

Community Clothing Repair

– A GUIDE

This compilation from our ‘Wear & Care’ Research Project is designed to help you **activate clothing repair** in your community. It is not a definitive guide, but rather a **collection of our insights** to help empower you to bring your community on a repair journey too.

We held a series of **six pop-up community repair sessions** over six weeks at our RMIT PlaceLab Brunswick Research Studio. Each week, with a group of **no more than 30 people**, we focused on a different aspect of clothes mending, alterations and embellishment via hands-on workshops.

The ‘Wear & Care’ Community Repair Series was run in partnership with RMIT’s School of Fashion and Textiles. We **collaborated with a team of expert menders and researchers** from the Repair Café at RMIT, who are undertaking research exploring garment longevity and durability.

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Wear & Care

Long Story Short

‘Wear & Care’ was an exploration into methods of fashion “rewilding” in Brunswick, Melbourne. It gathered locals, retailers, makers, creators, and researchers to learn about and encourage practices that mend, repair and share clothing to build a local response towards a new fashion system.

Why Community Repair Matters?

REMEMBER!

IF YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT
ESTABLISHING A REPAIR
COMMUNITY, IT DOESN'T HAVE TO
BE A BIG COMMITMENT.

BRINGING TOGETHER A GROUP OF
PEOPLE FOR AS LITTLE AS SIX
WEEKS MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE.

SO, GIVE IT A GO!

Build Local Community

1

Community initiatives, like repair cafes, are powerful interventions that do more than repair clothes, but have been evidenced as 'building social relations and practicing non-consumerist forms of citizenship' (Bradley and Persson 2022:1321). Through our events, we fostered new community relationships, with some attendees at events going on to self-organise repair groups beyond the initial project.

Grow Sustainable Practices

2

Repair has the capacity to extend the life of clothing, as it allows otherwise unworn clothing to return to active use and avoid disposal (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Through our discussions with local community, we identified small fixes like sewing on a button, can make a big difference in the perceived value of a piece of clothing as it moves through cycles of resale and reuse.

Communicate Clothing Value

3

These practices offer a communication tool in themselves, as 'the simple fact of making repair visible in the public space helps to transform the social norms around this practice, gradually making it acceptable and standardized' (Madon 2022:546). Through conversations at our events, we found that people's appreciation of the labour and materials, that made their clothes, grew as they interacted with repair processes.

What Makes People Want To Repair?

BEFORE YOU START PLANNING WAYS TO BRING YOUR CLOTHING REPAIR COMMUNITY TOGETHER, IT'S GOOD TO UNDERSTAND SOME OF THE VARIED PERSONAL GOALS THAT PEOPLE MIGHT BRING TO THE COMMUNITY.

1 Develop Their Skills

“ A RARE BUT AWESOME OPPORTUNITY TO A LEARN A NEW SKILL WHILST IN THE PRESENCE OF MULTIPLE EXPERTS.

“ I HAVE BEEN MENDING FOR YEARS, BUT THIS HAS BEEN SO HELPFUL. TO GET GUIDANCE, BUILD CONFIDENCE AND DEVELOP SKILLS.

“ BEING GUIDED JUST ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU FEEL CONFIDENT TO DO IT YOURSELF.

Attendees at PlaceLab's 'Wear & Care' Community Repair Series

Encouraging people to learn how to mend and practice skills in a communal repair setting, aids in preserving and growing skills, and creates a space to nurture visible and invisible mending (Durrani 2018). Across our repair series, there was a notable shift in engagement from our regular attendees as they grew in confidence and developed their skills over the sessions. Where some attendees may have started by watching and learning techniques to mend their clothes, they were soon discussing repair techniques and mending their own clothes as the series progressed.

3 Find Community

“ JUST WANTING TO BE PART OF THE VIBE.

An attendee at PlaceLab's 'Wear & Care' Community Repair Series

Community repair cafes and self-organised repair groups not only empower citizens with skills and knowledge but can grow communities, aid well-being and strengthen social inclusion (Bradley & Persson 2022). Those who attend also connect to a wider global network of repairers, creating a unique form of environmental activism for a circular future (Moalem & Mosgaard 2021). Across our Community Repair Series, we observed a shift in familiarity and growth in attendee interactions. We learnt from one attendee that a small monthly repair group had formed externally, and although individually they may not have all the mending skills they need, collectively they might.

2 Make Something Wearable Again

“ I LOVE IT.
I DIDN'T WEAR IT.
I WILL WEAR IT NOW.

An attendee at PlaceLab's 'Wear & Care' Community Repair Series

There is a growing interest in personal practices that extend the lifecycle of clothes through maintenance and use (Fletcher 2016). By teaching repair techniques and sharing mending and clothing care knowledge at our events, the attendees became equipped with the knowledge, quick fix skills, embellishment ideas and darning tips and tricks to keep their clothing in use for longer.

4 Be Creative

“ I AM JUST ENJOYING THE PROCESS.

“ LETTING THE PROCESS DETERMINE THE RESULT CREATED A MUCH BETTER OUTCOME.

Attendees at PlaceLab's 'Wear & Care' Community Repair Series

Learning the skills to repair provides an outlet for creativity alongside the practical skills to extend the useful life of clothes. Our Community Repair Series taught attendees visible mending techniques, such as Sashiko, and embellishment styles using iron-on patches and alteration techniques. This is a great way to encourage playfulness and experimentation with clothes. It gives attendees an opportunity to elevate clothes they may otherwise have not worn as often or remove from their wardrobes.

5 Restoring Self With and Through Clothing

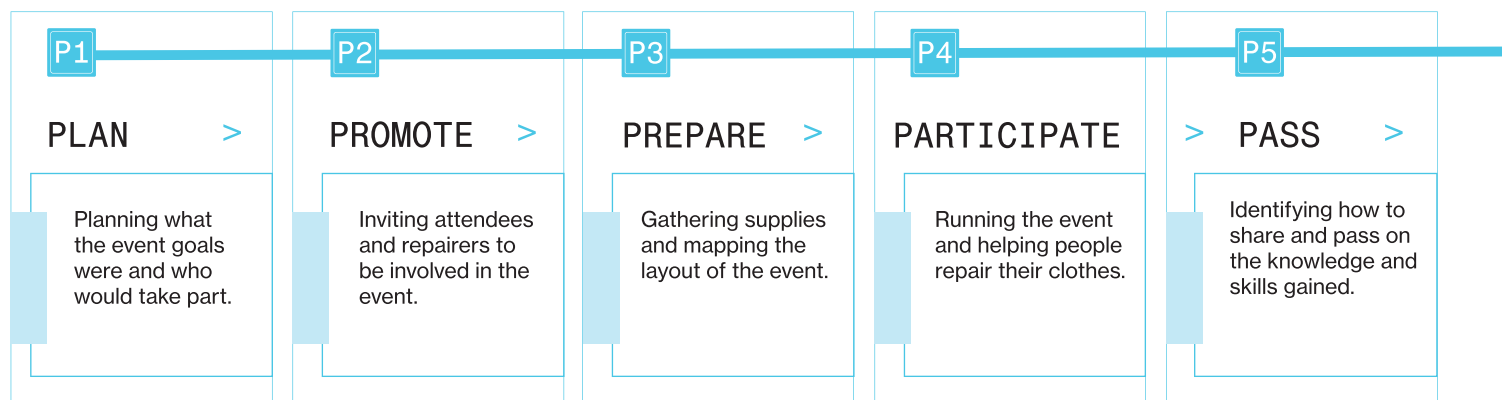
“ I WAS GOING TO TAKE IT TO SOMEONE TO FIX, BUT BROUGHT IT HERE INSTEAD.

An attendee at PlaceLab's 'Wear & Care' Community Repair Series

'Satisfaction flows from what we succeed in being and doing with the clothes we have available to us. It is a dynamic relationship between what could be done and what we actually know how to do and be' (Fletcher 2016:225). Amongst our Community Repair Series attendees, the act of mending reflected an experience of self-affirmation and reward from not only repairing clothes for themselves but also for others to return a favour.

How

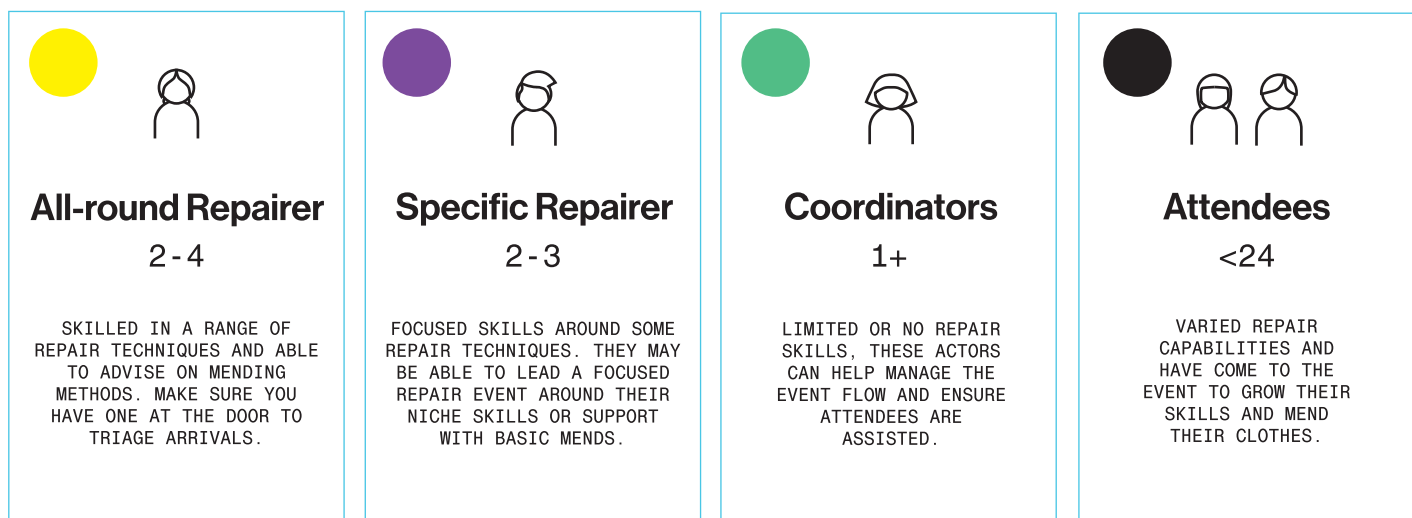
We found our repair events worked best through 5 key phases.



PHASE 1

Plan

Consider your goals for the event and whether you will focus on a specific theme, then plan the team you will need to gather to do so.



Promote

Our recommendations for how to promote your event and communicate with your team.

FOR INVITING ATTENDEES

Our tips

1. MAKE THE GOALS OF THE EVENT CLEAR.
2. SAY WHAT TYPES OF CLOTHING PROBLEMS YOU CAN REPAIR.
3. IDENTIFY WHAT REPAIR METHODS YOU'LL BE USING.
4. GIVE INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT ACCEPTABLE CLOTHING CONDITIONS.
5. EXPLAIN WHAT ADDITIONAL MATERIALS ATTENDEES SHOULD BRING.
6. PROVIDE CONTACT DETAILS TO ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS PRIOR TO EVENT

What You Might Say

COME ALONG TO OUR REPAIR EVENT ON AT BY JOINING US, YOU WILL.... (GROW YOUR SKILLS IN MENDING YOUR CLOTHES) AND(CONNECT WITH OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY). BRING ALONG YOUR CLOTHES THAT NEED(SOME NEW LIFE BREATHED INTO THEM). WE CAN HELP FIX (ZIPS, SEW ON BUTTONS OR HEM THOSE PANTS). IN THIS EVENT, WE WILL BE FOCUSING ON ... (HAND SEWING TECHNIQUES FOR VISIBLE MENDING). ENSURE ALL THE CLOTHES YOU BRING ALONG ARE WASHED AND CLEAN. IF YOU NEED A SPECIFIC MATERIAL FOR YOUR REPAIR, LIKE A PARTICULAR ZIP, PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN AS WE ONLY HAVE A LIMITED RANGE OF CHOICES. IF YOU AREN'T SURE IF WE CAN HELP FIX SOME OF YOUR CLOTHING, SEND US AN EMAIL AT AS WE WOULD LOVE TO ADVISE/ SUPPORT YOU.

FOR GUIDING REPAIRERS

What You Might Say

WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO HAVING YOU CONTRIBUTE TO OUR REPAIR EVENT ON AT IT WOULD BE GREAT IF YOU CAN (ARRIVE 15 MINUTES EARLY TO HELP SET UP) AND IF YOU CAN ALSO(BE PREPARED TO STAY A LITTLE LONGER IF NEEDED). KEEP IN MIND THAT OUR GOAL IS TO(BUILD SKILLS AND COMMUNITY). WE WANT TO HELP AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE, SO THINK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT A FEW PROJECTS CONCURRENTLY TO HELP EVERYONE RECEIVE EQUAL ATTENTION. WHEN POSSIBLE, GENTLY ENCOURAGE ATTENDEES TO SHARE SKILLS AND EXPERTISE WITH OTHERS INSTEAD OF IMMEDIATELY SEEKING OUT A REPAIRER.

ALSO, DON'T MISS OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE ATTENDEES IN SMALL PARTS OF THE PROCESS, THIS MIGHT BE THROUGH SUPPORTING THEM TO DO PARTS OF THE REPAIR WHICH ARE SUITABLE FOR THEIR SKILL LEVEL. WE HOPE THAT THIS WILL SUPPORT A CALM, COLLABORATIVE AND ENJOYABLE EVENT FOR EVERYONE.

Our tips

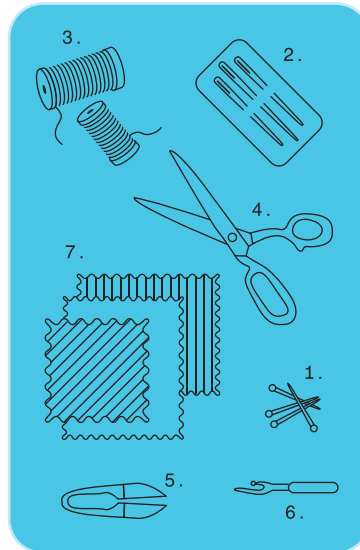
1. BE CLEAR ABOUT THEIR COMMITMENT
2. COMMUNICATE YOUR GOALS FOR THE EVENT
3. ENCOURAGE THEM TO SHARE THEIR ATTENTION BETWEEN ATTENDEES
4. ASK THEM TO DELEGATE SKILL-APPROPRIATE TASKS TO ATTENDEES.

Prepare

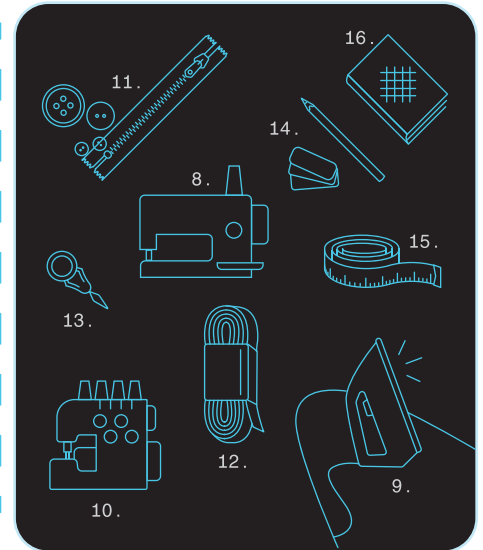
Repair Kit

Here's Some of the Supplies That We Found Useful:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. PINS | 8. SEWING MACHINE |
| 2. NEEDLES | 9. IRON AND IRONING BOARD |
| 3. THREADS OF VARIOUS COLOURS | 10. OVERLOCKER MACHINE |
| 4. SCISSORS | 11. ZIPPERS & BUTTONS |
| 5. SNIPS | 12. ELASTIC |
| 6. QUICK UNPICKS | 13. NEEDLE THREADER |
| 7. FABRIC SCRAPS | 14. TAILORS PENCILS/ CHALK |
| | 15. RULERS |
| | 16. REFERENCE BOOKS & INSPIRATION MATERIALS |



Essentials



Nice To Haves

Space

Think about how to use your space best. Look to create different zones where multiple people can work on similar projects with repairers distributed amongst the zones.

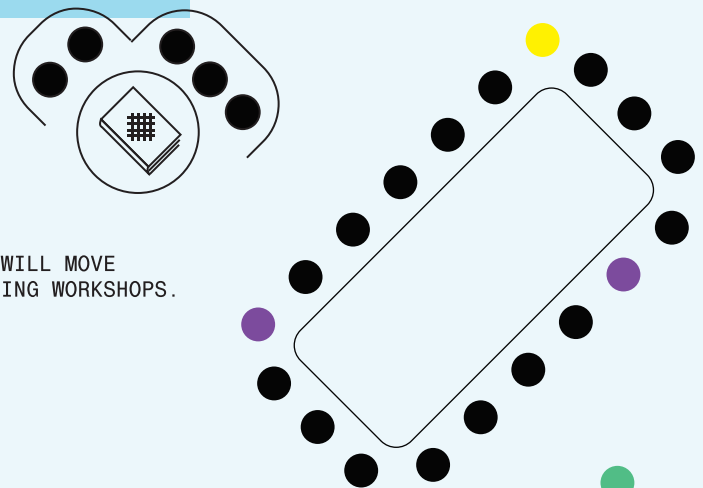
Here's One Example of How To Set Up Your Space:

A COSY NOOK IS THE PERFECT PLACE FOR AN INSPIRATION ZONE WITH REPAIR EXAMPLES AND REPAIR REFERENCE BOOKS.

*NOTE:
REPAIRERS WILL MOVE AROUND DURING WORKSHOPS.

CONSIDER PLACING AN ALL-ROUND REPAIRER AT THE DOOR FOR ARRIVALS, THEY CAN HELP DIRECT PEOPLE TO THE STARTING POINT FOR THEIR REPAIR PROJECT.

TABLES WHICH FOCUS ON SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES CAN HELP REPAIRERS ASSIST MULTIPLE PEOPLE AT ONCE.



- ATTENDEES
- ALL-ROUND REPAIRER
- SPECIFIC REPAIRER
- COORDINATOR

Participate

Here's our suggestions on how we ran our events to help foster collaboration, community and participation.

Key facts

- 2-HOUR WORKSHOPS
- 3 FOCUS ZONES
- 6 EVENTS WITH 6 THEMES:
 1. GENERAL REPAIRS
 2. RIPS & HOLES
 3. FASTENINGS & ALTERATIONS
 4. DARNING & KNITWEAR
 5. DENIM REPAIR
 6. ALTER YOUR TEE

Some Common Steps

- ALL-ROUNDER REPAIRER GREETES ATTENDEES AT THE DOOR AND ASKS ABOUT THEIR CLOTHES TO REPAIR.
- WELCOME AND BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE EVENT FOCUS TO DRAW EVERYONE TOGETHER.
- OPTIONAL: A SHORT INTRODUCTION IF THE SESSION IS FOCUSED ON A SPECIFIC TECHNIQUE, THIS MIGHT INVOLVE SHOWING EXAMPLES OR EXPLAINING THE REPAIR STEPS.
- REPAIRERS ASSIST ATTENDEES TO WORK ON THEIR PROJECTS
- CHECK IN POINTS WHERE COORDINATORS AND REPAIRERS CHECK THAT ALL ATTENDEES ARE BEING HELPED.
- LAST CHECK-IN AS THE EVENT HEADS TOWARDS CLOSE TO MAKE SURE THAT ALL ATTENDEES HAVE A PLAN FOR COMPLETING THEIR PROJECT, EITHER IN REMAINING TIME, OR AT HOME.
- EVENT CONCLUDES AND EVERYTHING IS PACKED UP, MAKE NOTE OF ANY SUPPLIES THAT MIGHT NEED REPLACING.

“ THERE WAS A CALL-OUT FROM A REPAIRER HALFWAY THROUGH THE WORKSHOP “DOES ANYONE NEED HELP?”, AND THEN ANOTHER 20 MINUTES LATER “DOES ANYONE NEED A HAND?”. THIS REALLY HELPED THE VIBE IN THE ROOM.

AT THREE QUARTERS OF THE WAY THROUGH THE SESSION, THE SPACE FELT LIKE A FOCUSED HIVE OF ACTIVITY.

A coordinator at PlaceLab's 'Wear & Care' Community Repair Series

Pass

Pass it on! Here's some ideas for your next steps to foster your emerging repair community.

Share The Event

Documenting the repairs to inspire others.

Support Exhibitions

Elevate repair projects.

Lend Your Kit

Help more people participate.

Recirculate Your Resources

Share your learnings and supplies.

Local Resources

We've made a list of local repair resources around Brunswick. There are many ways to engage in local repair activities and services, but this will get you started:

Brunswick Tool Library and Repair Café – <https://www.brunswicktoollibrary.org/>

Brunswick Neighbourhood House – <https://bnhcvic.edu.au/>

Fashion Fix (RMIT's School of Fashion & Textiles) – <https://www.instagram.com/repairingfashion/>

Makerspaces at Merri-bek Libraries – <https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/exploring-merri-bek/libraries/spaces/>

Multicultural Women's Sewing Group – <https://sewinggroup.wixsite.com/sewinggroup>

Second Stitch – <https://www.secondstitch.org.au/>

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**A Hyper-Local Initiative to Connect Communities,
Shape Place and Take a Radically Different
Approach to Doing Research.**

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RMIT PlaceLab acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the Eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.

RMIT PlaceLab respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present, as the original and continuing Makers of Place.

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