

Teen Entrepreneur
Lindsay Giambattista of



Like many teen girls, 18-year-old Lindsay Giambattista loves clothes. Several years ago, when the home-schooled student needed an idea for a community service project, she found a unique way to combine fashion and philanthropy by founding a non-profit called Taylor's Closet.

Styled With Heart and Soul

"I thought of girls who are my age who have that same love [for clothes], but have no way to get new clothes," Lindsay explains.

After praying for a way to make a positive, long-lasting impact, a light bulb went on in Lindsay's head and she decided to create a program to give away some of her clothes to teen girls in foster care. Giambattista was 14 at the time, and her parents were hesitant about letting her take on such a big project.

But, she was determined to help other teens. "I typed up a letter and sent it to 25 people, mainly friends and family, asking them to give me their nice, unwanted clothes," she says. "Within about six or seven weeks, I had 70 huge black trash bags in my bedroom. Everybody was telling their friends."

In August of 2005, Giambattista and her parents met with the president of a local foster care agency in South Florida, and their first outreach was that December. They set up a mini "shop" on a yacht and invited about 30 girls to pick from the clothes that had been donated.

"I didn't really know how bad it was until that night," recalls Giambattista. "It was very overwhelming for me, because I've never seen girls go through that much. They told me 'This girl hasn't smiled in six months'

Taylor's Closet

by Susan Johnston

and 'This girl hasn't laughed in twelve months.' But, a t-shirt from Hollister made them feel amazing. It's a t-shirt, but it gave them hope. My only motive was to give girls really cute clothes."

Birth of a Boutique

After that first event proved a success, the foster care agency offered a space in their building to set up a store on an on-going basis. Giambattista chose the name "Taylor's Closet" in memory of her twin sister who died at birth, and the organization officially became a non-profit in 2007.

Giambattista, her parents and her 16-year-old brother Justin all help with running the non-profit out of their home, which has been both fun and challenging. "We had to learn how to balance [running a business] and being kind to one another," she explains.

In addition to helping girls in South Florida, Giambattista has also taken clothing donations to the Ukraine, Honduras and several places around the United States. "We set up a temporary Taylor's Closet, and we transform a room," she says. "We go into an office building and instead of painting it, we take fabric and hang our fixtures [to make it feel like a boutique]. In Kiev, Ukraine, we reached out to orphans and city kids. In Honduras, we reached out to women and children that were abandoned. They have the same issues as teens here."

Taylor's Closet is now in the process of renovating a new 4,000 square foot building donated by a local church. "It looks like Anthropologie," she says excitedly. "It has a lot of cool architecture.

We get to have a huge warehouse to keep our clothes in. Right now our store is a 12 x 12 foot room [at the foster care agency], but the new building will have a café, art studio and dressing room area. We get to move our offices in there, too. We've gotten everything donated, and it's top-notch."

Lessons Learned

Giambattista hopes to study fashion design someday, but right now she's keeping busy running Taylor's Closet and working on her own fashion line.

"I'm more creative than business-minded," she says. "[Running Taylor's Closet has] helped me with time management and responsibility. In the beginning, my parents helped me, but recently it transitioned and it's like I'm starting to take over everything. During the day, I'm going to business meetings and emailing people. At night time, I'm a regular teenager."

When asked what advice she would give to other teens who want to make a difference in their communities, Giambattista says, "There's really nothing special about the process of starting Taylor's Closet. It was just an idea [that we nurtured with] support and prayer. If I look back now, I'm amazed at how much it's grown."

In reflecting on her success over the last several years, Giambattista remembers how "I went to my parents and they laughed at me. I would say to [teens], never doubt your dreams. There's nothing that is impossible if you really want it."

