

The Problem With Fast Fashion and One Chique Solution

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Fast fashion is a term used for clothing products that are produced inexpensively, rapidly, and in high volumes. Every year, 100 billion new pieces of clothing are produced. The production of fast fashion clothing items consumes large amounts of water, pollutes water sources, uses massive amounts of energy, and emits large quantities of greenhouse gasses. The fashion industry is the second largest consumer of water. Water is used in clothing production to bleach, dye, finish, soften, grow, and spin materials. The contaminated water created in this process is discarded back into water sources. The production of fast fashion uses massive amounts of energy. Turning fibers into textiles is energy intensive and requires large amounts of petroleum. The production and transportation of fast fashion items also emit large quantities of greenhouse gasses. On average, the fashion industry produces 10% of annual greenhouse gasses worldwide. In addition, as clothing breaks down, it releases methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Fast fashion is a massive contributor to climate change and harms the environment.

Fast fashion also contributes to waste in landfills. Every year 92 million tonnes of fast fashion waste ends up in landfills and this number is expected to rise to 134 million tonnes by the end of the decade. In Canada, 85% of unwanted clothing ends up in landfills, many of which are in the Global South. Many of the countries in the Global South have banned or attempted to ban used clothing imports. It is crucial to divert textile waste from landfills. Textile waste diversion strategies include eliminating unnecessary purchases, limiting necessary purchases and buying high-quality clothing made of natural fibers that will last a long time. Another strategy for diverting textile waste from landfills is the Chique Boutique, an ENSS thrift store where staff, students, and family friends can shop, but they do not pay!

The Chique Boutique challenges staff and students at ENSS to reconsider a throw-away approach to fashion. It encourages reuse. After weeks of preparation, the Chique Boutique opened its doors on December 1, 2021. The Boutique has a permanent home in the school; students and staff can access the Boutique at any time and giveaway days take place every second Thursday. Support from community networks - local service clubs, friends and relatives of students and staff, two women who knit scarves, hats, and mitts, retired teachers, and local food banks - has been established and these networks ensure a steady supply of donated items. The Chique Boutique is managed by students for the benefit of staff, students, and the environment. Student store managers gather donations, wash and fold clothing, promote giveaway days, thank donors, clean the Boutique, and set up and take down giveaway days. From its grand opening on December 1, 2021, until March 2, 2023, 1964 people visited the Chique Boutique and they took home 2476 items. A total of 1645 kg were diverted from landfill. The data support the positive environmental impact of this initiative.