

Fabric of the Future

Insights - Fabric of the Future

The Clothing Library accomplished a lot in a short amount of time and **its success will be an ever evolving process**. This pilot is just the **beginning in realizing a cultural transformation**.

The Clothing Library has had success in **diverting local garments from landfills** and **empowering people to borrow not buy** by enabling residents to **extend the wear of** discarded **wares** and start their **behavior change journey**. **With its ongoing presence in communities**, the Clothing Library hopes to be pivotal in helping to **normalize the borrowing over buying behavior**.

With **more time and allocated resources**, the Clothing Library could provide value to each community it serves, **in partnership with public libraries and secondhand retail sponsors**, to help **meet shared sustainability and social well-being goals** through the commoning of clothing.

The secondhand shopping mall **ReTuna** **serves as an ideal model for municipality partnerships** that provide **community benefit and inspire others** to adopt similar initiatives. Following in ReTuna's footsteps, the Clothing Library has the potential to **expand horizontally** in cities across the country and beyond in partnership with public libraries to **realize a more sustainable future**. Through clothing, **the principles of degrowth can spread organically**.



The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.

Coretta Scott King

Summary of Findings

Below are some key findings that will guide the future success of the Clothing Library.

Changes in Fashion Consumption Behavior

- **Borrow Not Buy.** Based on community engagement and participation data, the Clothing Library pilot **demonstrated** that a **borrowing program can influence behavior from overconsumption to voluntary simplicity.**
- **Make It Easy.** Consumers are **driven by style even if they value sustainability.** So, having an alternative choice must also be an easy one. For the Clothing Library, that means providing clothing that **costs nothing**, is **conveniently located** and provides **curated collections.**
- **Workshops Wanted.** Although not well attended primarily due to schedule and short lead time to promote, **DIY (do it yourself) classes were requested often**, illustrating a desire for learning mending and upcycling skills.

Community Engagement and Impact

- **Community Embraced the Concept.** From residents to sponsors to the press, the Clothing Library pilot was welcomed with open arms. There is an **appetite for an alternative to overconsumption. People readily jumped on board** to join the pilot. We saw this in the number of **volunteers, sponsors, event attendees and the sheer amount of clothing and time** that was donated.
- **Additional Value Perceived.** Different stakeholders experienced more value than anticipated. **Public libraries** garnered more publicity than expected; **suppliers** felt the Clothing Library was a great way to extend the life of clothing locally; **borrowers saved** not only money but also **time** with curated collections; and **volunteers grew their communities** while helping to degrow overconsumption behaviors.

Operational Challenges

- **Impediments to Scale.** To realize societal change, the Clothing Library would **need to expand its influence and impact.** In order to scale (horizontally expand) through the existing public library networks, it **must overcome** some formidable challenges:
 - *Space* - Not all libraries have available floor space that can dedicated to a program like ours, let alone incorporate it as a permanent fixture
 - *Sustainable business model* - A partnership with the municipality would be ideal, as selling services or even fundraising is not permissible in some public libraries
 - *Staffing* - Initially run by the generosity of volunteers, co-founders that can commit their time and talent are essential to each Clothing Libraries' success
 - *Storage* - Identifying a storage partner to process and store the inventory is necessary
- **Co-founders Needed.** The Clothing Library was **not meant to be a solo venture** and co-founders are **essential to its birth and maturation** in each individual community. Without them, the initiative will lack the **proper care and nourishment** it needs. Before any other Clothing Libraries (or pilots) are slated to launch, at least 2 co-founders are required for each location.

Contribution to Degrowth Principles

- **Principles into Practice.** The Clothing Library introduced degrowth principles and translated them into tangible practices.
 - **Voluntary simplicity** and the concept of **sufficiency** (enoughness) through the borrow not buy program that promotes a sharing economy
 - **Commoning of clothing** by **redistributing** and recirculating donated clothing in the community for free
 - **Decentralization** by creating a **non profit cooperative** business model that can horizontally expand through a network of co-founded and collective entities
 - Promote **social wellbeing** by creating a gathering space that offers opportunities for residents to meet and **engage through volunteerism and social events**
 - **Ecological sustainability** by diverting locally discarded clothing from landfills and extending its wear and through education of sustainability practices
 - **Focus on local** not only by collecting and redistributing local donations but also by empowering local residents to co-founder and cooperatively run their Clothing Library



Photo Left: Dover Public Library Senior Staff | Right: Emmy-Nominated Casting Director (left) dressed for the red carpet by the Clothing Library

Future Action

In the near future, the Clothing Library plans to open its doors as ongoing community initiative. Below describes the actions the Clothing Library will take.

Raise Awareness

We plan to not only **keep our current community engaged** but also reach more people with a well thought out communications strategy that includes social media engagement, events and collaborations with partners and sponsors.

We are preparing to pitch the Clothing Library at **Public Library Conferences** locally and nationally, starting this Spring. This summer we hope to present at the **Degrowth Conference in Spain** (TBD).

Maintain the Momentum

This Spring, we intend to **launch a Makers + Menders monthly salon** to keep momentum going and foster community around repair, rewear, remake values.

We are developing **'How to Open a Clothing Library in Your Community' workshops** to engage future co-founders and enable others to open and operate Clothing Libraries in their town.

Identify Co-Founders for Next

The Clothing Library is meant to be operated **as a team of co-founders** both at the individual library level as well as the future collective of Clothing Libraries. Therefore, **co-founders need to be recruited and committed** to the work ahead. Recruitment of workshop attendees as well as posting on social media and word of mouth is the strategy to attract and onboard co-founders.

Improve the Initiative

This Summer, the plan is to **re-tool, re-test, and re-launch**.

We need to test **sustainable business models (and explore municipality partnerships)** with individual Clothing Libraries and **discover solutions to scalability challenges** by launching Clothing Library **clusters pilots**.

Explore Other Applications

While public libraries are the ideal partner, **high school libraries should be explored** as well given the **population largely consumes fast fashion** brands like Shein and Temu. While the Clothing Library model can be applied to high schools, this avenue **has yet to be tested** and would need further research in order to understand the benefits and challenges of such a partnership.

Seek Funding

Much research still needs to be done and **funding is essential to conduct further studies** (e.g. ideal population density, long-term impact) and **additional pilots** (for sustainable business models, clusters for example). The founder will target **federal and state funding** as well as **non profit and family foundations** for **grants**.

The End (*for now*) and Personal Note

I started out my **career in fashion**, went on to **study neuroscience** and then **founded the first fashion incubator** in the U.S. With this experience, I **scaled a local business** to franchise and later joined a team that designed the **first green shopping mall** in the U.S. focused on **creating public gathering spaces** reminiscent of European market squares.

My passion for understanding **human behavior and community connections** has been the common thread. I conceived of the Clothing Library several years ago but **shelved the idea because** I thought **fashion was too frivolous to focus on**. But this pilot has shown me otherwise. Thanks to the **Degrowth Masters**, and its guiding principles, **for giving me a reason to bring it life**.

References

Links to references in body of text.

Appendix

Links to supplementary material:

[Surveys](#)

[Interviews \(available upon request\)](#)

Our Partners

