

Fashion

'It sounds like a little thing but it's powerful': the new Sydney boutique where everything is free

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Thread Together was founded in 2012 by Andie Halas, pictured, a former fashion industry insider with a marketing background. Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian

While the fashion industry dispatches unsold garments to landfill or the incinerator, there are many people doing it tough who need new clothes

The new Thread Together boutique on Sydney's Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, looks much like any other in these parts. The decor is chic black and white. There's a vase of tropical flowers on the counter. The racks boast smart blazers, shirts both dress and casual, jeans and sneakers. This place covers all options for the stylish gent.

Womenswear runs from the office-appropriate (tailoring) to flouncy cotton dresses for looking fresh when the temperatures climb. Stencilled on one wall is an Instagrammable quote from the American fashion designer Marc Jacobs. It reads: "Clothes mean nothing until someone lives in them."



Inside the Thread Together clothing hub on Oxford Street, Darlinghurst. Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian

Like I said, this place is much like any other boutique, bar one important difference - everything is free. Even the rent - landlords Toga Group and AsheMorgan have provided the space gratis.

"We don't call it a boutique," says Kat Brown, a Thread Together clothing hub manager. "We call the stores clothing hubs, and we have them in Canberra and Adelaide as well as Sydney. We reach clients in rural areas through our mobile wardrobe vans."



▲ Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian



Brown has taken part in Thread Together styling sessions, supported by the online fashion brand The Iconic and held for clients of Lou's Place - a women's refuge in Potts Point, Sydney. "It sounds like a little thing: trying on clothes, getting their hair and makeup done, but it's powerful. Choose a new wardrobe, get to feel beautiful and be looked after again. And maybe this was something they used to do. Before. You see how it matters to these women. I always say to them, 'It's not going to last. This is just now.'"

Brown knows. She's been there herself as a survivor of a violent situation. "We had 15 minutes to get out of there ... Our life changed dramatically. Finding myself in a women's refuge with almost nothing, then in temporary housing, I know what that's like. You're in pain, you're angry, you're dealing with so much." Brown, who has a personal styling background, got a new wardrobe through Thread Together. She helped out as a volunteer before landing her current role.

Halas says that in Thread Up's early days, she was thinking about "dignity and human connection" more than charity or fighting fashion waste. "But it soon became apparent by the sheer volume of what was being donated that waste was a massive issue. Remember, this was eight years ago - think how much more knowledge we have today about fashion's environmental impacts."

According to the [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#), 73% of clothing ends up landfilled or incinerated at the end of its life. While the pre-consumer picture is a bit shadowy (most brands aren't too keen on revealing how much they destroy) [some studies](#) suggest as much as one-third of the clothing produced is never sold.



▲ The Thread Together clothing hub on Oxford Street. Photograph: The Guardian



"I hope one day we don't have excess clothing, and we have to find another way to provide this service," Halas says. "I don't see that happening any time soon though." For now, they will keep doing what they're doing. "It is about change - it can change a person's day."



▲ Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian



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