

ABSTRACT

*The Second International Conference on CultureWear and Diaspora Museum at The National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka,
Japan*

Cultural Education through Clothing: Strengthening the Fabric of Friendships: The Girls' Friendly Society Explores Culture Connections through Fashions.

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The Girls' Friendly Society in the United States in America is an international, not-for-profit organization for girls and young women, affiliated with the Episcopal Church in the United States of America. The Girls' Friendly Society hereafter referred to as (GFS) provides a support system aimed at developing the whole person through a program of worship, service to others, study and recreation, all designed to help empower girls and young women to grow mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. GFS is an international organization with branches in 22 countries. Our philosophy is to educate, and share our cultural differences across the globe. Thus, the launching of our CultureWear Exploration Project.

Cultural education through clothing GFS strengthen friendships by redesigning gently used clothing to explore cultures. GFS started collaborating with East Rock Institute (ERI), Dr. Hesung Chun Koh and the Korean Students at Yale University (KASY) for a "CultureWear Workshop" developed in the fall 2008. "Bridging Culture through the Korean Fashion Show" from Sungshin Women's University (Seoul, Korea) and a Workshop in CultureWear were introduced to the GFS program in New Haven, Connecticut USA. GFS began building on the foundation laid by the Korean Fashion Show by Sungshin Women's University and the CultureWear workshop. A program was developed for its members 5 years to 18 years old to explore and learn about difference cultures and to express cultural traditions and beliefs through fashion. The program focused on three cultures, Korea, Ghana and Ireland.

The first component was a cultural outreach workshop introduced to the GFS delegations at the GFS 19th World Council in Seoul, South Korea in which 22 countries participated. In cooperation with Sungshin Women's University and East Rock Institute, GFS USA introduced the concept of CultureWear and how it was used to encourage cultural exchange with the youth by using fashions to demonstrate the uniqueness of using fabrics, colors and design to emphasis each culture. The second component was a Hands-on exploration of Korean traditions, beliefs, fabrics, colors and styles to create fashion with a cultural flair. The third component was our own version of "Project Runway", exploring the cultures of Korea, Ghana, and Ireland to learn about their traditions and beliefs, and how they are reflected in their traditional dress. We then took "American" outfits and redesign them to express each country's culture. Once the collection was completed, it was shared with the wider community.

The CultureWear Project was a creative way to involve youth to remake gently used clothing with ethnic flair and modern design to help broaden their knowledge, experiences beyond their own environment. Our purpose was to educate and inspire youth and adults in the community.

GFS USA will further exchange their project with GFS branches across the United States and our World Council sisters at the next GFS 20th World Council meeting in Ireland in the hopes of broadening the youth and adults knowledge of different cultures around the world and how it can be done through fashion. It is our vision that more dialogue will come about with our GFS world members and projects such as ours will begin to enlighten the girls and adults how using gently used clothes can bridge the gap in better understanding cultures and each other. The outcome of Seeking Unity in Diversity: CultureWear conference will be an important piece to assist us in broadening our project.