



Dressing for the **greater good**

By RENATA GALVÃO

Ten well-heeled women dress a room with clothes rails and display tables, stylishly arranging a mass of designer clothes, shoes and accessories. Later, they will mingle with other fashionable women, exchanging brand-name clothing items and sprucing up their wardrobes with new purchases. Sure, they'll have

non-profit organisation also sells clothes at markets and has three permanent clothing stores around Cape Town. Their objective is simple: apply the old charity clothes shop concept to high-end fashion to raise funds for projects working with children. *The Big Issue* chatted to founder Abigél Sheridan to find out why Chic Mamas do care about the

a bit more feminine. I didn't have too much experience in fashion but saw there was potential for something like this.

“ Chic Mamas started in my home. At first it was just myself and four close friends. Because every woman always desires new clothes and everyone has at least a piece of clothing they can donate, we decided a



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a good time, but the twice-monthly get-together isn't only for fun or fashion. It's all about making a profit...for children.

The women — most of them mothers — are volunteers for Chic Mamas Do Care, which collects top-end fashion items and organises bi-monthly exchange parties. The

children of South Africa and their future.

I used to volunteer for the Niall Mellon Township Trust and helped build houses for more than three years. But after having my third child I wanted to do something on my own schedule, and something

fashion exchange party was a good and fun idea to start with. We raised more than R200 000 in our first year. It took a year to do all the paperwork to become an NGO and our registration was finalised at the end of 2010.

We now have more than 25 'mamas'. The volunteer team has grown into a great

mix of dynamic and powerful women.

Why 'Chic Mamas Do Care'? Just because we're chic and stylish doesn't mean we don't care. Our mission is to promote the culture of giving and caring at all levels. We believe we can make change happen, one step at a time.

Some are new, some are used. At the same time, there is the swapping of clothes in a party atmosphere — that is our Swap4Charity. How it works is that you can bring in good quality items you no longer wear and we give you a token worth a nominal amount for each item. Tokens act as cash and

we create funds for education.

We also organise a Charity Fashion Sale every month at the Tokai Library where we sell all our upmarket items at bargain prices. And we now have three upmarket stores in Plumstead, Bergvliet and Hout Bay, where we organise half-price sales regularly. Chic Mamas also has a stall at the Blue Bird Garage Market in Muizenberg every Friday evening.

Getting good quality clothing donations is our major challenge. We have lots of wonderful supporters but sometimes we feel like a rubbish bin. People dump all sorts of things on us from smelly underwear to...actually, you don't want to know. But it is very discouraging.

To really help Chic Mamas you just have to donate nice items you no longer wear, or buy our brand-name and quality clothes for half the price you would ordinarily pay. If you donate you contribute, if you shop you contribute.

We have designers and boutiques on board now as well, so we do have brand-new items on our rails from time to time.

We strongly believe in the importance of young kids being in a safe, inspirational and stimulating environment. To create a healthy society we have to start early, at the roots, so they can blossom and grow into open-minded individuals. For that reason we've chosen to support projects that work with kids.

We support two key projects — early childhood development programme Little2Much and The Butterfly Art Project — which are both reaching many kids. We also contribute funds to building new classrooms and libraries for public schools. We always make sure all projects we support are credible and transparent and that every penny donated goes towards benefiting the children.

I consider building a fantastic team of volunteers as a great achievement. Our volunteers are very dedicated, passionate and supportive. I would like to take this opportunity to say well done to all mamas who make our mission a success.

Our greatest achievement as a team is changing lives. Looking at smiling kiddies and hearing uplifting stories as our fundraising reaches more and more children gives us great satisfaction and fulfilment. Raising more than R500 000 last year alone gave us confirmation our efforts are worthwhile. **TBI**

For more information, visit: www.chicmamas-docare.org



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We have created a chic, fun and ethical way of fundraising to support education and educational projects in the underprivileged areas of this beautiful country.

Twice a month we organise an Exclusive Fashion Exchange Party where we sell donated 'no-longer-wanted' garments from boutique stores and designer labels.

you can use them towards your new purchases. Tokens are like a little contribution for your clothing.

The idea is that while having fun you can help others. Every participant is part of creating social change. Our vision is simple but creates multi-level sustainability: by re-using and recycling unwanted goods



One chic mama, Abigél Sheridan