

## **Fix It Friday:**

Sustainability through Experiential Learning: *One Stitch at a Time*

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Fix It Friday is a program at Illinois State University in which students set up sewing machines in various locations on campus and within the surrounding community to offer free basic sewing, mending, and clothing repair services to anyone in need. The students lend their time, talent, and skills on a completely volunteer basis.

As students become engaged with sustainability initiatives across campus, they become more aware of the harmful social and environmental impacts created by the fast fashion model. We took this information and transformed it into action. By providing a free clothing repair service to the local community, the students practice their sewing skills while also reducing the amount of textile waste in landfill. The response to the Fix It Friday program from the community has been overwhelming. The program has received phone calls and emails from local news sources, businesses, and organizations throughout the state interested in the program and inviting the students to set up “shop” at their location or storefront.

While college students live busy lives with class, work and social commitments, the students have willingly given up a Friday morning or afternoon to help others. While this program was started primarily to fix clothing and educate consumers on overconsumption, students have engaged with community members and various individuals they would likely not be interacting with on a day-to-day basis on campus. The unintended stories from each event were often the conversations and interactions with the customers, rather than the details of items fixed. Additionally, students who were nervous to practice their sewing skills on other people’s clothing items stated the experience helped them gain confidence in their sewing abilities and fine tune their techniques. Encouraging testimonials from student volunteers materialized after each event including commentaries on personal growth, gaining a new perspective, and overall student learning surrounding sustainability.

The findings of a research study observed over the 2018-2019 academic year will be presented to provide a foundation for others to implement a similar project to reduce waste, educate consumers on overconsumption, and share the rewards of civic engagement & out-of-class learning...one stitch at a time.