

# TOTAL package

Hope in a Suitcase provides material comforts—and so much more—to foster children in L.A.

By Amanda Eberstein  
Photography by Sam Grant

LOS ANGELES is home to one of the largest foster care systems in the country, and many of the children who require aid are taken from their family or caretakers during emergency situations with little more than the clothing on their backs. “We started with a mini-band of seven parents, galvanized by the image of children in our own city entering the foster system carrying their personal belongings in a plastic trash bag,” says **Marsha Austen**, a former lawyer who co-founded Hope in a Suitcase ([hopeinasuitcase.org](http://hopeinasuitcase.org)) in 2016. The idea of the organization is simple but profound: By being provided with a suitcase filled with new clothing, sneakers, toiletries and comfort items such as blankets and stuffed animals—along with a handwritten note—these children are shown that they are important and that their belongings deserve the same respect and dignity as they do, no matter where they go.

Over the last few years, the organization has gained momentum, attracting high-profile supporters such as philanthropists Anthony and Jeanne Pritzker and actress Jordana Brewster, and helping more than 11,000 young people along the way. It has also developed the popular Shopping Days events for tweens and

teens—often who have never been able to choose their own clothing or ask for basic hygiene items or undergarments—so that they can make their own decisions and express their personal sense of style.

Now, Hope in a Suitcase is joining forces with Make Good, Inc.—a like-minded nonprofit that provides books and other items for at-risk L.A. youth—to open The Emporium: Foster

Resource & Literary Center, a multipurpose HQ located in Culver City. “There are so many things that are complex and that divide us these days,” Austen explains. “One thing we all know and can agree upon is that children in foster care are going through a very difficult time through [no] fault of their own. They should know that we care about them.”

