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PRESS RELEASE

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Torrance, CA — After a heartfelt conversation between Torrance High School junior Cara Kim and principal Karim Girgis, a transformative idea took root. What if the support offered to students in need didn't feel like charity, but instead felt like choice, dignity, and belonging?

That question sparked the creation of *Tartar Threads*— Torrance High School's first "grab what you need" boutique-style resource center. This student-led initiative offers free clothing, school supplies, and essentials to students in need, all within a welcoming environment that replicates a fashion-forward boutique.

What's the goal? To remove the shame and stigma that often accompany traditional donation centers.

"This all started when Principal Girgis told me a story about how the Torrance Council of Parent Teacher Association (TCPTA) made gift baskets every Christmas for students from lower-income backgrounds, but most of them never got picked up," Cara explained. "It didn't make sense...these were free, thoughtful gifts. Why would someone walk away from something that could help them?"

Driven by curiosity, Cara began researching the psychology behind it. What she found struck her deeply.

Her findings pointed to something called *Self-Discrepancy Theory*. Coined by E. Tory Higgins, it's a framework in psychology that shows how the gap between who we are and who we want or believe we ought to be creates emotional responses like shame, guilt, and anxiety.

"When students feel like accepting help means they're failing to meet their goals of independence or self-sufficiency, they can avoid it, even if it hurts them," Cara said. "I wanted to change the way help is presented so students don't feel like they're giving something up by asking for support."

With the help of counselors, school staff, and local businesses, Cara transformed an unused classroom at Torrance High School into a sleek, private, and thoughtfully-designed boutique. Each item includes a tag, just like in a real store, but instead of a price, the tags feature affirming quotes. A mannequin, donated through the school's fashion department, gets a new, trendy outfit every month to display recent donations. These outfits are also featured on *Tartar Threads*' growing social media pages to create buzz and excitement.

So far, over 200 clothing items have been collected, sorted, and displayed. The initiative is staffed by counselors and trained student volunteers. Students can discreetly request a visit by scanning a QR code posted around campus, which leads them to a private Google Form. A counselor then issues a call slip during class to bring the student to the boutique, eliminating the awkwardness of being seen walking into a public donation center.

"I want my peers to feel like they're shopping, not struggling," Cara said.

This isn't Cara's first step into advocacy; it's part of a much deeper mission. She's also the founder of Shelter-Up Solutions, a nonprofit she started in honor of her uncle, who experienced homelessness and was later cut off by her extended family.

"He was the first relative I ever met," Cara recalled. "And then one day, he was just...gone. My family had cut him off."

His disappearance left a lasting mark. "It made me realize how quickly people can be forgotten," she said. "I never wanted anyone at my school to feel that same kind of abandonment."

Tartar Threads is the newest branch of that mission, and it's already impacting the Torrance High Tartars. "Students don't need to explain what they took or why. That's the beauty of this space; it's theirs," Cara said.

Looking ahead, Cara is actively looking to work with local businesses to secure long-term partnerships. Ultimately, she hopes the model can be replicated in other schools across Torrance Unified School District and beyond.

"This project taught me that real change doesn't have to start big," she says. "It just has to start."

To support Tartar Threads, schedule a donation drop-off, or arrange media coverage, contact Cara Kim at [\[Carakim2008@gmail.com\]](mailto:Carakim2008@gmail.com).