

Kinship creates cause

By Felicia A. Petro/Senior Reporter

Allied News | Posted: Saturday, February 22, 2014 5:37 am

Sewing in their Grove City College dorm has developed a kinship for two friends who are trying to raise \$5,000 on Indiegogo to help end poverty - with only one day left on the campaign.

Whether it be through Indiegogo or direct donations, Scott Inderbitzen and Chloe Smiley want to launch their non-profit, e-commerce clothing company by March to provide micro loans to businesses in developing nations.

They call it Kin Threads.

"The 'kin' part is trying to build a community around the clothing line (or threads)," Smiley said.

"We make the clothes and send the money back," Inderbitzen said. "It's exciting stuff."

The startup funds will help the student build their website and inventory to sell "frockets," a slang term to describe shirts with custom-designed front pockets. The word originally came from "frat-pocket," referring to stereotypical fraternity brothers (or frattys) who wear them.

Frockets have evolved and are now "up and coming," Inderbitzen said. "A lot of frocket Ts are coming out and we thought we'd hop on the trend."

Kin Threads has a unique twist on the frocket: The pocket will be made with a custom design that complements the country of the business owner it will be targeting for a micro-loan.

A QR code label will also be placed on the sleeve or hem of the shirt for scanning by smart phones, which will bring up the Kin Threads website.

There buyers can read "the story of the entrepreneur receiving help," Smiley added. "We're trying to make the connection between who made the shirt and who is wearing it."



ali kinthreads students021.jpg

Chloe Smiley and Scott Inderbitzen encourage donors for help in reaching their \$5,000 campaign goal on Indiegogo to help launch their non-profit organization, Kin Threads. The Grove City College friends are making "frockets," which are shirts with customized front pockets to sell and use the funds for micro loans to business owners in developing nations.

Right now, the production team is Smiley and Inderbitzen "in the dorm lobby," he said.

"We sit and get the ironing board out and cut fabric. It's real grass roots. It's really fun, a good time," he added. "Right now, we have about 15 to 20 shirts. Those are all pretty much sold already."

Inderbitzen had the original idea to join clothing with charity after taking a semester off from college two years ago and going to an Indian music concert.

"The music itself was totally wild, but what struck me was their clothing. It was authentic and really cool clothing. It'd never seen anything like that," he said. "It was a really cultural experience."

Inderbitzen began to wonder how using such "a trace" of those unique designs in clothing could help impoverished people across the globe, he said.

He began to pursue his idea after winning a competition at GCC that was essentially about ideas. Inderbitzen and Smiley are both majoring in entrepreneurship there.

After winning the competition, Inderbitzen was given an application for Venture Labs, which is a program associated with GCC that has experienced entrepreneurs who mentor new entrepreneurs in accelerating their ideas or incubating them - i.e. watching them grow.

"Basically, people pitch their ideas to this lab, and if they like you, they help people figure out if it's a viable business idea," Inderbitzen said.

That was in the fall of 2012 and Inderbitzen realized through Venture Labs that his original idea of selling clothing here made by individuals from the developing nations to help fund their enterprises - was too costly.

The idea that birthed Kin Threads came last fall when he and Smiley went to a first conference by Kiva U in San Fransisco. Kiva U has microfinancing experience for developing people.

"That was the inspiration. That's when we considered getting this off the ground and making it happen," Smiley said.

"Chloe realized we could do what Kiva does in the microfinance for the benevolent portion ... and we can produce the shirts and keep the costs lower," Inderbitzen said. "Micro loans are a great way to eliminate poverty."

Kin Threads received its non-profit status in November - and displays of their venture have been put up at GCC's student union and the downtown Grove City coffee shop, Beans on Broad.

"We've received a lot of positive feedback from students, alumni and faculty. We're very encouraged by their support," Smiley said. "We're really excited about it and people getting behind the idea. We're really happy with the progress."

Kin Threads has connected with GCC alumni doing micro loans in Malawi and Zimbabwe, Smiley

added.

The Indiegogo campaign began January, and "Right now we're up to \$1,150," she said. "It's a flexible funding campaign, so we'll be able to use the money even if we don't complete the goal."

After the Indiegogo campaign ends, Kin Threads will continue accepting donations, Smiley noted.

Kin Threads is on Facebook, where there are links for its website and Indiegogo campaign. Smiley and Inderbitzen are giving away sweatshirts, T-shirts and beanie hats based on giving by donors.

The main clothing line will consist of a winter collection with beanies and sweaters - and possibly hoodies down the road. The spring collection includes V-necks, crew-necks and male tank tops called "bro-tanks," Inderbitzen said. Pricing will range from \$15 to \$20 for T-shirts and around \$30 for sweatshirts.

Smiley, 20, of Michigan, said she chose GCC for its unique entrepreneurship major. She is now a junior.

Upon graduating in May, 21-year-old Inderbitzen of Harrisburg will be looking for a sales-related job in "something innovative," he said. In the long term he'd like to operate Kin Threads full time, he added, "but we'll keep the project alive."

Inderbitzen believes entrepreneurship is a way "to serve others through commerce and make it easy for others to serve others. I feel convicted to pursue that gift," he said. "I think God calls us to be responsible with our finances."

Donate to Kin Threads by Sunday at www.indiegogo.com/projects/kin-threads or visit Kin Threads on Facebook at www.facebook.com/KinThreads to find links to the fundraiser and its website, kinthreads.weebly.com.

To learn more about the work of Kiva U, visit www.kiva.org

Published Feb. 15, 2014, in Allied News. Pick up a copy at 201 A Erie St., Grove City.