

CAMPUS NEWS

Benny's Closet Launches: First Pop-Up Thrift Event Draws Nearly 200 Bengals

A four-month donation drive culminated in a two-day, two-campus pop-up thrift event built on a simple rule: take what you want, pay what you can.

ISU Office of Sustainability | Pocatello, Idaho

Idaho State University's Office of Sustainability officially launched Benny's Closet this spring, a campus thrift initiative built around one idea: clothes, books, and household items that still have life left in them should stay in circulation instead of heading to a landfill or sitting unused in a closet.

The program's first pop-up doubled as its public launch. The event ran across two locations, the Wood River Room on April 21 and the Quad Lounge on April 22, both from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Nearly 200 students, faculty, and staff came through the doors across the two days to browse racks of clothing, boxes of books, shoes, stationery, decor, and kitchen items, all free to take or available for whatever a shopper felt they could pay.



Pallavi Pokharel, ISU Sustainability Manager, shows off donated pieces ahead of the Benny's Closet launch.

How Benny's Closet Works

The concept behind Benny's Closet, named for ISU's Bengal mascot, is a pay-what-you-can thrift model. Shoppers are welcome to take items for free, or leave a cash donation if they are able to and want to. There is no price tag system and no obligation. The format is designed to remove cost as a barrier to reuse, while still giving the campus community a way to support the program if they choose to.

That low-barrier design is intentional. Traditional donation bins and thrift stores can feel inaccessible to students working with a tight budget, or to anyone unsure whether an item is even still wanted. Benny's Closet is built to feel more like a community closet than a transaction, open to anyone who needs something and open to anyone who has something to give.

Months of Collecting, Culminating in a Launch

Donations for Benny's Closet were collected campuswide over roughly four months, starting in January 2026 and continuing through the week of the April launch. By the time the doors opened, the office had received an estimated 100 or more bags of donated goods, spanning clothing, shoes, books, stationery, home decor, and kitchen items.

That steady, months-long collection window let the Office of Sustainability build up enough inventory to stock two full pop-up locations at once, rather than a single small table. It also meant the April event functioned as both a first sale and a proof of concept for how a recurring version of the program might work. The donation collection, sorting, organizing and final display was only possible with the help of the Sustainability club and some other volunteers who passionately believe in the thrift culture.



Shoppers browse racks of donated clothing at the Quad Lounge pop-up.



Boxes of donated books drew steady traffic throughout both pop-up days.

Turnout and Estimated Impact

Across the two-day launch, an estimated 200 members of the campus community stopped by to shop, donate, or both. The Office of Sustainability has not yet weighed the specific items collected for this first event, so the figure below is a planning-level estimate rather than a measured result. Using an average of roughly 8 pounds per donated bag, a reasonable midpoint for a mix of clothing, books, kitchen items,

and decor, the office estimates the first Benny's Closet collection diverted at least 800 pounds of material from the landfill, and likely more given that donations topped 100 bags.

100+ Bags of donated goods collected, Jan. – Apr. 2026	~200 Attendees across the two-day launch	~800 lbs Estimated material diverted from the landfill*
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**Estimated at roughly 8 lbs per donated bag. Not yet based on a measured weight; the office plans to track actual weights at future events.*

What's Next for Benny's Closet

With the launch behind them, the Office of Sustainability sees Benny's Closet as a recurring fixture rather than a one-time event. The program sits alongside the office's other reuse efforts, including the Green Move-Out Program and routine e-waste collection, and feeds into a longer-term goal laid out in ISU's Sustainability Action Plan: a permanent, student-managed campus thrift space that keeps the circular economy going year-round.

“This first pop-up told us people want this,” said Pallavi Pokharel, Sustainability Manager for ISU's Office of Sustainability. “Nearly 200 people came through in two days, and we collected more than 100 bags of donations before we even opened the doors. Now the goal is to keep Benny's Closet going, grow it, and eventually give it a permanent home on campus.”

The office plans to hold future Benny's Closet pop-ups on a regular schedule and to begin tracking actual collection weights at each event, so future impact figures can move from estimates to measured results.



A donated t-shirt gets a once-over before going on the rack.