



## 2021 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition

### *Case Western Reserve University Physical Resource Center*

1. Contact info (name, department, school, email, phone)

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2. Focus of Case study

Our program sought to reduce waste on campus as a free store which received secondhand student donations and allowed other students to shop for free.

3. Detailed description of campaign or effort:

Our free store, named the Physical Resource Center or PRC, was created as a space for students to shop sustainably and affordably. It was made possible through RECycle, an annual residence hall donation drive program started in 2012 that provides students with an alternative way to dispose of items they no longer need or want at the end of the school year without sending them directly to the landfill.

A major focus of the PRC was to keep it entirely volunteer run. No students are paid to help at the PRC and while some CWRU staff are involved, it is through smaller extensions of their job. To achieve this, a student steering committee was created consisting of two chairs, operations managers, personnel (volunteer) managers, inventory managers, food pantry managers, and PR reps. Various other students helped in less official capacities, and a large number of volunteers helped to run the store.

COVID-19 precautions limited the number of volunteers and students able to visit the PRC at once to 2 and 5 people, respectively. To accommodate these limits without inconveniencing students we created 30-minute time slots so that shopping could be reserved in advance.

In the fall we were open for two days each week for four hours each day and with the success of the first semester, we were able to open for a third day in the spring. Many students appreciated getting essentials such as towels and winter jackets, while others appreciated the sillier donated items such as a Hello Kitty toaster and Halloween costumes. With new donations coming in each week and through RECycle, we are incredibly excited for what our second year has in store from better sorting efforts to additional community outreach.

4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:

*List out in bullet format each of the steps involved in planning.*

- Organizing various pop-up item swaps using RECycle items and other donations/collections, most recently a "Stuff Swap" at the campus Sustainability House in Fall 2019

- Gathering materials through RECycle, our annual end-of-the-year dorm donation program during the student moveout
- Acquiring funds from student activities organization to support the PRC in the Spring of 2020
- Finding a donated space that would work for a pilot program
- Creating a steering committee of students to help focus the PRC's mission
- Beginning sorting efforts in the late Summer of 2020 which continued through the year as more donations were received
- Setting up the PRC with clothing hanging on racks and other miscellaneous objects on tables
- Opening two days a week for undergraduate students in Fall 2020
- Opening three days a week for undergraduate and graduate students in Spring 2021
- Creating a replacement steering committee to run the PRC for the next school year
- Orchestrating RECycle with CWRU staff to provide donations for the next year

#### 5. Resources and stakeholders involved

The PRC was able to access a student resource fund comprised of un-used, excess funds from student groups that were not able to use their money due to COVID. This funding was used to pay for utilities in a space donated temporarily by the Real Estate office at CWRU as well as some smaller purchases: PPE, clothing racks, and hangers.

In terms of a volunteer base, we had two types of volunteers: short term and long term. When the PRC was open for business, we always had one long term and one short term volunteer. The long-term volunteers were trained by our steering committee and were responsible for ensuring that things were running, and the short-term volunteers helped in smaller capacities while gaining experience to become long term volunteers.

We were fortunate to be able to work with many offices and organizations on campus to get the PRC running. The Office of Energy and Sustainability on campus helped us to acquire many tons of RECycle materials in 2020 and helped us connect with our university housing employees. The office of Real Estate helped us to acquire a donated temporary space to house the PRC and excess items in storage. Our Student Activities and Leadership office helped us to open during COVID. Our Center for Civic Engagement and Learning helped us find volunteers, even when many students could not live on campus. We also worked with some departments in a smaller capacity such as the LGBT center at CWRU; we created a day with separate store hours and trained volunteers for members of the LGBT center to visit together in efforts to promote inclusion and comfort while shopping. As well, the Undergraduate Student Government, USG, helped us to find interested students to support the effort and helped us to find beneficial connections across campus.

#### 6. Describe the Results of this campaign component

The PRC was received incredibly well by the CWRU community and it received a lot of positive attention. We received a few media shout-outs, which helped to spread the word including an [article in our campus-wide daily newsletter](#), the Daily, a [feature in the Office of Energy and Sustainability's newsletter](#), a [write-up from the Case Alumni Association](#), and [a mention in our student run newspaper](#), the Observer. We also received a few awards this year including two student leadership awards: a group community service award and Outstanding New Student Organization of the Year. We counted approximately 700 student visits to the PRC this school year, resulting in nearly 3000 items being taken (not including hundreds of smaller items such as pens and paperclips that likely would have been thrown away at another donation site). Student surveys completed following visits

to the PRC averaged a satisfaction rating of 4.83 on a scale of 1-5. Overall, it seems like a great first year to our program.

7. What would you do differently in the future?

While many students have been able to visit thus far, there are still many students who have never even heard of the PRC. In the future, we need to increase PR efforts to combat this. One possible idea would be to work with the heads of our Orientation Week to orchestrate a stop on the tour path that all new freshman complete. Another idea would be to have pop-up store hours around campus where we can display some clothing on racks for students to take, locating ourselves near where students are living or in class. Another important effort is the continued emphasis on sustainability. Many students still believe that they shouldn't be shopping at a free store if they can afford to pay for items, so by explaining that waste reduction is incredibly important and that shopping secondhand is beneficial to all, opinions can be changed.

8. What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?

I think that starting with a small "Stuff Swap" was a great way to gauge student interest. For this, some RECycle materials were diverted in 2019 and delivered to the Sustainability House on campus. There, an event was held where students could dig through donated goods and bring items that they no longer wanted. While the turnout was smaller, with only about 50 people, it paved the way for something much larger.

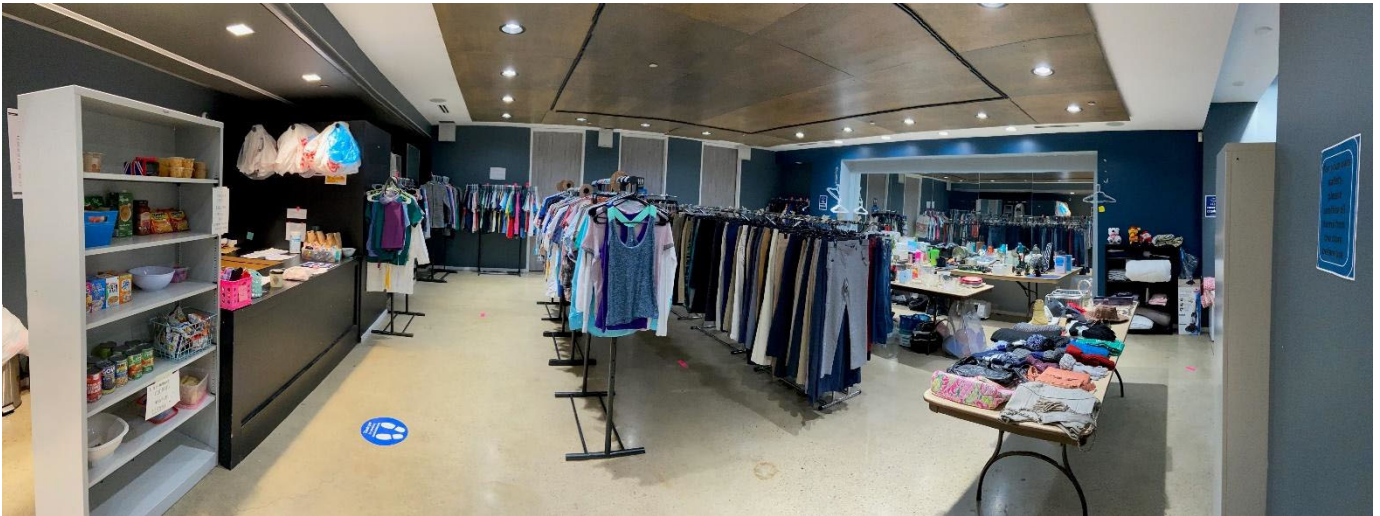
Other than that, connections are everything. We've worked with so many campus departments and organizations outside of the CWRU community and have benefitted from keeping in touch with them. One example is the Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry Men's Shelter. We found ourselves with more bedding, towels, and pillows than we knew what to do with, so we reached out to the shelter asking if they might need some. With that connection, we were able to donate dozens of pillowcases, blankets, towels, and more to people who were seeking houseware in their new apartments, helping both us and them. While reaching out across the Cleveland area felt like a bit of a stretch for a new organization, that connection helped us immensely and we plan on reaching out to them again in the future!

While thousands of items found new owners with the PRC, this accounted for only a fraction of the donated inventory. We hope that students, regardless of need, will be encouraged to use this resource through a continued emphasis on the benefits of secondhand shopping for waste reduction and resource conservation efforts, and we hope that any other interested colleges can continue that encouragement!

9. Photos and Graphics



*A photo of the sorting process in progress before the PRC opened*



*A photo of the PRC layout this Spring*



*Another angle of the PRC layout this spring*





cwru\_prc



*A photo from our Instagram showcasing two of the awards we received this Spring. Displayed in the photo are Ananya Hari, the future chair, and Olivia Paxson, the current chair.*