, with some groups extending to clothing or bike repair, linking with 'Freecycle live' events and buying new tools which enables them to fix more items. A shared resource of fixers means that groups have a bank of people they can call on if they are short for a particular event.

Council and CAG project staff continue to be on hand to assist groups who want to start new events or need help with publicity, volunteer recruitment or updating equipment. Groups have received a number of positive local press articles, attracting more attendees and raising awareness of other waste prevention and environmental projects the groups work on (annex 4)

The government Resources & Waste Strategy discusses the need to move from dealing with materials in a linear system to a more circular economy, keeping items in use for longer and realising their true value. This project meets those ambitions and is creating a culture in which reuse and repair is the norm in Oxfordshire.

As well as solving an environmental problem, the project has helped to create stronger communities through improved links, reduced isolation and sharing skills. This is of crucial importance if we are to mitigate the effects of climate change.