

Store making a difference around the world

YWCA Boutique proceeds go toward international development

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JUSTIN SKINNER

For such a small store, the YWCA Toronto International Boutique has made plenty of big contributions around the world.



photo by Mike Pochwat

YWCA International Boutique volunteers Marcia McKay, left, and Gillian Roulston mind the store. All the profits from sales at the boutique go directly to international development projects which are supported by the YWCA.

The store recently moved to its current Deer Park location at 81 St. Clair Ave. E. to make way for the One Bloor condos being built at its former location at Yonge and Bloor streets.

While on the surface, the international boutique appears to be a simple retail location, carrying gifts and crafts from around the world as well as fair trade coffee and tea, the dollars the store brings in contribute to more than the bottom line.

"The boutique's goal is to raise funds for community developments around the world," said store manager Anne Wood. "They're generally women-led projects that benefit whole communities."

Some of the boutique's many noteworthy projects include rebuilding a women's shelter in Honduras that burned down, buying a power generator for a hostel in Zimbabwe and developing a program to help children stay off the streets in Sao Paulo, Brazil. In 2007, the boutique helped establish a women-run poultry farm to improve employment and nutritional conditions in Bangladesh.

The projects are chosen by the YWCA's International Cooperation Committee.

"They make decisions based not just on need but also on the funds available," Wood said. "Sometimes budget's a factor because so many of the things that need to be done in developing countries are huge projects, but we'd always love to be able to do more."

Priority is also given to projects that are sustainable, so that once they are up and running, they will be able to benefit communities over the long term.

Because proceeds go toward international development, the international boutique relies heavily on volunteer help instead of paid staff. More than 40 women give their time at the boutique, many of whom use their time there to gain new skills.

"We've had a number of new Canadians join us to get Canadian work experience," Wood said.

The boutique also endeavours to sell fair trade goods as much as possible, to ensure workers were not exploited in order to make the ceramics, jewelry and other items on sale.

Some funds from the store also go toward Amnesty International, while the boutique is home to a year-round UNICEF outlet.

"It's great to be able to do something that can help make a difference in people's lives around the world," Wood said.

The store is in Suite 2213 on the first floor of the mini-mall at 81 St. Clair Ave. E. For more information, or to volunteer, call 416-924-4762.