

**Steph Woollard**  
**26 years old**  
**Ivanhoe, Vic**

Steph Woollard is the founder of Seven Women, a fair trade wholesale and retail business that sells handmade felt and knitted items as part of a grassroots development project that empowers women through income generation.

During a trip to Nepal, Steph met seven women with disabilities who were operating out of a tin shed and experiencing harsh discrimination. Having witnessed the stark contrast between her quality of life and that of many women living in the impoverished country, she felt she had to do something to make a difference. Together with the seven women Steph created a women's skills training centre, where women learn skills that empower them economically.

Fast forward to today and the initial seven women have now taken on managerial roles at the centre, which now employs over 100 women, and are keen to pass on their skills to others.

Ever since her first trip to Nepal, Steph has been inspired to give back to a country that she feels has given her so much. Steph believes in empowering others to break the cycle of poverty they live in; she has a passion for effective development work and loves public speaking engagements where she can talk about how best to effect change by moving away from the charity model, which can encourage dependency, and embrace methods which empower. "Empowerment is not expensive," she says.

Steph hopes to effect positive change in many communities in the future by applying the same principles of empowerment that she used with Seven Women. In the meantime, she is establishing a wholesale business to create more demand for the Nepalese women's project.

Steph's passion and determination to make a difference was recognised recently when she was selected to take part in the Foundation for Young Australians' 2011 Young Social Pioneers program. The 12-month training and development program supports, educates and equips young social change makers with the tools they need to successfully manage their project or organisation.

"I'm so happy to have been selected as a 2011 Young Social Pioneer and I'm confident I will gain the knowledge and skills I need to make Seven Women a long-term success," she said.

"Learning from the other Young Social Pioneers and industry experts will help me become a better leader and will hopefully help me to expand Seven Women."

