

# Catie's Closet



**FOUNDED:** 2011

**CURRENT ORGANIZATION BUDGET:** \$440,000

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Catie's Closet transforms unused spaces into free, in-school stores or "closets" where pre-K–12 students in need have immediate access to basic necessities and quality, up-to-date clothing. Access to clothing and supplies helps to increase students' self-esteem and sense of belonging.

According to research from Jossey-Bass Education and the Tauck Family Foundation, poverty is recognized as one of the primary reasons for low educational outcomes, accounting for an educational gap of four years by the time students reach 12<sup>th</sup> grade. When students don't have the most basic clothing and necessities, they lack confidence, feel like they don't belong, and are more likely to miss school and to drop out. In Massachusetts alone, over 5,700 students dropped out of high school in 2014, costing taxpayers \$1.7 billion over the course of their lives. The problem of schoolchildren living in poverty in Massachusetts is vast:

- Massachusetts has over 300,000 low-income students
- Low-income students comprise 70% or more of total students in 424 Massachusetts schools

## Investment Opportunity

Catie's Closet seeks an investment of \$1.25 million over the next two and a half years in order to build the organizational infrastructure to expand its services into other urban hubs across Massachusetts. With this investment, Catie's Closet will be poised to provide up to 100,000 low-income students with access to its services through in-school closets and social service providers. In addition, this investment will enable Catie's Closet to create a plan to replicate its model across the country through a national affiliate roll-out.

## Two-Year Goals

- Build closets in 25 schools in Merrimack Valley area to complete current distribution hub
- Create new distribution hub to serve Boston schools and lay groundwork for hubs in New Bedford/Fall River and Springfield/Holyoke areas
- Devise replication strategy for national affiliate plan to be rolled out across country

## Ways to Invest

### FINANCIAL

- \$200,000 opens a new distribution hub
- \$50,000 completes current distribution hub infrastructure and staffing needs
- \$5,000 opens a new in-school closet

### IN-KIND

- Financial/accounting services to work on productivity/budget specifics for hubs
- Technology system to track usage of closets
- Volunteers/organizations to run donation drives
- Legal services to work on the national affiliate model



## Leadership & Governance

Mickey Cockrell, executive director and co-founder, spent more than 30 years in retail management prior to co-founding Catie's Closet. Most recently, she served as Vice President for Kohl's. Mickey is an innovator and problem-solver, and serves as a board member for CTI (Community Teamwork, Inc.) and is also on the board of advisors for Indigo Magic.

### Board of Directors

- Anne-Marie Bisson, Board President and Founder, *Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union*
- Laura Bisson, *United Health Group*
- Lynne Baril, *Lowell General Hospital*
- Brian Chapman, *Mill City Environmental Corporation*
- Mark Dionne, *PriceWaterhouseCoopers*
- Lauren Adduci, *Enterprise Bank*



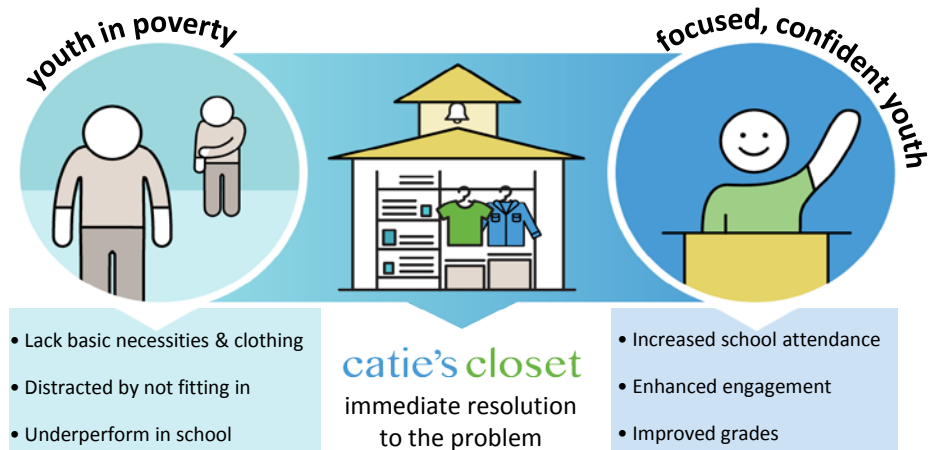
**In the last 6 weeks Nate has brought his math grades up from a D to a B+, enough to make him start to believe in his abilities again.**

**SHERRI**

**Teacher, Hudson Memorial School**



## THE CATIE'S CLOSET MODEL



## THE "CLOSET"

Catie's Closet currently operates 25 in-school "closets" in the Merrimack Valley/Lowell area. These closets have the look and feel of a retail apparel store, with on-trend clothing as well as new toiletries and other accessories, all neatly stacked on shelves and arranged on hangers. School social workers or other trusted faculty members guide students in need (as determined by qualifying for free or reduced school lunch) through the "closet." In a discreet and sensitive environment, students can "shop" for the clothing they want to wear and that will help them feel confident among their peers at school.

Catie's Closet sources clothing and other items from charitable drives held by community organizations. All donations are carefully sorted to ensure that clothing is of contemporary fashion and in good condition, and then organized by gender, size, and type. Catie's Closet houses its donations in a large distribution center in Dracut, MA, and relies on its more than 200 volunteers to sort donated items. Items from the distribution center are then taken to each school to replenish the closet. Each school closet is staffed by a volunteer who assesses inventory shortages and ensures the closet is clean and organized.

Catie's Closet has pioneered this unique and effective method of distribution. The in-school closets give students in need immediate access to clothing and basic necessities, with minimal interruption in their school day, and with no social service agency, paperwork, or lengthy process involved. It is simple: a student needs adequate clothing and a trusted school official can help him/her get it, right in the school, right away.





Some students arrive in our halls and classrooms solely because of Catie’s Closet. Students have come to me first thing in the morning, right off the street, asking to visit Catie’s Closet. They return looking fresh and visibly changed in their posture. I am certain that they may not have arrived at all if Catie’s Closet was not available to them.

ADMINISTRATOR

Lowell High School



### Awards

- CELEBRATION OF EXCELLENCE: NON-PROFIT OF THE YEAR AWARD
- ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR ALL: WINNER OF #1 NONPROFIT
- FORTUNE MAGAZINE’S TERM SHEET AWARD: WINNER
- MASS CHALLENGE: DIAMOND WINNER
- TUGG: WINNER OF NEW NON-PROFIT CATEGORY

### Key Supporters

- ABBOTT AND DOROTHY STEVENS FOUNDATION
- DIGITAL CREDIT UNION
- EBAY
- FOREST FOUNDATION
- JEANNE D’ARC CREDIT UNION
- JOHN HENRY FOUNDATION
- THEODORE EDSON PARKER FOUNDATION

## TARGET MARKET AND GROWTH

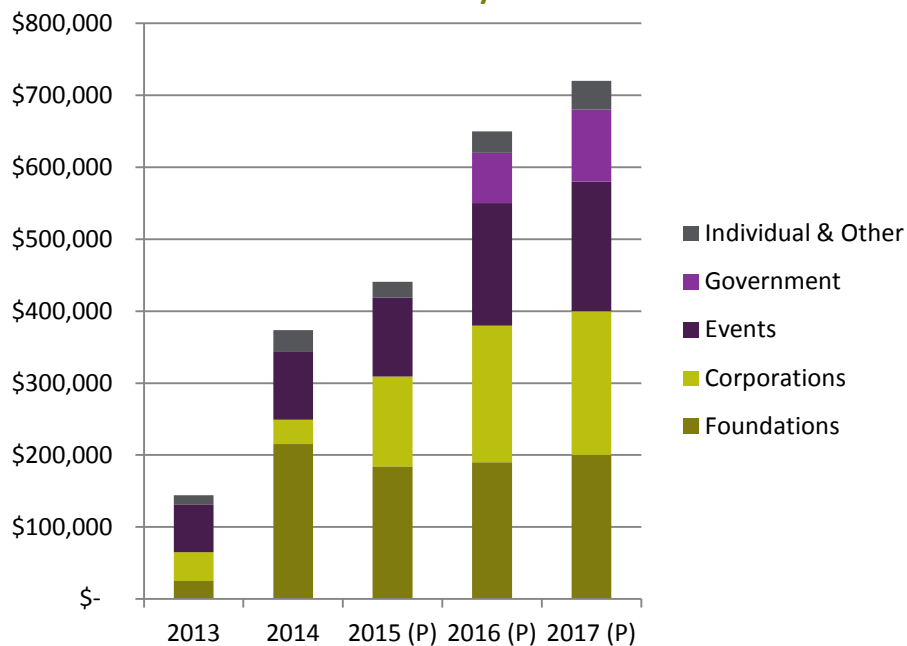
Catie’s Closet targets schools and communities with high poverty. By working in schools where low-income students comprise 70% or more of total students, Catie’s Closet has the opportunity to reach many students in need. If more students gain increased confidence, attend school more regularly, and are less distracted in class, the entire school environment can improve for everyone, not just those helped by Catie’s Closet.

Catie’s Closet believes this positive change can happen throughout whole communities. For this reason, it has developed a hub and spoke system, which involves a central distribution center servicing up to 50 schools in a community. Its current Merrimack Valley hub services the 25 existing in-school closets and plans to service 10 more new closets in the region by the end of 2015. The hub distribution model is easily replicable and can meet the needs of many other communities. Catie’s Closet plans to open hubs to serve the Boston, New Bedford/Fall River, and Springfield/Holyoke areas. Beyond Massachusetts, over 20 million students nationwide live in low-income households. Already multiple school districts across seven states have requested Catie’s Closet’s services. Over the next two and a half years Catie’s Closet will devise a strategy to roll out a national affiliate program that would enable communities across the country to replicate its model.

## FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Catie’s Closet has a proven track record of leveraging free space in schools, the work of hundreds of community volunteers, and nearly \$900,000 worth of donated items in order to help thousands of students in need. Catie’s Closet has also been the recipient of numerous awards and grants, has a solid base of donors, and holds successful fundraising events. However, in order to scale its operations to serve many more students in need, Catie’s Closet will require a significant multi-year investment.

Revenue by Source



## INSPIRATION: Catie Bisson

Catie Bisson, daughter of founder Anne Marie Bisson, passed away in 2010 at the age of 20. Born with a rare connective tissue disorder, Catie faced a lifetime of challenges, but no obstacle would keep her from gaining her education. While attending Lowell High School, Catie realized her peers were not as fortunate as she, as many did not have adequate clothing and basic necessities. Catie empathized with her peers and championed them in her own quiet way by being a true friend, inviting them over for meals and sharing what she had.

Catie believed that attaining a good education was the key to being a productive member of society, and gives one both the ability and the responsibility to give back to the community. When she passed away, Catie was on the Dean's List at Bridgewater State College, pursuing a degree in writing. Catie's Closet is now carrying out Catie's convictions by helping students stay in school and attain a good education so they too can help their communities thrive.



## PROGRAM PERFORMANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH

Below is a summary of the key measures that Catie's Closet will track over the next two and a half years to demonstrate progress, capture lessons learned, and make course corrections as needed.

	FY 2015 (P)	FY 2016 (P)	FY 2017 (P)
<b>PROGRAM PERFORMANCE</b>			
Number of low-income students with access to an in-school closet	16,000	26,500	36,000
Number of schools with a closet	35	50	65
Amount of in-kind donations (clothing and necessities)	\$1,050,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,950,000
Hub growth	Complete current hub infrastructure	Initiate Boston hub	Grow Boston hub
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH/CAPACITY-BUILDING</b>			
Number of Catie's Closet staff	Add 2 FTEs	Add 3 FTEs for new hub	n/a
Board members	Add 1 with legal expertise	n/a	n/a
National affiliate plan	Begin development	Complete plan	Begin implementation
Impact performance tracking	Design technology for tracking	Track at one school	Track at multiple schools
Total revenues	\$440,000	\$650,000	\$720,000

## SOCIAL IMPACT

As a start-up organization, Catie's Closet lacks a robust system to track the impact of its services on students. However, in partnership with Lowell School District, Catie's Closet has begun the process of implementing technology to collect data on users of its services. This will include creating an electronic survey for school social workers to measure Catie's Closet's impact on individual students, such as decreased absenteeism and improved grades. Once implemented as a pilot program in Lowell, Catie's Closet can introduce this tracking technology in other schools it serves. Below is a list of impact measures that Catie's Closet is already tracking or plans to track.

INDICATOR	2014
Number of low-income students with access to an in-school closet	12,500
Number of items dispensed since 2011	168,000
On a selected day at Lowell High School, percent of all students that accessed and/or wore clothing from Catie's Closet	30%
<b>The following two social impact indicators are examples of what will be tracked with Lowell School District partnership:</b>	
Percent decrease in absenteeism for students using Catie's Closet	Tracked by 2017
Percent increase in grades for students using Catie's Closet	Tracked by 2017

