

The contents of
a typical bag from
Wardrobe Foundation.



Wardrobe Foundation

Eloise Grant (W15) has created a positive outcome from a challenging year

DECIDING to pursue a career in the travel industry at the start of a global health pandemic was not my wisest move. However, being furloughed for six months gave me a precious gift of time. I left Canford in 2015, having spent most of my time there on the river (or sometimes in the river!), coxing the 1st VIII. It is no exaggeration to say that an education at Canford is a fantastic opportunity. My time there instilled the motivation to grasp every opportunity that comes my way.

Following Canford, I completed a degree in Human Geography and Environment at the University of York and went on to study an MSc at the University of Stirling in Strategic Sustainable Business. While completing my Master's degree, I carried out a consultancy project for a social enterprise based in Scotland called Babes in the Wood. The aim of Babes in the Wood is to provide families in need with essential items for their children. I analysed the organisation and produced a comprehensive understanding of its social and environmental impact, presenting a detailed plan of recommendations to support fundraising for the organisation.

Throughout my time at Canford I was fascinated with different cultures and places. A love of geography, strongly instilled by the wonderful Mrs Hoey, influenced my chosen career path in the travel industry. I absolutely love to travel, and working in the travel

industry should have created so many opportunities to visit new places – if it wasn't for international borders effectively closing in 2020. However, with more time available, I thought about my time at Babes in the Wood and the positive impact of the organisation. Was there a similar opportunity to create a social enterprise to help women in need of clothing?

I run Wardrobe Foundation, which was established in May 2020, from a converted barn in Cranborne with the support of my wonderful Mum, Lisa. It is a social enterprise providing clothing gift bags to women in need of clothing support. We have recognised two parallels. On the one hand, there are women who have clothes in their wardrobe which don't fit or which they no longer wear or have simply fallen out of love with. Then on the other hand, there are women living in our community who are in desperate need of clothing support.

By early 2021, we had provided over 100 women with a substantial gift bag full of essential clothing items – 2000+ items of clothing to women in need. It is a bittersweet moment delivering so many clothing gift bags, as society should not require our services. The impacts of the pandemic have unfortunately further increased the need for Wardrobe Foundation.

Wardrobe Foundation aims to instil confidence, dignity and empowerment with each clothing gift bag. We want to move away from the idea of clothing

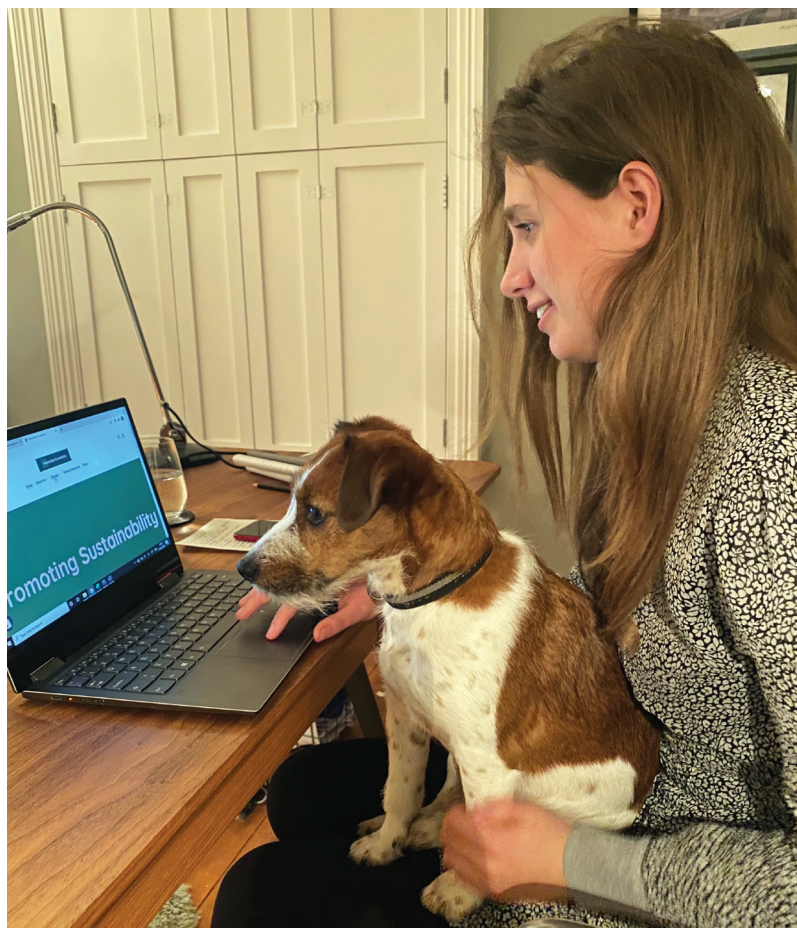


arriving with the women who need it in a black bag, holding a random selection of clothing that is mismatched, stained and often unsuitable. Instead, we gather information (size, age, height, style preference), which enables us to put together a bespoke clothing gift bag of 'foundation' pieces.

We rarely meet the recipient of the clothing gift bags we produce. Instead, to ensure individuals truly in need of clothing receive support, we work very closely with established charities, local community groups and organisations across Dorset. For example, food bank statistics are something we follow closely. It is likely that if someone is struggling to afford food, they will be struggling to afford clothing, too. Food banks have become a particular lifeline for many during the pandemic; demand has increased by over 60% in the past year, and in fact, there are now more food banks in the UK than McDonald's outlets. We are working particularly closely with the Wimborne food bank to identify women in need of clothing.

As well as a strong social mission, we also have a strong environmental aim, and we make use of everything we receive through our doors. For example, even though some clothes may be worn beyond repair or stained, we cleverly upcycle these items to produce the actual gift bag that holds the clothing. This provides a unique way of delivering clothing, and we have to match the colours of the bag to the clothes inside or to the recipient's favourite colour – we just can't help ourselves! We are very lucky to have a brilliant team of talented volunteers who have all been helping to sew the gift bags at home. Current Canford pupil Ellie Paget has been helping from home in the holidays – Ellie is a real whizz on a sewing machine!

At Wardrobe Foundation we want to keep clothes in circulation for longer. Ellen MacArthur's work surrounding the circular economy, an economic theory presenting a system that eliminates waste by keeping resources in circulation, has been an inspiration to our



work. MacArthur's theory sits heavily in the ethos of Wardrobe Foundation: the clothes we gift have already been produced yet are no longer needed by their original owners, so with some TLC we bring these clothes back to a high standard. We think of ourselves as the middle women, redistributing clothes women no longer need and passing them to women who do need them. We also endeavour to minimise the environmental footprint of our operations – from eco-friendly washing detergent to recycled or recyclable stationary.

We have successfully encouraged women to have a 'wardrobe detox' during the pandemic, running Covid-safe collection days to put clothes to good use immediately. We are also developing strategic partnerships with retailers to use their unsold or slightly imperfect stock. Wardrobe Foundation helps to deliver fashion brands' social and environmental responsibilities and we see a number of new relationships developing as awareness of Wardrobe Foundation grows.

Establishing Wardrobe Foundation has been the most fascinating and eye-opening experience, from creating a website and establishing a social media presence, through building relationships with charities and local community groups, to managing donation collection and delivery days. Personally, I have built upon the foundations of my education, drawn on past opportunities and put everything into Wardrobe Foundation. I am now committed to ensuring Wardrobe Foundation permanently fills a gap in society to help women in need of clothing. As fashion designer Anna Klein once said, 'Clothes aren't going to change the world, the women who wear them will.'

wardrobefoundation.co.uk

Far left: A butterfly bag sewn by Canford pupil Ellie Paget

Above: With my loyal PA, Mole