

# “To be able to offer the best of something can touch people and also restore their dignity”

Fashion stalwart Andie Halas reveals how a simple idea to pay forward excess clothing that was destined for landfill has not only changed lives, it's helped the environment, too

It started with towels. My background is in the fashion industry [the Halas family founded Australian swimwear label Seafolly in 1975]. No matter how well you plan, there's always clothing or product that's left over. It always bothered me. What do you do with the excess? Yes, you have factory outlets, you go on sale, you go on *more* sale... But at the end of the day you're left with perfectly good product that eventually goes straight into landfill.

One day [at Seafolly] we had all of these extra towels and I decided to drive them out to the local Asylum Seeker Centre. It was there that I saw the lack of good clothing at the agency. They were offering employment, legal and medical services, plus food and clothing, but the clothing they had was just boxes of old items donated by well-meaning people.

I thought, this is crazy – I know we can do better than this. So I organised some new clothes and had this small market day at a local charity. I tried to

tailor [the clothing] for who was there, in terms of gender, age, size and even in terms of religious purposes. There was quite a wide choice.

And I realised then just how important choice is to dignity. That very first market day, a woman said to me, “For the first time, I feel that I'm not in fancy dress.” When you're going through a difficult time – which none of us are immune to; COVID has certainly shown us that – to be able to offer the best of something and not a hand-me-down is enormous to that sense of dignity. That's what you need when times are tough. It just touches people on so many levels, and I didn't realise that until I saw it firsthand.

That's how Thread Together came to exist in 2012. We take new excess clothing from designers and manufacturers and distribute it via charities and social service agencies to vulnerable people – and keep it out of landfill. So I suppose the organisation is helping two issues: it's good for people who need assistance

and it's good for sustainability. Textiles contribute hugely to landfill.

All of our funding is from private or corporate donors, so we don't get any government funding. The growth has been very organic since 2012. I never dreamt it would get to where it has. Well, I suppose I did dream about it, but I wasn't sure I was going to be able to make it work.

With more than 13 per cent of people living below the poverty line in Australia – and that figure was taken before COVID – we have to give back to society in some way. Take the example of a woman fleeing a domestic violence situation, which we

see at Thread Together all too often. She packs up her five kids and she literally leaves with nothing but the clothes on her back and the clothes on her kids' backs. She's able to get to a women's shelter.

She has nothing. She has no bras, no underwear, no clothes for the kids. Nothing. She has to start again. And she's been through a horrific time. To be able to offer this small thing in the form of clothing, in a funny way it's saying to her, “You will be OK. People do care. You're not forgotten.” ★

Andie Halas is the founder of Thread Together; [threadtogether.org](http://threadtogether.org).

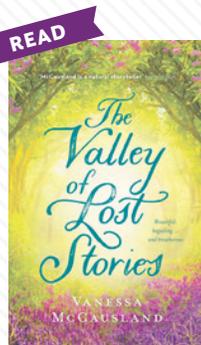


★  
STELLAR  
PICKS

Things to try  
this week



Rock out to a revival of **RENT** in a new production that celebrates 25 years of the hit Broadway musical, at the Sydney Opera House from December 27 to January 31; [sydneyoperahouse.com](http://sydneyoperahouse.com).



**THE VALLEY OF LOST STORIES**  
by Vanessa McCausland,  
\$32.99, [harpercollins.com.au](http://harpercollins.com.au)

“A mix of romance and mystery, *The Valley of Lost Stories* is about four friends who are keeping secrets from one another – and of course things go awry”

ADRIENNE TAM,  
SENIOR FEATURES WRITER



Have a very **LANGHAM** Christmas with a special afternoon tea, lunch or dinner over the festive period. There will be pink Christmas tree displays, a miniature gingerbread village, and gingerbread decorating for the kids. Find out more at [langhamhotels.com](http://langhamhotels.com).