

# Impact report

November 2021 – June 2023

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# community toolbox

- canberra -



## Acknowledgement of Country

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The Community Toolbox Canberra acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Custodians of Country and recognises their continuing connection to land, sea, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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## Why a tool library?

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*To provide equitable access to tools and equipment,  
allowing people to connect with their community,  
reduce waste, save money and learn new skills.*

Sharing resources has been around since the first people created communities. The first tool library emerged in Columbus in the 70s, and hundreds across the globe have followed. With our current shared focus on mitigating the climate crisis, embracing the circular economy is becoming increasingly mainstream.

The Toolbox is a local solution to global problems. It contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG12 Responsible Consumption and Production.



The Toolbox – and tool libraries generally – deliver several important outcomes:

- **Mindful use of resources.** Tools and equipment are kept in circulation at their highest value.
- **Financial savings.** Members can save money by borrowing specialised tools - costing less and giving a better result than buying cheaper or multi-purpose tools. Members can also save money by doing jobs themselves, where no certification required.
- **Reduced landfill.** People often throw surplus equipment away because more mindful disposal is too hard. Tool libraries divert unwanted equipment from waste streams.
- **Skill sharing.** Members share knowledge with one another, informally or in scheduled workshops. More experienced volunteers informally mentor their younger colleagues.
- **Community building.** The Toolbox welcomes everyone. Many of our volunteers are new to Canberra and find their first sense of community at the Toolbox. Members and volunteers form friendships and a stronger sense of community.
- **Improved mental health.** Members who otherwise would have little control over their environment, can make simple home repairs and improvements. The Toolbox gives members the means to be creative, which is closely linked to wellbeing.
- **Personal safety.** Regular safety assessment of equipment means faults are identified quickly and members can be more confident, especially if they are new to tool use.

## A short history

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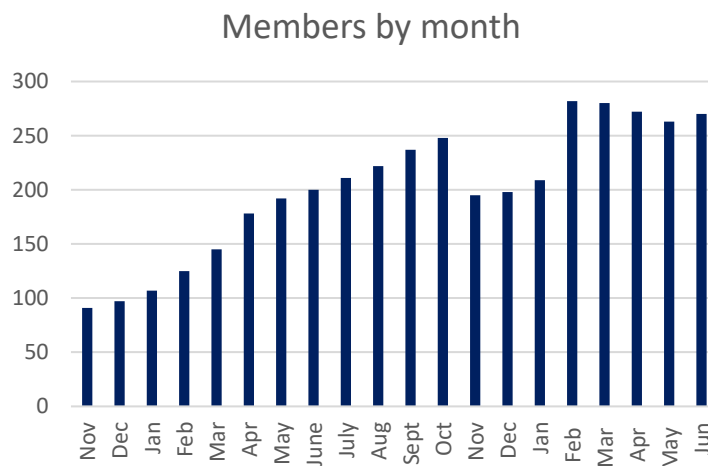
May 2019	First Toolbox planning meeting	
November 2019	Logo developed	
March 2020	COVID arrived	
April 2021	Auspice agreement and premises secured	
August 2021	Crowdfund concluded	
November 2021	Doors open!	
April 2022	First repair café	
March 2023	First workshop	

## Members

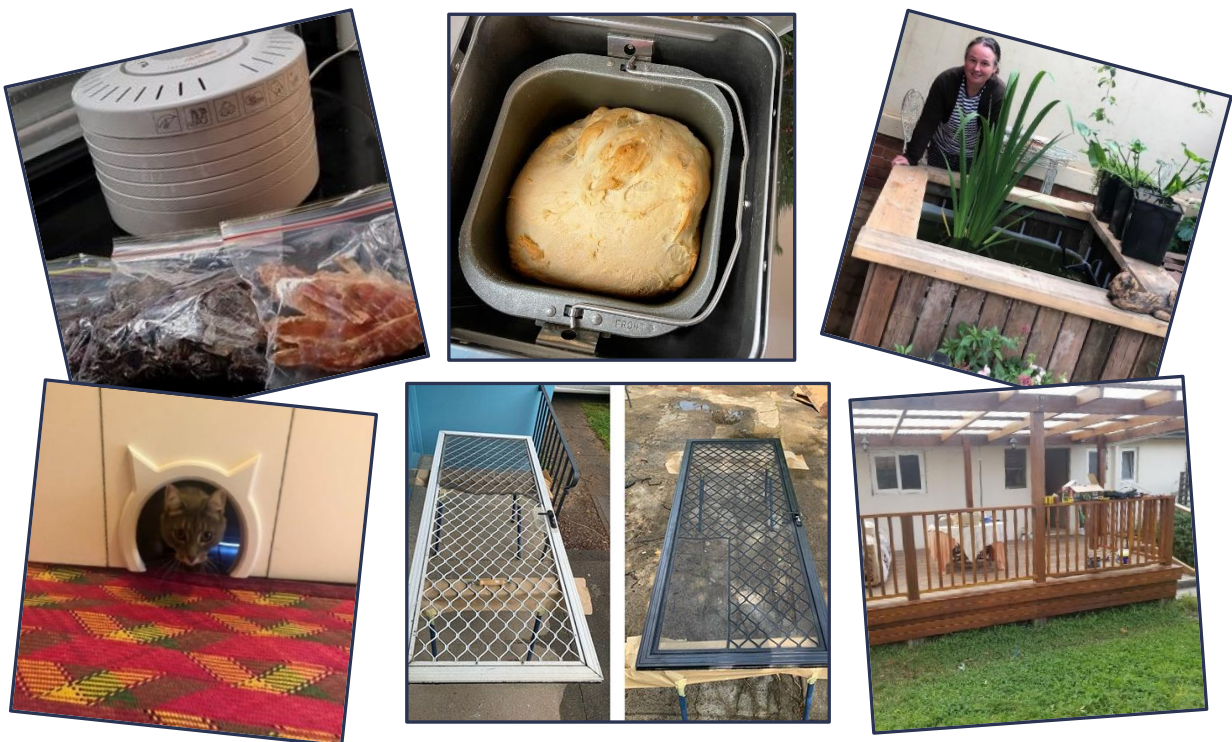
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The Toolbox is here for all, so we have an accessible membership structure. Regular membership is \$99 per year and can be as low as \$22 if cost is a hurdle to participation. Most members' savings exceed their annual fee in their first visit. Some members save many hundreds of dollars in a year. Our top borrower has saved at least \$6,000 since we launched.

Membership levels exceed our expectations and fluctuate from month to month. Since launching, we have had 412 members. Increasing membership numbers, particularly through membership retention, is a priority for the Toolbox.



We love seeing the results of borrowing Toolbox items and encourage members to share them.



Moving from ownership to access is climate action that saves money and space. It lets us do so many things for the cost of a single tool a year. Libraries just make sense!

- Kathy

It's a fantastic service! There's a tool for every job, and knowledgeable volunteers who can give you pointers. Such a great resource, staffed by lovely folks.

- Dan

I can't be grateful enough for the Canberra Toolbox Community: my family and I moved into our home earlier last year. My membership easily saved us hundreds of dollars in tools I needed for a single instance, but would have otherwise needed to buy new if not for the Toolbox.

I don't have a shed, a circumstance I am sure more people are finding themselves in whether by choice or forced circumstance. People don't need a drill, they need a hole in the wall: the Canberra Toolbox Community has been the cheapest and simplest way for me to do that.

- James

Access to a 'library of things' is a dream come true. There are lots of things that I'd like to be able to use but don't want to buy them, both for financial and sustainability reasons. I have borrowed all sorts of things from Community Toolbox Canberra but I think the food dehydrator is the thing I pick up most often. It helps me to reduce my food waste which I love but they are so bulky, I'd hate to have it in my kitchen all the time.

- Rebecca

The concept of the Community Toolbox is so positive in so many ways. It means not buying something for a single use; not needing a garage full of stuff; trying things out that you never would have had access to otherwise; joining a creative community and meeting great people. It means you can attempt all those projects that until now were cost prohibitive. It means you can get involved and volunteer. As a volunteer you get to hear about the great stuff that people are doing with the equipment they borrow and learn from the other volunteers about service and maintenance.

- Louise

I have been very impressed with your professionalism, generosity and prompt responses.

- Sarah

The Toolbox is a fabulous contribution to Canberra's community. With the Toolbox, I've renovated my house and avoided buying tools that I wouldn't use often. From hosting a garden party, to fixing a screen door, and digging new garden beds - the Toolbox has supported me to do it all!

- Jen

I've gotten a lot out of my toolbox membership as a first homeowner, who moved into a place that needed a bit of work. I've so far installed a dog door (reciprocating jigsaw), removed some old metal fencing poles (angle grinder), repaired some rotted fascia boards before repainting (orbital sander, drop sheet) and used a variety of tools to do more simple things where a socket wrench set or drill have been required.

It's saved me a lot of cash, but I'm actually more motivated to spruik the Community Toolbox due to the efficient use of resources it enables (yes, I am an economist professionally).

- Dan C



# Inventory

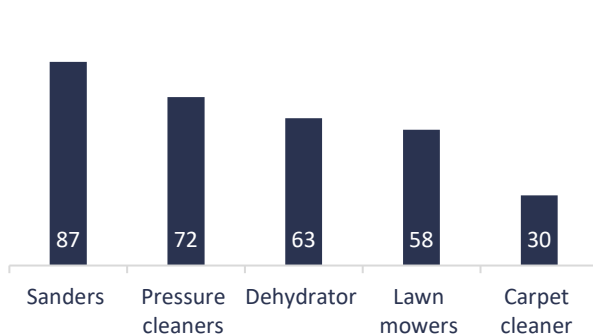
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The Toolbox stocks items that could reasonably be used only a few times a year. That differs from household to household, so the [inventory](#) is very broad across these categories:

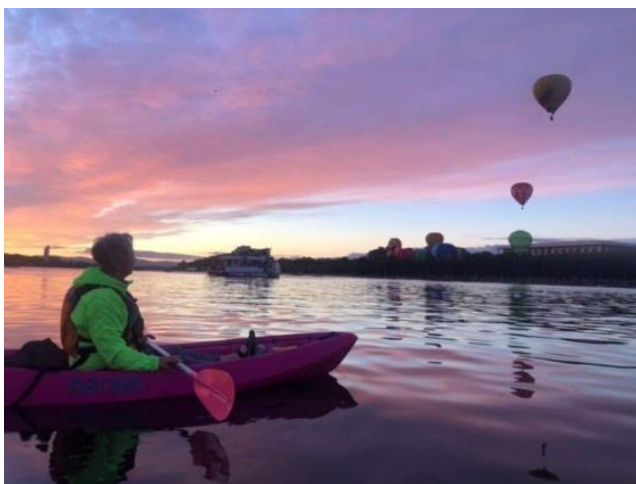
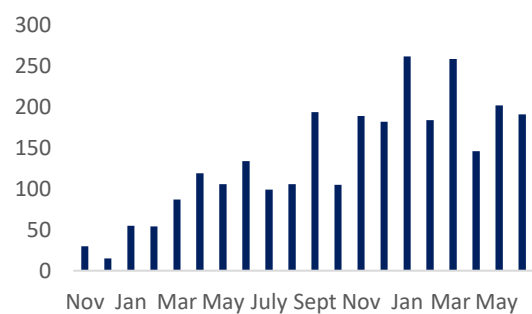
- animals
- books
- cleaning
- creative
- events
- food
- garden
- hand tools
- hardware
- health
- office
- power tools
- PPE
- recreational
- travel

Loans are generally for a fortnight. Very popular items are one week only and niche items (dog crates, mobility aids etc) are often loaned for much longer periods. At the end of June, the Toolbox had 800 items in circulation, which had been borrowed 2,700 times. In the 48 fortnights since launching, sanders were borrowed 87 times.

### Top 5 popular items



### Loans by month



One of our favourite things is to hear members enthuse about a new skill that they've explored with borrowed equipment. We like it even more when members share their new knowledge.

Kirsty has taught herself how to preserve food using our pressure canner and is contributing to information for future borrowers. Helen took our kayak out on the lake at dawn for a full emersion in the Enlighten Festival. Tom made a bunk bed for his kids with the help of our mitre saw. Canberra is alive with creativity and lifelong learning and we are delighted to be a part of that.

## Volunteers

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The Toolbox is volunteer-run. Most of our volunteers also juggle jobs, families, pets, study and hobbies. We are deeply grateful for our volunteers and everything they do.

Since launching in November 2021, 40 volunteers have donned a Toolbox apron and kept the doors open. We are really happy with our volunteer retention and we like to think they find their time in the Toolbox rewarding.

We have clocked up 1,200 hours in scheduled shifts, plus at least that many spent working behind the scenes. And quite a few putting up our new shed (thanks, Paul!).

Volunteer tasks include:

- testing and tagging electrical equipment
- general organising and decision making
- being a librarian
- scheduling volunteers
- cleaning
- sourcing spare parts
- liaising with government and other stakeholders
- maximising space as our inventory grows
- bookkeeping
- policy writing
- training



### **Our thanks to Team Toolbox:**

Rebecca T — Kathy E — Nic W — Ingram N — Suzanne R — Julie E  
— Wanyima W — Paul C — Rachel M — Bek B — Carol R — Lile D  
— Tara N — Barbara B — Louise P — Callum T — Juan F — Jen S  
— Kim F — Zl M — Jeannette F — Maribel F — Sarah H — Michael P  
— Daniel M — Sue T — Graham C — Ian A — Sam D — Julian W  
— Chutong Z — Kym B — Euan T — Nikki H — James C — Jessica C  
— Babette F — Alex H — Gihansa L — Asher B

## Repair cafes and workshops

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We launched a monthly repair café in April 2022. Participants (not necessarily members) bring damaged items and our repairers fix them without charge. Keeping items in use is the most obvious benefit, but participants also learn through observing and discussion. Repair cafes around the world are making repairing the norm again and providing a forum for skill sharing. Repairs have included a video recorder, a pond pump, a favourite woollen jumper, bed sheets, and a laptop. We've also been lucky enough to have a roving musician and a barber a few times. It can be a real mind-shift to move from replacing to repairing but, in parallel with several other repair cafes operating across Canberra, we're making a difference.

Repairers have offered:

- visible mending
- textile mending
- woollen darning
- knife sharpening
- tinkering
- electrical repairs
- jewellery repairs
- Apple repairs
- bicycle repairs
- barber cuts
- sewing machine repairs

We hosted our first workshop on textile repairs in May, which was well attended. We have several more planned for 2023, including tool familiarisation, native bee hotels and sewing machine use.



## Behind the scenes

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The Toolbox opens on Thursday afternoons and Saturday mornings, and hosts the monthly repair café. There is a lot that goes on behind the scenes: ensuring that our inventory is well maintained, planning new projects, liaising with members, networking with other libraries, and more.

There is always something going on:

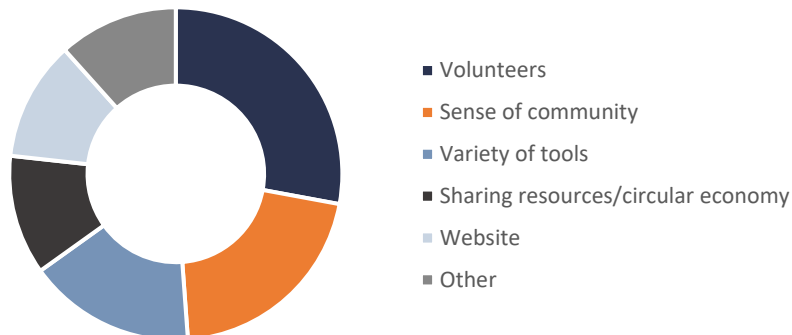
- Everything that plugs into the wall is tested and tagged quarterly by accredited volunteers.
- We have developed a strategic plan to see us through the next few years. See page 14 for our big goals.
- We have reviewed our risk management plan and other policy documents to ensure our smooth and safe operation. We operate under an auspice agreement with SEE-Change and have been working with them to make our policies available for other projects and for the benefit of the broader organisation.
- The Toolbox has benefited advice from The Inner West Tool Library (Sydney), the Brunswick Tool Library (Melbourne), the St John Tool Library (BC, Canada) and others. Now, we are sharing our expertise in the Wollondilly Shire (NSW), Sydney and Adelaide. We have also had some involvement in the Library of Things peak body project – a collective focused on advocacy and uncovering trends among libraries.
- We've just finished our first stocktake to ensure that everything in our inventory is on the shelf and available for loan.



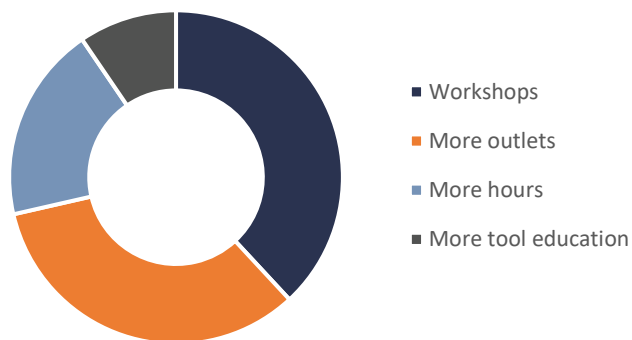
## Next steps

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### What members think are our strengths



### What members think we should focus on



### Update

- Several workshops are planned for 2023.
- We are investigating a mobile Toolbox so that we can launch multiple 'outlets' at once.
- We have trained more volunteers to cover the hours we are already open, but to have more hours, we will need more people.

### Mobile Toolbox

Still in its planning stages, the mobile Toolbox will broaden access to our inventory. We need to increase our volunteer base to deliver this project and will be engaging with people who live locally to each stop. We have been engaging stakeholders on the best way to deliver a mobile service via a [survey](#), which will remain active until delivery to maximise the project's impact.



1

The purchase of tools for single use largely eradicated among members

2

Our members feel empowered to fix and make

3

People want to acquire skills and are curious about processes

4

To provide an accessible, safe, secure place for people to work and access our services

5

Sharing becomes mainstream



### Why a tool library?

- Mindful use of resources
- Reduce landfill
- Skill sharing; community building; improved mental health



### Members

- 412 members since November 2021
- Most loans by member: 160
- 2,700 loans since November 2021
- \$135,000+ saved



### Volunteers

- 41 volunteers since November 2021
- 1,200 scheduled hours
- Many unscheduled background hours
- Most hours by a volunteer: 236



### Inventory

- 800 items in circulation
- Top 5: sanders, pressure cleaners, dehydrators, lawn mowers, carpet cleaner



### Future

- More members
- Mobile service
- More workshops and training

**Community Toolbox Canberra** operates under an auspice agreement with SEE-Change Inc.

76 Federal Highway, Watson ACT 2602

Thursdays 4pm-7pm

Saturdays 10am-1pm

Repair cafes are hosted on the last Saturday of each month.

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