

BREAKING NEWS

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Fashion industry joins with not-for-profit organisation Avenue to help those with disabilities get jobs

By disability affairs reporter [Nas Campanella](#) and the Specialist Reporting Team's Celina Edmonds
Posted 10h ago, updated 2h ago



Stephanie Trinh-Tran (right) processes clothing orders with Avenue team members. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

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Stephanie Trinh-Tran has faced more obstacles than most in following her dream to work in the fashion industry.

The 21-year-old, who lives with autism, was knocked back from fashion courses until she came to not-for-profit disability organisation Avenue, where she works in an order fulfilment team for a clothing label.

"I love the clothes, the prints, the styles and the colours," she said.

Stephanie's mother Julie thought her daughter might never break into the industry.

Teachers were reluctant to take her on because of the support she required to understand tasks, but Julie was confident in her daughter's ability.

Key points:

- Avenue provides a space for people with disabilities to do work in teams, while being supported
- Founder Laura O'Reilly says the enterprise is trying to redefine work in Australia
- Ms O'Reilly established the not-for-profit after seeing her brother constantly denied work



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Stephanie Trinh-Tran just wanted a chance, after she was knocked back from fashion courses and work experience. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

"Whenever she had free time she would sit and draw and I would look at her and think, 'I need to help her [get work in the industry].'" she said.

Eventually Stephanie completed a one-year TAFE course and while looking for work experience, her mother found Avenue and its partner, fashion company Yevu.

Avenue was started by Sydney woman Laura O'Reilly and her family after the experience of her late brother Shane, who lived with cerebral palsy and "needed support with all aspects of his daily life".

"He was funny, he lit up every room, he had an amazing memory and lots of computer skills," Ms O'Reilly said.

"He saw himself as leaving school and, like his older siblings, going out and working."



Avenue CEO Laura O'Reilly established the not-for-profit organisation because her brother was missing out on opportunities. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

The family was shocked to find there were very few employment options for Shane when he finished his education, so they designed their own.

Avenue now has four co-working spaces across Sydney where people with disability can choose the work they do — and get paid to do it.

"Avenue serves ... the cohort for whom mainstream work is not accessible — the cohort who traditionally society says can't work at all," Ms O'Reilly said.

"We say 'rubbish, everybody can work' and Avenue is really trying to redefine work in a way that includes everybody."

Avenue receives funding through a participant's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) package.

Each participant chooses a team to work with according to their skills and interests, including minding pets, letterbox drops for real estate agents or order distribution for Yevu.

Avenue provides support where it's needed for the more than 300 people on its books.

"They work in their teams and then whatever income is earned from that team, they retain and keep," Ms O'Reilly said.

Social enterprises working together

A social enterprise, Yevu's clothing is made in Ghana by local women and distributed by the Avenue team, which includes Stephanie and 34 other people with disability.

Yevu's founder, Australian woman Anna Robertson said the brand provided "sustainable, dignified and fair" work for women in Ghana and the partnership with Avenue was a natural fit.

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Yevu founder Anna Robertson said the partnership made sense because it fit with the ethics of her business. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

"Avenue provides employment opportunities to everyone, they don't discriminate," Ms Robertson said.

She said the partnership also made good business sense.

"The team packs and dispatches up to 40 orders a day, which is incredible," Ms Robertson said.

"I love seeing the team here, they're all working so hard to provide exceptional customer service and they know the products so well."

'I feel part of something'

Sophie Grivas, who lives with Down syndrome, has found a sense of happiness since joining the Avenue team.



Sophie, Amrita and Stephanie keep whatever fees they earn from the fashion company. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

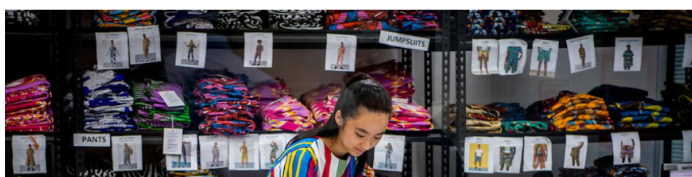
The 34-year-old hopes to move out on her own and said the role had given her more confidence.

"I like being around my friends, including my best friends and building up computer skills," Ms Grivas said.

"I'm learning about budgeting, saving and going shopping."

Her colleague Amrita Ramjas, 32, who lives with Down syndrome and an intellectual disability, agreed.

"I really like the team because I feel included," Ms Ramjas said. "I feel a part of something."





Stephanie Trinh-Tran hopes the opportunities she has had at Yevu will lead to more chances to further her career. (ABC News: Brendan Esposito)

Recently named team member of the month for her hard work, Stephanie said she hoped the skills she had learnt would lead to further employment in the fashion industry.

"Online or in the industry," she said. "I'm into clothes ... they're so beautiful and I like to draw ideas and create stuff."

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