

Style Cycle—A revolutionary swap shop

OVERVIEW:

My Climate Action project is called Style Cycle and it is a sustainability and social impact initiative that brings together fashion, environmental awareness, and a sense of community. Being at an all-girls boarding school, I have seen so many unique and different styles of fashion around campus and have grown to find my personal sense of style here. However, through my month-long PGC journey, I realized the extreme impacts of fast fashion and consumerism on our earth—specifically with the fashion industry being responsible for 10% of global carbon dioxide emissions, which is 1.2 billion tons annually! I recognized that my school, Westover, would especially benefit from a project centered around fashion; thus, I created a campus Swap Shop that allows faculty and staff to donate clothing while also picking out new items! Through my CAP, I am helping reimagine how fashion is viewed at my school.

INITIAL GOALS:

- 1) 50% participation from faculty and students at my school
- 2) Post at least 10 posters around the school
- 3) Start a social media and post to raise awareness
- 4) 5 bins of clothing (200 donated, 100 taken)
- 5) Find 3 co-leaders and 20 people interested in helping out
- 6) Reach out to 5 schools and 3 organizations to donate to
- 7) Find a 50% positive change in the post-shop survey compared to the pre-shop survey

While many of these goals were met or surpassed, a few of my goals also shifted along the way.

- I decided to **not start any social media** while I was implementing my project in my school, but instead **opted for more effective announcements I made to the entire school** at our assemblies on Mondays and Thursdays, speaking informatively about fast fashion and announcing updates.
- In addition, I shifted my goal of finding 3 organizations outside of my school to donate to and instead **successfully partnered with another student within my school** who was interested in working together. She informed me that the East Kololo Primary School and Shimoni Demonstration School in **Kampala, Uganda**, where she is from, lack access to many necessities, including quality clothes. Below, I will speak more about the initial goals that I successfully met.

CHALLENGES DURING IMPLEMENTATION:

While presenting my initial idea to the administration at my school, I was cleared to use a large space by the library and under the dorms with one exception—the fire marshal had to confirm too. However, he notified me that the space was a fire exit and had to stay empty, which led me to relocate the shop to an old 11th-grade lounge on the 3rd floor of my campus. This ended up working perfectly as it is more accessible and easy for students passing by.

TIMELINE AND PROCESS:

December → January

- Met with Residential Life Supervisor and faculty advisor to approve room by library
- Presented about fast fashion and my PGC experience to my entire school
- Began creating posters to post around the school (15+)
- Created a pre-shop survey, announced it, and sent it out to my whole school

February → April

- Continued to make assembly announcements to my whole school, informing and sending surveys
- My faculty advisor drove an hour to get metal racks and felt hangers from an old store
- Assembled the racks with the help of my friends
- Cleaned, organized, and set up the room with clothes, posters, and decorations
- Opened the Swap Shop with specific events (cookies, ice cream party) (continuous)

KEY LEARNINGS & MOMENTS:

The most important part of my CAP journey was learning about how a project can address not just one singular issue but can reach and extend beyond what I imagined at first. My initial goal was a project based more simply on environmental awareness. However, my swap shop has expanded into a cherished space on my campus that builds a sense of community and collaboration for the students at my school. With my CAP, I have recognized that activism can take many forms and people are much more likely to engage once an initiative is started and easy for them to access.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES:

- My school has 200 students and faculty combined—I received **102 responses on my first survey** and **73 responses on my second**, which was more than 50% participation in answers alone. The data will be in a separate file but I wanted to emphasize a few important pieces of the data.
 - 100% thought the swap shop was successful and thrifting “very often” increased by 15% from the 1st to 2nd survey
 - 46% planned to stop by but haven’t had a chance and 47% stopped by once or more (93% total interest)
 - 70% donated or planned to donate, 33% took clothes and 30% planned to (63% interest),
 - 90%+ stated satisfaction 8/10 or higher, 95% would go back and recommend to others, and **96% would like to help out in the future!**
- In just one week, 400 clothes were donated along with over 200 taken from the shop, surpassing my goals. Due to factors like avoided landfill waste to manufacturing emissions, my swap shop has saved an estimated around **8,000 lbs of CO2 emissions** and **317,000 gallons of water** from reusing.
- 200 hand-picked quality items will go to the school communities in Uganda mentioned above.

POTENTIAL FOR ONGOING IMPACT

My project doesn’t stop at Westover. I have reached out to 10 other schools and one of the top 20 boarding schools in the US, the Hill School, is on board to replicate Style Cycle in May. I hope this becomes a model that any school can adopt to take climate action as a community together. I also plan to contact many schools and colleges in the summer to continue this ripple effect, giving them the opportunity to create a more sustainable atmosphere at their school with a designated and easy-to-implement plan!

MY PROUDEST MOMENTS:

My proudest moments have come from seeing others genuinely enjoy themselves in the shop or talking with students who have used clothes from the shop. It feels especially rewarding to hear others discuss the impact this project has had on them, including a faculty named Abby commenting on the survey: “Nothing stops me - I’ve been trying to be more proactive to thrift and repurpose ever since your first survey! :)” Another student named Alison wrote, “I think we should do this multiple times a year because I <3 clothes but I’m broke and hate to keep buying new clothes at full price when there are so many nice things that don’t get reused just because nobody talks about them!” Having these moments has really changed my perspective and motivated me to continue pursuing what I’m passionate about while truly making a difference.