

Skank to swank

Tearaway's aid mission



Wendy Caccetta

BY her own admission Lydia Taylor was a teenage tearaway who was caught up in a culture of street violence, drinking and drugs.

But with the help of some powerful patrons, the 20-year-old is turning her life around with plans to launch a street-clothing line and work as a religious chaplain in prisons and world hot spots.

Mining entrepreneur Andrew Forrest is paying for her to attend Bible college, fashion stalwart Liz Davenport is guiding her on the catwalk and a major bank is helping her to get her clothing label off the ground.

Ms Taylor, who has spent four years dealing with her problems at the Esther Foundation recovery program, said she planned to call her line of street clothing, which will include tees and hoodies, Roots Go Down.

Westpac bank has donated \$2500 to get the brand off the ground. She said she would donate any profits to building an orphanage in gang-troubled El Salvador and also to religious groups in Perth.

Ms Taylor said the name of her label had personal meaning to her. "I had an unhealthy root system - racism,



Fashion plates: Lydia Taylor with Liz Davenport.

was a skank - I can say that now.

"I had a few boyfriends who were involved in crimes and gangs. I started to drink every night. If I had continued on, I probably would have gone on to speed and other drugs."

Ms Taylor, whose father is indigenous, said she wanted to work with other indigenous cultures around the world, such as those in El Salvador, and eventually work with Aboriginal people in Australia.

anger, bitterness - all of that was my root system," she said.

"The result was a tree that had no life or roots. Over the last four years I've allowed myself to grow into a healthy tree."

Ms Taylor said she met Mr Forrest at an Esther Foundation open day. He is sponsoring her studies at the Harvest West Bible College.

She also met Mrs Davenport through the foundation and the fashion designer has used her as a model in some of her campaign images.

Ms Taylor said though her mother always provided her with a good home, she took a wrong turn in her early teens and became involved in Perth's street culture.

"I dealt with violence and I had a strong violent streak in me," she said. "I had no self-esteem and I