

Used Clothing Put to Good Use

Popup thrift store to raise money, possibilities for Wildcat Friends

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

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On Friday, Dec. 5, a popup thrift store will open in the MUB. It will be there for two days, offering for sale sweaters and T-shirts and skinny jeans and sundry other articles of clothing collected by UNH students in November.

Sometime after 5 p.m. Saturday the tables will be taken down, the unsold clothes boxed up for donation, and, the hope is, more than \$2,000 will have been raised to help support Friends in Action, a nonprofit group whose offshoot Wildcat Friends gives young adults with disabilities the chance to experience college.

Here's the back story:

Professor Kate Hanson, co-founder of the community leadership program at the Thompson School, and Heidi Chase, executive director of Friends in Action, came up with the idea for the fundraiser after talking about such a project for years.

Students in Hanson's community leadership class have handled the logistics: promotion and advertising; planning the clothing drive, drumming up volunteers. Sponsoring the event is Eyes Open, an organization started two years ago by then-sophomore Maggie Saliba to foster relationships between UNH students and Wildcat Friends participants. Add in the other organizations on campus that helped out, and the Fashion Cats Thrift Store became the definition of collaboration.

And then there's the rest of the story. Like how all that organizing and planning gave Hanson's students a glimpse of the way leadership works in a real-world context. And more importantly, perhaps because it was the root goal from the beginning, the success of the thrift store will serve as a barometer for Chase, who wants to open a community center in Durham that would have a thrift store run, with help, by Wildcat Friends, offering them the work-skill and social engagement piece she has been looking to bring to the program.

"The center will allow people with developmental disabilities to have more opportunities to interact and learn from UNH students by working with them at the thrift store, by socializing in the community engagement center and by having the UNH campus more accessible through new opportunities," Chase says.

From Hanson's perspective, the project already has been a winner.

"In community leadership, the question is, 'How can we have students experience something on a deep level so they understand what we've been talking about—leadership, teamwork,'" Hanson says. "This has been a coordinated action toward a shared goal. The whole stakes change when they're doing something real."

Students have learned just how real organizing such an event is, logging scores of volunteer hours emptying the collection boxes that have been at key spots on campus since the beginning of November (by Veterans Day they had received more than 1,500 items), sorting and pricing the clothing and finally, for the next two days, manning the event itself.

"This has been totally different than any of the community service that I've done before," says senior Maggi Hanson (no relation), a teaching assistant in the leadership class. "We've had to think of everything—getting the donations, advertising, all the logistics."

Junior Caroline Norris adds, "Our class has so many different leadership styles. I think that's a good thing because that's what you're going to find in real life, people who come

up with things that you didn't think about, and you're going to have to adjust your thinking."

Hanson admits the project has been a lot of work. But, she says, "I think it has given the students a sense of satisfaction. It's helped them gain confidence. The process of leadership isn't just what you're doing but how you're doing it."

In addition to Friends in Action, proceeds from the thrift store will go to the Waysmeet Center and the Children's Hospital of Dartmouth-Hitchcock.

The Fashion Cats Thrift Store will welcome shoppers Friday Dec. 5, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. and Saturday, Dec. 6, from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. in the MUB, room 156.

[Watch this video](#) by journalism major Annah Todd of students involved in the project.

Learn more:

[Community Leadership](#)

[Friends in Action](#)

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