

# Weaving a network at Thread Den

As a budding fashion entrepreneur, Kylie Shepherd knows what it's like for beginners to be locked out of the loop of a very guarded industry. For her, liberation was one of the things that spurred her to become part of a new sewing initiative in North Melbourne.

"It's liberating to learn a new skill. It's very exciting to watch people say 'I get this. I can do it. I didn't think I could!'"

Thread Den, which opened in November above All the King's Men on Errol Street, offers sewing machines for hire by the hour, as well as fabric, equipment and free staff assistance, in a supportive learning environment. It also runs a series of classes for people at various sewing levels.

Kylie, 26, is one in a group of four young sewing enthusiasts who set up the centre last year. She met Melissa Kramer, 27, through the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) program at RMIT. Almost straightaway the pair saw a gap in the market for sewing circles and drop-in hire, which had already become popular overseas.

The group, which also includes Tennille Rohde and Luke Rohde, endeavours to provide a relaxed environment for learning and development. The sewing 'lounge' maintains a friendly setting where people can face each other while they sew, facilitating open discussion.

"People feel comfortable to ask questions, confident to begin," says Kylie. "It's all about the community."

The store, which aims at exchanging



Kylie Shepherd (rear) shows Thread Den's vintage and designer clothes

ideas and knowledge between beginners and experts as well as assisting young designers, also sells a collection of local designer and vintage clothing. The label of Lara Cameron, whom the *News* profiled in the previous edition, is one that Thread Den stocks.

"We are constantly looking to expand our range of local designer clothing. The more that is out there, the more people will buy."

To encourage local designers, they hope to set up forums where industry professionals talk openly about the tricks of the trade. Thread Den has also successfully set up school and holiday programs and groups for mothers interested in learning the basics of children's clothing.

Situated upstairs from the gentlemen's haircutters via Webbs Lane, it adds to an eclectic group of designers who call North Melbourne home. Bridging the divide between city-cool and suburban kinship, Kylie explains that the locale provides the "best space" for entrepreneurs and local initiatives.

Sewing machines cost \$7 an hour to hire and overlockers and cutting tables are also available. Thread Den is open every day except Monday.

*Georgia Wilkins*

Photos: Jim Weatherill



Sewing classes cater for all levels from beginners to experts

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