

CASE STUDY IN REUSE

REUSE CENTER



FINGER LAKES REUSE

ROBIN ELLIOTT, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

ITHACA CENTER: 214 Elmira Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850

MEGACENTER: 2255 N. Triphammer Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850

DAYS/HOURS: Every day, 10am-6pm

<https://ithacareuse.org/>

The Basics

- Finger Lakes ReUse is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 2008 by Diane Cohen
- Developed from waste reduction goals of the Tompkins County 20 year Solid Waste Management Plan
- Focuses on the “triple bottom line” strategy: Community, Economy, and the Environment (not just profit)
- Model example of how a reuse center can combine other reuse initiatives into a central reuse “hub” (such as repair cafes, workforce development, partnerships within the community, deconstruction, etc.)
- Reports approximately \$2 million in sales revenue every year!
- Community partnerships include: public libraries, schools, arts centers, workforce development centers, human services agencies
- Has received many awards to date: US EPA Environmental Champion Award, DEC Environmental Excellence Award, Recovery Friendly Award, Ithaca Times and Ithaca Journal Awards
- Economic Impact Analysis Report conducted by Cornell University students Nika Mikec and Wyeth Augustine-Marceil measured the economic impact of Finger Lakes ReUse in Tompkins County (read the report here: <https://tinyurl.com/6pn7w79t>)

Services include:

- Salvaging used goods through donated items
- Selling used goods at ReUse Centers
- Providing job training through the ReSET Program
- eCenter, which provides computer and electronics goods and services
- ReUse Materials Access Program (ReMAP), which allows people in need to access goods with store credit, in partnership with local human service agencies
- Deconstructing Houses through deconstruction (“green demolition”)
 - Fixers Collective is a weekly repair clinic that helps to repair items and teaches community members how to fix their own items
 - Hosts many community and volunteer events
 - Item Wish List available on the website: simple Google Form that allows public to request what they’re looking for at the Center (increases the chances of people choosing reuse over buying new)
 - Currently developing a Community Reuse Template (stay tuned on their website for updates!)

Between 2018-2022...

4,406.39 tons of waste diverted
\$423,014 saved in disposal costs
\$8,673,969 in sales revenue



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Syracuse University
Center for Sustainable Community Solutions

Questions?
Contact: Morgan Ingraham
CSCS Program Coordinator
meingrah@syr.edu

FUNDING & ADVICE

Challenges & Opportunities

- You never know how much you are going to grow in the beginning, especially since there is no concrete data on how much reusable material there is in your community, or how community participation could skyrocket
- In order to more effectively handle the materials being diverted from the wastestream, Finger Lakes ReUse welcomes the expansion of other reuse centers and is always looking to form more partnerships
- Having a central warehouse to process reuse materials will be essential to the future of Finger Lakes ReUse as they continue to grow
- Because they've grown rapidly, they doubled their staff from 46 to 80 between 2020-2023 and went from a small to mid-sized business; their solution was to focus on business best practices in order to offer employees a living wage and develop an HR department to outline formal policies (e.g., interview processes)

Funding

- They started with very little funding, but found that initial funding does not necessarily tie into success and community participation and local partnerships can help immensely to get a reuse program off the ground
- The Tompkins County Solid Waste Division (now called Recycling & Materials Management) was a vital partner in the beginning
- Finger Lakes ReUse was born out of the Tompkins County Solid Waste Management Plan
- Tompkins County provided a small amount of funding to get the program started
- Now that Finger Lakes ReUse has grown, the County only makes up a very small percentage of their overall funding
- Finger Lakes ReUse non-profit status allows them to fundraise, secure grant funding, and accept individual & community donations
- Most of their revenue now comes from the sale of used goods at the ReUse Centers themselves

"Even a very small amount of seed funding can make for an incredibly successful reuse center!"

Advice for Starting a Reuse Center

- Communicate clearly and consistently with your governmental partners about your organization's needs to make sure everyone is up-to-date and on the same page
- A successful reuse center is all about the partnerships
- Workforce development is incredibly important and has become a major component of what Finger Lakes ReUse does
- Even a very small amount of initial seed funding from the County can launch a successful reuse program
- Natural partnership for NYS Counties to invest in reuse towards their own waste reduction goals
- Reuse Centers do not have to be government organizations (Finger Lakes ReUse is a non-profit organization), but the government can help support the development of such programs
- Develop effective communication strategies with your residents and partners for sharing of resources and information
- The Build ReUse Wiki is a centralized platform for the sharing of resources and ideas related to reuse:
<https://www.buildreuse.org/wiki>
- Regular Zoom meetings, networking sessions, workshops, virtual events, and in-person events have been found to be the most sustainable communication strategies for Finger Lakes ReUse so far



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