

Life as told by you

"I'VE HELPED
GIVE THOUSANDS
OF FOSTER
TEENS COOL,
NEW OUTFITS."

Allyson, 20, opened
a boutique when she
was 14 where teens in
foster care could shop
for free. Now, she's about
to open five more!





I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT BUSINESS... BUT I DECIDED TO GIVE IT A SHOT!



At my school, everyone is required to do a big community project in Year 12. Some people volunteer at the local hospital. Others help primary school kids with homework or coach them in sports. I started brainstorming ideas when I was 14, three years early. When I came up with an idea to hold a clothing drive for kids in foster care, my parents asked me why I had to wait until Year 12 to get started. I didn't know anything about business or have any connections – I was only 14! But I decided to give it a shot anyway.

My goal was to open a clothing boutique where girls in foster care could shop for free.

There was a vacant shop that used to be a deli and the owners said I could have the event there, free of charge. I called it Threads for Teens. Heaps of kids at my high school donated clothes they had outgrown. The opening day of the store, 13 girls got a new outfit. I felt so proud. These girls were used to getting hand-me-downs. "Shopping" at the boutique made them feel special.

The shop owners let me continue to use their space for free for about two years. During that time, I raised enough money to move to a larger space – and then a couple years later, an even larger one! We kept outgrowing our spaces because we were fortunate to have so many clothing donations. **Even big brands like American Eagle Outfitters and Urban Outfitters started donating clothes.**

The organisation has grown as well and I have a whole team of volunteers. It was important for me to get that in place before I went across the country to university. Now that I'm not nearby, I can't oversee the store, but I oversee all the donations and partnerships. The store is run by two high school volunteers, who pass it onto two new volunteers each year. **Right now, we are in the midst of opening five new boutique locations, so I'm crazy busy with that.**

Two summers ago, the volunteers and I took a big Threads For Teens roadtrip with

a big fancy tour bus that we converted into a mobile store, hitting all 50 states in the US. In one of the cities I gave a speech, telling the girls how I started the organisation and sharing my story.

Last summer, we went back to the same city and a teen came up to me and told me that my story inspired her to work really hard and be the first person in her family to go to university. That moment really meant a lot to me.

Now, I'm at uni studying business and my goal is to have Threads For Teens stores all around the country. I'm also about to go on the next roadtrip! This time, in addition to giving thousands of girls new outfits, we are holding workshops in each city where local businesspeople share their success stories. The biggest thing this whole experience has taught me is that **you don't need to know exactly how to do something to get started.**

All you need is a faint idea of what you want to do and how you're going to do it. You can spend hours on the Internet researching how to do something, but all that gives you is a pile of research. The best research and the best way to get started is to just... get started!

AS TOLD TO EMILY LAURENCE