

Clothing exchange opens Wednesday

COEUR d'ALENE -- Thanks to the sensitivity and drive of a 14-year-old girl, some of the area's neediest kids will have a chance to own some clothing they can feel good about.

The North Idaho Clothing Exchange (NICE), a nonprofit created by Lake City High School freshman Emily Carroll, offers kids who can't afford to go to the mall -- foster kids, children living with relatives, homeless kids -- a place to "shop" for trendy, new, or gently used clothing free of charge.

NICE's grand opening is Wednesday at Project Safe Place, 201 E. Harrison Ave.

"I found out two or three years ago that one of my friends was in foster care," Carroll said.

She was upset to learn that foster children are usually pulled from their homes and forced to leave everything behind, including their clothing.

And with limited funding, Carroll said, there isn't any money for the kind of clothing kids like to wear.

"I thought, 'How is that fair that I get to have all these new clothes and they don't?'" Carroll said. "Today, if you don't look right, people are mean."

She took matters into her own hands and sent letters to the corporate offices of all the major clothing retailers that sell to teens.

Aeropostale responded from its headquarters in Manhattan that it would donate some samples.

"I thought we were going to get this little box with a couple of things," Carroll said. "They gave us these huge boxes full of boys' and girls' clothes."

And they kept sending them.

Carroll said she has received about 16 boxes from the company filled with jeans, shirts, winter coats, backpacks, sneakers, socks and more.

"We're very excited for her," said Carroll's mom, Karlene Behringer. "It's really nice to see someone this age willing to do something to help other kids."

Brandi Smitherman, director of Project Safe Place, said clothing is one of the biggest concerns for the kids who use their services.

"We rely on the community's generosity, and sometimes they want to know what we need," Smitherman said. "When we ask the kids, most often they ask for clothes."

The NICE distribution center at Project Safe Place is located in the basement of St. Vincent de Paul's H.E.L.P. center on Harrison Avenue.

Shopping hours are from 3-6 p.m. the first and third Wednesdays of each month.

There is no charge for the clothing, but shoppers must be referred by a social worker, case worker or caretaker.

Referral forms are available online at the NICE Web site, www.northidahoclothingexchange.com.

For information or to make a donation, call 640-3183.