



# Guelph Tool Library and the UN SDGs:

## Reduce consumption, strengthen local resilience, foster community well-being

The Guelph Tool Library offers residents access to affordable household products while providing an opportunity to reduce consumption habits, fight climate change and improve community cohesion and resilience.

The television host slowly opens the front door—revealing an entryway that’s absolutely loaded to the rafters in clutter. Stuffed animals, clothes, gift boxes, old electronics. It’s difficult to walk through the home, let alone live in it.

The premise of the show, [Sort Your Life Out](#), is to help the homeowner, Sue—and other contestants—dig out of the clutter. Relocating their home’s contents to an empty warehouse, viewers get perspective on the “stuff” once inside the house. The aerial image is jaw-dropping—532 plastic shopping bags, 205 hair rollers, 30 umbrellas, 18 unused toothbrushes, 17 old digital cameras, 443 pairs of shoes, and many, many other things. This view makes you wonder what your home’s contents would look like if they were laid out in a similar fashion.

Unfortunately, this woman isn’t the only person out there who’s grappling with the side effects of overconsumption. If everyone on the planet consumed resources the way Canadians do, we’d need [five earths](#) to sustain our habits. Greenhouse emissions are also a big concern - created through manufacturing, transportation, shipping, returns, packaging, waste hauling, and even decomposition.

The trend is contributing to climate change, overflowing landfills, biodiversity loss, ocean pollution, anxiety, depression, and a host of other environmental and social ailments. It’s something more than [half](#) of Canadians want to change—including Susan Carey, John Dennis and Saba Saneinejad.

In fact, it was this trio’s concern for the environmental and health impacts of overconsumption that led them to learn about lending libraries—and ultimately drove them to bring the Tool Library, and other services, to Guelph.

## Impact



**30,000**  
items loaned



**800**  
members of the Guelph  
Tool Library (GTL)



**1,300**  
items on inventory at  
the GTL



# Impact



**2,500kg**

of household goods recycled or rehomed at Re-Purposefest.



**800+**

items repaired at bimonthly Repair Cafes



**250**

community members develop skills through hands-on workshops



**4,000**

graphic novels and comic books donated in support of Books for Inmates, through the Free to Read initiative



## The appeal of lending libraries

The idea for the Guelph Tool Library came about in 2015, when Susan and John were chatting over coffee. Susan had recently learned about the Toronto Tool Library—a non-profit organization that lends out a vast array of tools for home renovations, gardening, lawn maintenance, repairs and DIY projects, all for a low annual membership fee of \$55/year.

“ I’m an idea person, while John is an action person. So when I said ‘I wish we had a tool library’, John’s response was ‘Let’s do it!’

- **Susan Carey,**  
Founding member of the Guelph Tool Library

The idea appealed to Susan and John and, later, Saba, because it not only offered people an opportunity to reduce their consumption habits, but it also helped strengthen local resiliency by transforming unused products sitting in people’s garages into community assets.

Because these types of libraries mimic the age-old practice of sharing tools between neighbours, they also foster a sense of community. They are often a hub of activity—bringing people together to learn about, or practice, the art of living with less. People are happily donate previously-used tools rather than throw them away, or simply financially support an organization that allows other to avoid buying new.

“When we went to the Toronto Tool Library to learn how to start a similar establishment in Guelph, they mentioned that a lot of their members don’t actually use it,” Susan says. “They just love the idea of living in a community that has this type of venture, and wanted to support it.”

## The Guelph Tool Library: In a nutshell

The Guelph Tool Library became a registered non-profit in 2016, with the help of a City of Guelph Wellbeing Grant. Its goal was (and is) to enhance the Guelph community in five key ways:

- Provide affordable access to products
- Reduce consumption to help reach zero waste goals
- Fight climate change by reducing emissions tied to consumption
- Help prepare for and build back better after crisis
- Improve community cohesion and resilience

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



## The role of the SDGs

Given the nature of its services and mandate, the Guelph Tool Library is making traction on many Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Some of the highlights include:

- **SDG 13: Climate Action** – Circular practices, like those supported by the GTL, are an effective way to promote sustainable consumption and boost climate resiliency.
- **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production** – The GTL focuses on amplifying reuse, promoting affordable access to essential items.
- **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** – GTL champions sustainable behaviours and builds community resilience by connecting neighbourhoods and increasing access to tools and equipment.
- **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities** – GTL makes otherwise-expensive household items available to more people.
- **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth** – The circular economy abides by a different model of economic growth—and the Guelph Tool Library offers a small-scale example of what could be.
- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being** – Cluttered homes have been [scientifically linked](#) to higher stress, low self-worth, depression, isolation and behavioural issues. GTL offer a pathway to decluttering—and encourages people to connect with others in the community.

## Looking ahead

The Guelph Tool Library membership has more than tripled in size between 2021 and 2024—and Susan anticipates its services will continue to surge in popularity in the coming years, as people get more accustomed to the benefits of circular thinking.

With a central location downtown Guelph, and partnerships with city-run programs the Tool Library has gained notoriety locally. “We’ve built up some credibility, by partnering with the public library and city-run programs, that increases our success of applying for grants” says Susan.

“As a non-profit, we’re always hand-to-mouth. We’d love to reach a level of operations where we can feel more financially secure,” Susan explains. There are some ways to make life more financially secure—one option being to apply for grants and community benefit agreements that offer multi-year support.

The Tool Library is also planning to expand its programming in the next year and beyond. A few potential ideas include a “mug library”, which would aim to cut down on take-out cup usage by allowing food establishments to send coffee home in second-hand mugs that patrons are welcome to keep or return – as well a new maker’s space that would offer additional space for community use and connection. Funding is a challenge here too, as Susan explains “to set that up, you need the right ventilation, wiring, lighting, insurance, people to oversee proper use of tools...it’s expensive.”

## Growing the GTL



One of the library’s top priorities is to find a bigger space.

“The hardest thing about starting a lending library of any type is finding the space,” Susan says. “Our current location is about 1,400 square feet, costing \$2,500 per month and we’re outgrowing it.”

Another goal is to create a new maker’s space. While these exist in Guelph, the GTL version would be a little different.

“We were thinking more ‘hammer and nails’,” Susan explains. “A place where you can make a bird feeder, for instance—or fix your coffee table. It would be like going over to your neighbour’s garage.”