

# 'Don't despair, repair' - keeping electronics in austerity Britain

April 9 2013, by Reuben Easey

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An innovative project in London is helping people to prolong the life of their electronic devices by repairing them and encouraging others to do learn to do the same.

If you're the kind of person who owns a [mobile phone](#) held together with sticky tape, or your laptop is running more slowly every time you flip it open, the Restart Project could come in extremely handy.

It brings together volunteer repairers, technology enthusiasts and engineers—and says that in tough financial times it is "preparing the ground for a future economy of maintenance and repair".

At a recent event in the hip Primrose Hill district, a steady stream of visitors—of all ages—arrived clutching computers and other broken-down items, many having heard about the service via [Twitter](#).

At tables dotted around the room, repairers helped open up the devices for inspection, while on the wall, a list kept track of which problems had been solved and which had not.

"Why throw something away when you can fix it?" said photographer Jon Freeman, who walked away a happy man after having his girlfriend's laptop fixed.

He said he only wished he had heard about the service earlier as he had recently paid Apple for a new [power cord](#) for the [laptop](#).

"It would have been simple to fix—Apple charge £65 (\$100, 76 euros)."

Diogo Castro, a Portuguese man in his 20s, was not quite so lucky with his computer, but did get some valuable advice about what was wrong. "My first idea was to get a new one straight away, but unfortunately I couldn't because of the money, so this project helped me a lot," he said.

Founded in 2012, the Restart Project is the brainchild of two adoptive Londoners, Ugo Vallauri, from Italy, and Janet Gunter, a British-American. Having worked in the [developing world](#) for several years, they were frustrated by the amount of waste they saw whenever they returned to the West, and looked for a way to encourage people to repair and reuse their broken [gadgets](#).

"Every time we'd come back here we would see people upgrading, tossing perfectly good technology, or giving up on things without even having opened them," exclaimed Gunter. "Would you take your car to the dump when you've never even popped open the bonnet?"

Environmental goals aside, the pair also hope the events will help counter the feelings of "disempowerment" people may feel from understanding virtually nothing about how everyday objects work.

"When something breaks, people don't know what to do about it," said Vallauri. "They've lost trust in regards to professional repairers, they are pushed by markets and advertising to always look for the next big thing. People feel this frustration and tend to just get more and more new things, as opposed to making the best use of what they already have."

The 'Restart parties', as they are known, offer largely free repairs for all but the biggest items.

A key plank of the project's ethos is to promote the work of skilled local

repairers, and revive some of Britain's war-time tradition of 'make do and mend.'

As the project grows, Gunter and Vallauri plan to start lobbying manufacturers to design more durable and easily repairable products, and have also lead workshops with students in local schools and universities.

"When you see an 11-year-old trying to open up an old VCR, and being mesmerised when you take the top off, and learning by retro-engineering how things work, you'll immediately have a new person that's not going to waste electronics", said Vallauri.

Though the project only began in mid-2012, the organisers have already received numerous enquiries about replicating it elsewhere in Britain and abroad.

Should it succeed, the project's slogan of 'Don't despair, repair' could one day become a mantra for upgrade-weary consumers around the world.

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