

From Waste to Wardrobe: Open Closet gives clothes a second chance

Maci Gambrell

Qds15@txtstate.edu

A sea of colorful textiles was spread along five tabletops where excited students rummaged through piles of T-shirts, dress pants, shoes and accessories. Some sifted through well-loved cotton blouses with one arm while tucked lightly worn leather belts under the other. Friends chatted about which items highlighted their personal style best while pop music filtered through the LBJ ballroom.

While landfills around the world overflow with discarded clothes, the Open Closet free market lets students refresh their wardrobes while helping protect the planet from fashion waste.

As a part of Campus Sustainability Month, the office of sustainability sponsored Open Closet, a clothing drive and free market on campus that provided over 500 students with access to donated clothes.

For two weeks prior, Sustainability interns gathered and sorted nearly 1,000 pounds of clothes donated by students, faculty and staff from various locations around the university. Then the market took place on Oct. 28 in the LBJ ballroom where students were encouraged to take five items for free. Almost all of it cleared out in the first couple of hours.

“It’s showing people that there is an alternative to just discarding your items as soon as you’re done with them and buying new ones,” said Lisa Fields, sustainability coordinator for the office of sustainability. “We can breathe new life into these things that would have otherwise ended up in a landfill.”

Clothing donations for Open Closet this year were equal to the last two years combined. Emma Parsley, sustainability manager at Texas State and creator of Open Closet, said she’s seen increasing involvement since the event began in 2022.

Smiling at the students digging through piles of donated shirts in front of her, Parsley said she’s excited for students to take away more than just clothes.



Students browse through donated clothes at Open Closet event in Texas State University’s LBJ Ballroom, on Oct. 28. Photo by Jonah Winter.

“People participating in this event, hopefully that encourages them to maybe have their own clothing swaps with friends or with community groups,” Parsley said. “Because then it's better for the environment cause you're not having to use water, or energy to create new clothing items.”

This drive was initiated to help offset the excessive amount of clothing wasted around the world, Fields said. Clothes are the world's second biggest polluter with 92 million tons of textiles taken to landfills each year. America is a large contributor, as the average American throws away 81.5 pounds of clothes a year.

“Buying secondhand, it's a really good way just to give items more love and you can feel good about it,” Fields said.

Erica Aguilar, president of Texas State's fashion merchandising association, said she has enjoyed attending the Open Closet because she appreciates the opportunity it gives students to shop responsibly.

“I've gone a couple times and I've gotten belts, I've gotten business clothes... and just like staple pieces of clothing that will last, no matter the trend,” Aguilar said. “It makes thrifting really accessible for freshmen to get their hands on.”

As someone with a closet full of secondhand items, Aguilar said that students face a variety of challenges when it comes to shopping sustainably. It's more difficult for undergraduates without cars, because of the lack of thrift stores near campus, she said.

Consumers are often hesitant to buy from thrift stores when comparing the immediacy and low prices of fast fashion, to reused items that may be more expensive or don't fit current trends.

“I think it's a little bit more difficult, but I do think that people have the social responsibility not to be using fast fashion outlets,” Aguilar said. “So, there's also maintaining that equal level of, like, I want cute clothes, but also maybe I shouldn't give in to this program that ends up harming the rest of the people around me.”

Extra clothes not taken by students, were donated to the Hays Caldwell Women's Center or to Jostco Recycling to be made into cleaning rags for future use.

Open Closet was just one of the events the office of sustainability held this month, that also included tabling during homecoming festivities, a sustainability fair, and ended in a campus clean up. Parsley and her team said they look forward to hosting this event next year but encouraged students not to wait to shop responsibly.

“You don't necessarily have to participate in large-scale sustainability events, to be sustainable,” Parsley said. “You can go to a local farmer's market, or you can repair that loose button on your jacket. Sustainability isn't just a keyword, isn't just a trendy word, it's habits. It's a mindset on how you want to live your life.”