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NEWSLETTER

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TOOLS FOR SOLIDARITY

35 years of Solidarity, Singers, Spanners & Saws

Past volunteers from many far-flung lands gathered for a few days last August to celebrate the achievements of 35 years. Generations of volunteers have donated time to build TFS to what it is now. The toolsfest started one evening with a very thought provoking talk and discussion about economic "degrowth" from FEASTA (Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability) and what such a world would look like. Next we had an afternoon of sustainable goal themed games and activities, challenging our perceptions and getting us to think outside of the box. This was followed by a movie night featuring short films offering solutions for a sustainable future. Then we had one of the legendary Tools pub quizzes where everyone is a winner and if they couldn't answer the brain teasers then at least they could enjoy mountains of freshly made sumptuous sarnys.

Next it was open day at the Sunnyside workshop, a generous spread of soups, curries and cakes and guided tours of our shelving, Singers, Jones's, Stanleys, Disstons, photos and murals. Visitors were then divided up into teams to undertake giant tool themed jigsaws, send tools via catapult across the yard, throw balls of wool into containers that mechanically triggered buckets of sawdust to spew their contents from above, then blindfolded to learn how to use handsaws and assemble jack planes. Best of all each team had to build wee boats which were filled with midget tool kits that were pulled along a mini waterway full of obstacles. The icing on the cake was our resident TFS band who, braving howling winds, performed on the roof in the style of the Beatles at Abbey road.



Yaprak & Selim from TFS' 35th birthday celebration.



TFS' volunteers & friends playing their songs on the 35th birthday celebration.

That evening we had a birthday bash down at the Dockers club. This was a fundraising event for the public with our own resident comedian and tools volunteer of 35 years, Tim McGarry, punk godfather, Terri Hooley and Funktank who gave us some fab Motown tunes. The following day hungover volunteers met in heavy rain in the city centre for more fun and frolics, the legendary treasure hunt for all the family. We learnt new facts of Belfast history as we scuttled along alleyways and dived into buildings old and new in search of clues. Finally we were rewarded with our treasure, bags of chocolate gold. The 35 years were rounded off with a night of dancing at a "private" venue for volunteers only, including a Swing (1920s style) workshop and then an after party at the volunteer house. Some of us oldies who were reminiscing about past tools parties thought this was certainly one of the best to date. Thanks a million to all who came, shared a feeling of togetherness, fun and solidarity and to all those who put in so much hard work to give us such a variety of events.

Hamish Arrowsmith

Eco-Congregation Ireland

The churches in Ireland are not famous for their progressive views or actions on anything in general, but there are some notable exceptions.

One of these is an inter-church group called Eco-Congregation Ireland (www.ecocongregationireland.com).

Eco-Congregation Ireland (ECI) encourages churches of all denominations to take an eco approach to worship, lifestyle, property and finance management, community outreach and contact with the developing world.



ECI asks Christians everywhere to reflect on the beauty of God's world and to consider what practical steps can be taken to prevent further damage to the environment. Also, to pray for our wounded planet, for people in the developing world already affected by climate change and for future generations. The Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches have representatives as well as the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

There is a firm emphasis on practical actions. Churches joining ECI are encouraged to start with an environmental audit – working through a check list that covers energy use, recycling, cleaning products, use of the grounds for bio-diversity, management of the church funds among many other aspects. This is followed by suggestions for action – churches choose two or three aspects to work on initially and there is a structure they can follow if they want. Actions might include doing away with disposable cups for coffee after church, organising recycling of paper, plastics etc on the church premises or planting wildflowers around the borders of a church graveyard. Some churches are trying to ensure that their financial funds are ethically invested, moving away from fossil fuel investments. This is backed up by services with an environmental theme, for example re-imagining a traditional harvest service to become a ‘harvest of tools’ with a collection for Tools for Solidarity. Progress and achievements are recognised by certificates and an Award which is held in high regard – but to keep the Award churches must show progress in some directions every three years.

In Northern Ireland, the local ECI section organises regular inter-church meetings, with around 25 people turning up to exchange news on what their church is doing, and discuss new ideas. Many of these people were at the most recent School Strike for Climate in Belfast. South Belfast Quakers recently held a day-long seminar entitled ‘Hope and Despair: Responses to Climate Breakdown’ which was attended by around 50 people from churches across Ireland, and reinforced the message that individual actions are essential, but only make sense in the context of global actions by people and governments.

Ken Orr

My New Adventure in TFS

I had the chance to join Tools For Solidarity as an EVS volunteer more than one year ago.

At the end of this 12 amazing months passed in TFS I couldn't imagine going back home, in Belgium.

I had no plans about what I wanted to do after my EVS. I finally had the opportunity to stay longer as a partnership worker. I was lucky to be supported by our previous partnership worker, Angéline. She was very patient and attentive. We miss her a lot at Tools. Now I'm working by myself with still a lot of help from Stephen and John. I'm enjoying so much this new chapter of my life and I'm very grateful to the Wood brothers for giving me the chance to stay.

I'm discovering so many exciting (and a bit stressful) parts about our both projects in Tanzania as managing Skype calls with our partners, looking at or drawing a budget, thinking about the future of the project, etc. Also, we are currently trying to develop a new project that is so interesting to take part in. It takes time, sending a lot of emails and contacting many organisation

but at the moment we are in a good way to find new partners.

I sincerely believe that TFS is the best place to learn and grow.

Manon Oger

An Amazing Year With TFS

It has been almost a whole year for me in Belfast. I am going to finish my project in 10 days! I had an amazing year with lots of learning, sharing, taking responsibilities through volunteering with Tools For Solidarity.

It was more like a coincidence finding this project but when I look back now, I see how lucky I am to be here for the last one year. I can't imagine learning this many different skills somewhere else. The only thing you gain with TFS is not learning skills, we have a lovely friendly & sharing environment that makes you feel supported everyday.

That may sound a humdrum but TFS changed my life. Using our hands everyday and building and repairing all the time is incredible. I have many different ideas about how I want to live my life now. I can't stop thinking of what I want to build next. I always liked maintaining the stuff I have by myself but I didn't know the possibilities of what I can do.

I should mention that the main point is touching people's lives & we are doing this through learning a big amount of different skills. I have been mostly working on sewing machines throughout the year and I can fix a big range of different sewing machines (it requires some knowledge about electric as well) but also had chance to use different tools and participating in building shelves and boxes that let me use a variety of different tools (I can't tell many of their names in my own language) also a little bit about maintaining them.

I decided to stay in Belfast longer and I am happy that I will be here and able to volunteer with TFS whenever they need a hand. I believe that once you meet TFS it is not easy to ever leave this experience behind as a memory. As many other ex volunteers of TFS hopefully I will also be still around these lovely people and keep sharing for many more years.

Sena Yaprak Ozdemir

Repair Cafe



Repair Cafe, April 2019, Ormeau Golf Club.

We throw away too many things. Even if the thing has a tiny problem it's tempting to simply get rid of it and go to the shop to buy a replacement. Although, often it's easy to find a way to repair it, saving the environment from e-waste and plastic. There is an event that promotes this approach to tackle this problem – “Repair Café” in Belfast. Every month a bunch of enthusiasts and professional fixers gathers in the same place with a mission - to infect other people with an idea of giving a second chance to broken things. It's not a secret that planned obsolescence is definitely not a conspiracy theory. The fact that things we buy don't last is forcing us to consume more and more. People from “Repair Café” tries to prove everybody that it's possible to break the circle and start living more environmental-friendly life, having a nice hot beverage and meeting new friends.

To get things fixed – such a simple idea that unites many people in Belfast. Not only locals – people from all over the world, including myself.

The venue is always different, so check their Facebook page for more details: www.facebook.com/RepairCafeBelfast/ Try to find some time to pay a visit, as a guest or a fixer, I'm sure you won't be disappointed!

Andrei Rybakov

RASP

Tools For Solidarity is doing lots of amazing jobs and one of them is definitely Refugees and Asylum Seekers Programme (RASP). It's a programme that TFS gives refugees and asylum seekers a free training during a couple of weeks which is either about fixing sewing machines or tools maintaining & skills.

This programme has started in 2018 and continuing successfully. Each training has at most 5 people. Their transport and lunches are being provided and they receive a certificate and a kit of tools or a sewing machine each (depends on what the training was about).



Yaprak working with Augustina on sewing machines.



John Wood is working with RASP trainees.

As the current organiser of this programme, I have to say that I really enjoyed organising it because it put me in a position that they would share most with me. I had the chance to have a real communication with most of the trainees and I have some new friends. Even I have been invited over for a dinner to one of the lovely family's house!

Personally I value the refugees and asylum seekers issue very much because they may be suffering more from being lonely than being in a hard condition financially. It is very heart warming to see they involve in a community for some time and learn together and they love to share the information they got only in a few days. They exchange each other's contacts and maybe keep meeting later on.

RASP is happening once in a few months and it is being advertised through social media. You can follow our facebook, instagram & twitter accounts for the updates.

Sena Yaprak Ozdemir

Belfast Tools Library



There is much talk of the Sharing Economy but by far and away the best and earliest form of this is the library – one of the greatest concepts humans have come up with.

Libraries are social, communal spaces for sharing resources. They should be integral to all aspects of human society because we need urgently to move away from individual patterns of materialism and consumption towards a more social, equitable and sustainable world. This is starting to happen – slowly – but there is a growing realisation that urgent transformation is vital. The Belfast tools Library is part of that transformation.

In October the library opened its doors to members. For months previously a small group had been meeting, making plans, gathering tools and recruiting volunteers.

We have gathered hundreds of tools and pieces of machinery. Many of these have been checked, PAT tested, refurbished, photographed, engraved, catalogued and are now listed in the library as items ready for loan - <https://www.belfasttoollibrary.com/>

The library is based in the Vault Artist Studios, Tower St, Belfast - an amazing space/hub for artists, musicians, puppeteers, photographers, film-makers, bee-keepers and writers - <https://www.vaultartiststudios.com/>



John & Stephen Wood in the Belfast Tools Library.

It is open every Saturday from 10-1pm. To use the library you need to be a member – suggested annual donation is £25. Membership enables you to borrow 3 items at a time – one week loan, renewals possible.

We hope in the new year that we will have a workshop filled with machinery that members will be able to use. The workshop will be able to enable us to run training courses.

To make all this possible we have a team of volunteers – to help run the library, collect and refurbish the tools, promote and publicise the library and make the tea. We warmly welcome new volunteers and members to join – though we will have to do something about the heating!

Stephen Wood