

By my side at the till is Pearl Mackie, best known for being companion to Peter Capaldi's Time Lord in *Doctor Who*. After I lean over the counter to serve a lovely gentleman who buys £125 worth of support services, Mackie turns to me and compliments the speed of my transaction. I ask what convinced her to give up her time to serve in the shop.

"I think the work Choose Love do is absolutely essential," she states simply. "It's just so important. And I think a lot of similar projects don't necessarily work with partner organisations that are on the ground in the same way."

Choose Love has been able to reach over 4.8 million people across 41 countries through their 476 partners. They have provided 1.2 million items of clothing to refugees, 3.2 million nappies, 594,000 shelter items, and funded 156,000 legal cases, leading to family reunifications.

"This is such a crucial way of getting the direct aid to refugees," Mackie says. "Rather than filtering through lots of different systems. And this store shows that there can be joy in even the bleakest situations."

And joy is the word to sum up the atmosphere. The pop-up shop will remain open until Christmas Eve, and Choose Love's partnership manager Sabira informs me that as well as selling much needed support for refugees, the store will also be hosting live recordings of podcasts, DJ workshops, poetry readings, acoustic gigs, stand-up comedy events and film screenings.

After coming off my till shift, I buy a T-shirt for myself and bump into O'Porter again.

"Christmas is about giving," she says, "and giving to people who really, really, really need help is the best kind of giving."

The Choose Love store is located at 57 Carnaby Street, London, and open every day from 10am-7pm, except Thursdays (10am-8pm) and Sundays (12pm-6pm) until Christmas Eve. If you can't get to London, all of their items are also available to buy online via choose.love

Pearl Mackie and The Big Issue's Sophia Alexandra Hall serve a customer at the Choose Love store on Carnaby Street



ACTIVISM

Protest fashion is this year's hottest gift



Words: Honey-blue Stevens

This has been a year of strikes and marches, and Christmas brings another opportunity to be an activist as people give the gift of protest. These makers are making it happen.

LAME

Ethan Crawford is a professional doodler, and director of the popular clothing brand LAME. His 'Eat the Rich' T-shirt, with a fat banker on the front is a protest against those with vast wealth. Crawford says: "That tee was inspired by the 'wafer thin mint' scene from *Monty Python's The Meaning Of Life*, where the guy in the dinner jacket eats so much he is blown up like a balloon. People certainly align with the frustration at the stagnation of our country. And though I am not seriously advocating cannibalism I do absolutely love the conversations sparked across the political spectrum by wearing this T-shirt."

lame.store

Bean Hive

You know a shop is special when it garners a one-star review on Google, from someone "shocked and appalled" by the "completely detestable and pointless" political slogans in the window. Owner of Bean Hive by the Sea in Falmouth used parts of the review to create

products, including a T-shirt that says: "I bought some tat at Falmouth's cave of horrors."

"Our infamous one-star review criticising us for our political stance has become one of the best advertising tools we've ever had," said owner Em Parker.

The shop contains everything from pro-trans rights tees to queer-positive badges and lucky dip bags, with profits going to the shop's chosen charity each month.

Parker said: "The shop has always reflected my politics. We have increasingly become more overtly confrontational with our messages and products over time, but we've always made a conscious effort to stock things from queer people, people of colour, female, non-binary, trans and makers and designers from marginalised backgrounds – which is political itself. By selling their things we are giving a clear message: their voice needs to be heard."

the-bean-hive.co.uk

Topple and Burn

Libby Freeman, owner of Topple and Burn, makes political jewellery, clothing and posters with slogans such as: Smash The Patriarchy, Refugees Welcome, Feminism and They/Them. It began when Freeman made a necklace to raise money for Calais Action in 2017.

"I expected to raise about £200, but even with my awful makeshift website it went viral and sold hundreds in the first week," she said. "I started making different designs about other causes I was passionate about, and it evolved into a business very quickly."

"We get a lot of messages from customers telling us that wearing our jewellery empowers them and how it starts a lot of important discussions. When you have passion and rage about things that really matter to you, the self-expression that comes with being able to wear how you're feeling is a release."

toppleandburn.com

For more gift ideas that bring with them a social echo, check out the range on bigissueshop.com

BIG ISSUE

Breakthrough

Honey-blue Stevens is a member of The Big Issue's Breakthrough programme