

TRADESWOMEN LED POP-UP REPAIR CAFÉ FEASIBILITY STUDY - FINAL REPORTING

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Executive Summary

This report presents the outcomes of the Tradeswomen Led Pop-Up Repair Café; a feasibility study project delivered by Opportunities with Experience (O-W-E C.I.C.) and supported by Thrift and Thrive Medway in Chatham.

The project was designed to improve access to practical repair and upcycling skills for women while promoting sustainable reuse of materials. Over a 16-week period, the project delivered 14 workshops, engaging 12 participants in hands-on learning focused on repairing and revamping household items, and basic DIY skills.

The sessions created a welcoming and supportive environment where participants were able to build confidence, develop practical skills, and connect with others. Participant feedback highlighted the value of the social and creative aspects of the workshops, with many noting the importance of learning skills that help reduce waste and encourage repair rather than disposal.

The project also delivered environmental benefits, diverting approximately 30 items from landfill through repair and repurposing activities.

Building on these outcomes, the project has strengthened partnerships and identified opportunities for future development, including the potential creation of a community Tool Library to improve access to tools and support continued learning.

The feasibility phase has demonstrated strong community interest and clear potential for the project to grow as a sustainable, community-led initiative supporting skills development, environmental sustainability, and community wellbeing.

Project at a Glance

Project: Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café

Location: Chatham, Medway

Lead Organisation: Opportunities with Experience (O-W-E C.I.C.)

Community Partner / Host Organisation: Thrift and Thrive Medway

Project Length: 16 weeks

Key Achievements

- 14 workshops delivered
- 12 participants engaged
- 5 regular participants attending consistently
- Approximately 30 household items repaired or repurposed
- 1 new community partnership strengthened
- Participant progression into further skills development through the “We Can, You Can, She Can” Interior Decoration course

Focus Areas

- Skills development for women
- Repair and reuse of household items
- Sustainable use of materials
- Community wellbeing and connection

About Us

Opportunities with Experience (O-W-E C.I.C.) works to encourage people to rethink how materials are used and valued within their communities. Our aim is to promote sustainable practices by reclaiming materials that might otherwise be discarded or downcycled, and by encouraging the reuse of materials wherever possible. Through this approach, we seek to create value from items that are often treated as waste, while supporting practical skills, creativity, and community engagement.

The Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café is an initiative run by Opportunities with Experience (O-W-E C.I.C.) and supported by Thrift and Thrive Medway, based in Chatham. The café is led by tradeswomen and provides a welcoming space for women who want to learn practical skills in repurposing, recycling, and repainting low-cost household items, alongside basic DIY and trade skills.

The project aims to build confidence, encourage sustainable repair practices, and create opportunities for women to develop practical skills in a supportive community setting.

The feasibility study was led by Opportunities with Experience (O-W-E C.I.C.), working in collaboration with Thrift and Thrive Medway as a community partner.

Community – What We Wanted to Do

At Opportunities with Experience (O-W-E C.I.C.), community engagement is central to everything we do. By reclaiming and recycling surplus building materials from construction projects, we aim not only to reduce waste but also to empower local groups, schools, charities, and individuals to create positive change within their communities.

Providing access to materials that would otherwise be discarded enables people to develop creative projects, improve community spaces, and gain practical skills. Whether supporting local residents or enabling community-based art and refurbishment projects, our goal is to help create lasting social and environmental impact.

We chose to work with Thrift and Thrive Medway because of their strong and long-standing connections within the Medway community, particularly their focus on supporting disadvantaged groups. When the opportunity arose to develop activity within their hub in Chatham, partnering with Thrift and Thrive Medway was a natural fit.

By working together, we are able to combine our shared values and expertise to offer a broader community service, while building on the excellent work already taking place within the organisation.

What We Did – Workshops and Skill Development - Improving Access to Skills Development for Women in Medway

The Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café delivered a series of practical workshops designed to improve access to skills development for women in Medway.

Over the course of the project, we delivered 14 workshops, engaging 12 participants, in collaboration with Thrift and Thrive Medway. The sessions provided hands-on learning opportunities focused on upcycling, sustainable crafting, and basic DIY repair skills.

The workshops were designed to encourage creativity, build confidence, and equip participants with the knowledge to repair, repurpose, and create using low-cost household items and reclaimed

materials. By making practical skills more accessible, the project aims to empower participants and their communities to embrace more sustainable ways of living.



Participant taking part in a Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café workshop, learning practical repair and upcycling skills.

Participant Progression

Following the final block of sessions for the Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café, participants have been invited to take part in the Opportunities with Experience (O-W-E C.I.C.) 10-day “We Can, You Can, She Can” Interior Decoration course, which will begin in late March.

As part of this course, participants will work together to fully decorate the Thrift and Thrive Medway boardroom, providing them with the opportunity to further develop practical skills while gaining hands-on experience in a real community setting.

This next stage builds on the confidence and skills developed during the repair café workshops and offers participants a pathway into further learning and practical work experience.

What Participants Said – Environmental and Community Impact

Participant feedback highlighted the positive social and learning environment created through the workshops.

One participant described the sessions as “a friendly and interactive space delivering new techniques and applications of skills.”

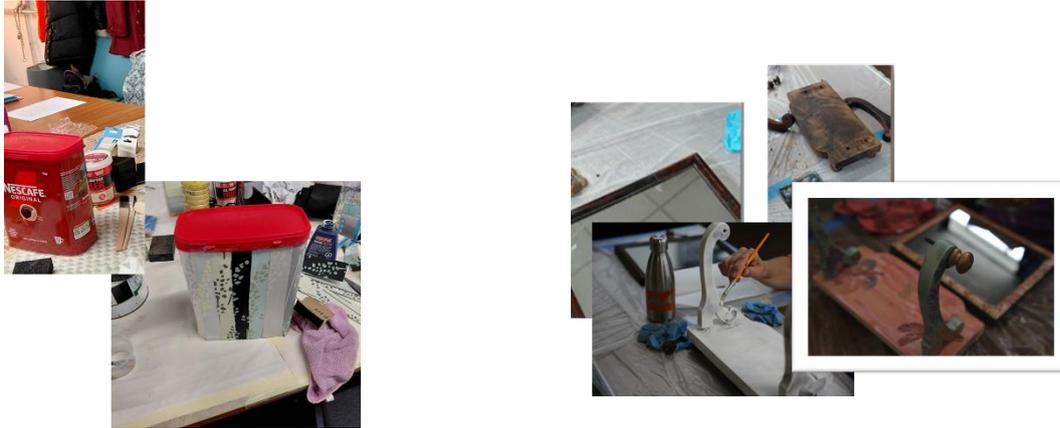
Another participant commented that they appreciated “the freedom to do your own thing, with support and encouragement when needed, while learning skills I could use in the future instead of throwing things away.”

Participants also valued the social aspect of the sessions, with one attendee highlighting “being creative and socialising” as a key benefit. Others emphasised the importance of conversation and peer support within the group.

Environmental Impact

During the 14-week programme, the Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café diverted approximately 30 household items from landfill. While modest in scale, this represents a meaningful contribution towards reducing waste, encouraging reuse, and promoting better use of existing materials.

By supporting repair and repurposing activities, the project contributes to reducing environmental impact through waste reduction, improved resource use, and the lowering of carbon emissions associated with the disposal and replacement of household items.



Examples of household items repaired and repurposed during the 14-week programme, helping divert materials from landfill.

Scalable and Sustainable Delivery Model

Feedback gathered during the feasibility phase has highlighted the wider value of the Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café. Participants frequently commented on the positive impact the sessions have on reducing loneliness, supporting mental wellbeing, and creating a welcoming environment where people can build practical skills.

Another key theme identified through participant feedback is the lack of access to appropriate tools at home. Many attendees expressed interest in continuing repairs independently but reported that the cost of purchasing tools can be a barrier.

In response to this feedback, by the end of 2026 the project aims to develop a low-cost community Tool Library. This service will allow individuals, households, and community groups to borrow PAT-tested hand-held tools at an affordable rate, removing the financial burden of purchasing equipment that may only be used occasionally.

Providing access to affordable tool hire alongside low- or no-cost skills sessions will enable the project to make a meaningful contribution to the local community. It will support individuals and organisations to become more sustainable and resilient by encouraging repair, reuse, and practical skill development.

Our previous experience supporting a community-based project demonstrated the potential value of this approach. By facilitating shared access to tools, the project saved the organisation an estimated £500 in tool purchases, while also reducing unnecessary consumption.

Alongside the Tool Library, the Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café will continue to deliver repair sessions and skills workshops. These activities will support confidence-building, knowledge sharing, and community connection, while also creating opportunities for volunteering and potential job pathways.

Where possible, surplus materials collected through repair activities will be redistributed to community groups and charities to support projects that benefit their local communities.

Key Outcomes and Learning from the Feasibility Project

Strategic Partnerships and Ongoing Support

The development of the Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café has strengthened collaboration between Opportunities with Experience (O-W-E C.I.C.) and Thrift and Thrive Medway, creating a strong foundation for future delivery.

The project supports Thrift and Thrive Medway's commitment to circular economy principles, encouraging the reuse and repurposing of materials while reducing waste. Through both new and established partnerships, the project has contributed to the diversion of surplus materials and the promotion of sustainable practices within the local community.

These partnerships have been essential in supporting the delivery of workshops, providing access to materials, and helping to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for participants.

Project Identity and Naming

During the delivery of the Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café, participants began discussing how the project might develop in the future. As part of these conversations, participants suggested the name "She Repair Café" to reflect the confidence-building and practical skills women were gaining through the sessions.

While the suggestion captured the spirit of empowerment and skill-sharing within the group, further reflection highlighted that the activities delivered through the workshops extend beyond traditional repair. The sessions focus strongly on upcycling, creative reuse, revamping household items, and learning practical decorating and DIY skills.

As the project continues to develop, consideration will be given to a name that better reflects this broader focus on skills development, creativity, and sustainable reuse, while maintaining the empowering, women-led ethos that participants valued.

Learning from Delivery Challenges

One challenge encountered during the project was the availability of tradeswomen to deliver some of the planned sessions. As many tradeswomen are self-employed, their work schedules can change quickly when paid work opportunities arise.

While this reflects the realities of working within the construction and trades sector, it highlighted the importance of building greater flexibility into the delivery model.

As a result, the project team adapted by:

- adjusting session content where needed
- supporting peer learning within the group
- ensuring the core workshops continued to run

This experience has provided valuable learning for the future development of the project. Going forward, the delivery model may benefit from:

- developing a wider pool of session facilitators
- planning flexible workshop formats
- combining trades-led sessions with peer-led learning activities

These adaptations will help strengthen the sustainability and resilience of the project in the coming years.

This experience also highlighted the strong demand for skilled tradespeople and reinforced the importance of developing community-based learning environments where practical skills can be shared more widely.

Looking Ahead – Recommendations and Next Steps

As the feasibility phase concludes, the project team will review the outcomes and consider the future development of the Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café.

Next steps will include:

- Evaluating whether the project should become a permanent community initiative
- Identifying opportunities to scale or improve the delivery model
- Exploring new partnerships that could strengthen long-term sustainability
- Developing potential spin-off ideas, such as a community Tool Library

These steps will help ensure that the learning from the feasibility project informs future growth while maintaining the community-focused values at the heart of the initiative.

Photo Evidence

Photographic documentation of the workshops and activities delivered during the 14-week Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café programme has been captured throughout the project.

A selection of images has been included within this report to illustrate key activities and outcomes. Additional visual evidence of the workshops, repaired items, and participant engagement is provided in the accompanying PowerPoint presentation, which documents the progress of the project over the 14-week period.

Conclusion

The Tradeswomen-Led Pop-Up Repair Café has demonstrated the value of creating a welcoming, practical learning environment where women can build confidence, develop new skills, and connect with others in their community. Through hands-on workshops and collaborative learning, participants have been able to repair, repurpose, and creatively reuse household items that might otherwise have been discarded.

The feasibility phase has highlighted clear benefits, including improved access to practical skills, positive social interaction, and contributions towards reducing waste through repair and reuse. The project has also strengthened partnerships between Opportunities with Experience (O-W-E C.I.C.) and Thrift and Thrive Medway, creating a strong foundation for future development.

The learning gathered through this project suggests strong potential for continued growth. Future plans, including the development of a community Tool Library and expanded repair and skills workshops, will build on the foundations established during this phase.

Overall, the project demonstrates how community-led initiatives can support sustainable living, skills development, and stronger local connections, creating lasting value for individuals and the wider community.