

It's fashion with a heart and a conscience



CAMERON BURNELL

FASHION CONSCIENCE - Li Ling Ng models one of her Braille tees.

By ROB OLSEN

WELLINGTON WOMAN Li Ling Ng is a businesswoman with a serious social conscience.

The 24-year-old accountant has come up with a novel way of raising money for charities through the fashion industry. She produces stylised t-shirts and sells them, with a portion of the sales going to pre-selected charities.

She is already working with the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind and has produced 200 t-shirts in two colours with an "I love NZ" logo. The "love" is in the form of a Braille heart. The t-shirts cost \$60 to buy and if all goes well Ms Ng hopes to donate between \$500 and \$1000 to the foundation after tax and a bit of profit.

She is working on a similar project for Wellington City Mission and has some other groups in mind too.

Her city mission initiative sees her working with disadvantaged and damaged kids whom she has involved in designing the product.

The mission's fundraising and publicity manager James Austin is full of praise for Ms Ng and her husband's efforts. "They have been supporting us for several years and they are very generous donors."

He says the kids involved in the mission for youth have had pretty rough lives and are often "frightened and suspicious".

"They are going to see some of their design work sold in shops and that's good for their morale ... to hell with the money ... that's great."

Nevertheless, he says any funds raised from the t-shirts sales will help with the mission's \$2.5 million a year budget.

Ms Ng admits she has a bit of a social conscience. Even the t-shirts she uses are sourced from a company in the United States that does not use sweatshop labour. However, she eventually wants to source the t-shirts from within New Zealand.

"I'm trying to be a bit of a Robin Hood," says Ms Ng of her venture, appropriately named Hinitiative or "the element of hope". She says it's "social conscience shopping for the fashion conscious".

It is a great way of getting people to donate to charity.

"There is millions of dollars going through the fashion industry ... some people are not too keen about giving cash to street appeals and this is a different way of raising funds. It enables people to spend on themselves with a portion of that money going to the needy."

And if you're wondering why someone would want to go to so much trouble to raise money for charities, Ms Ng says she is simply "passionate about fashion and helping people out".

The idea came out of a brain-storming session. "I thought, 'what can I do to help

people out'.

"There is definitely a commercial component in there too, but there's also a commitment to the community and helping people out."

And the feedback from people has been "pretty good", so far, says Ms Ng. "Some say they'd never give to a charity but will buy a t-shirt. They like the idea."

◆ Li Ling's t-shirts can be sourced through her website: www.thehinitiative.co.nz

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