

MEDIA RELEASE

From Doomadgee to PNG: inspirational project connects women across borders

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A SIMPLE idea for washable sanitary pads is changing lives in remote Papua New Guinea by helping female students stay in school, and even more young women will soon benefit thanks to a group of hardworking Doomadgee women who have embraced the Moon Sick Care Bag initiative.

The concept was introduced to the community by Yolonde Entsch, the Women's Coordinator working with community and economic development organisation My Pathway, and Moon Sick Care Bag founder Gay Muller.

"When the ladies involved in the My Pathway activities learned about the difficulties faced by girls and women living in extremely disadvantaged areas of Papua New Guinea, they were so moved they wanted to do something to help," Mrs Entsch explains.

"Led by the Women's Activity Supervisor, Veronica Walden, the team have worked tirelessly to make 330 care bags that will be sent to PNG at the end of July. These bags contain the basic necessities that will keep older girls in school, so they don't miss a week of school every month and fall behind in their education."

Each bag holds four washable sanitary pads, two pairs of underwear, a face washer, a handmade bar of soap, a small bag for soiled pads, a laminated card depicting a monthly cycle and a photo of one of the women who has worked on the bags - all supplied in a beautiful and colourful carry bag, also handmade.

Today (Thursday), a group of 20 women were publicly acknowledged for their efforts when My Pathway CEO Paul Synnott visited Doomadgee and presented each of the women with a Certificate of Recognition.

Mr Synnott said the Moon Sick Care Bag Activity had demonstrated the impact that small and remote communities could create.

"The ladies in Doomadgee have proven that local community projects can have a global impact. Their capacity for compassion, and dedication to the project has been inspiring and I'm looking forward to seeing their relationship with women in PNG evolve," he said.

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“There’s been unwavering commitment to complete the care bags in time to meet the scheduled shipment. I was honoured to be able to personally thank the women for their hard work today.”

Mrs Entsch said it was an amazing accomplishment for the women to produce the bags in a short time period and the activity was now leading to further micro-business opportunities.

“One lady had never used an overlocker before and she has sewn more than 1320 pads on her own – that’s worth celebrating,” she said. “It’s also about creating a business model - the idea that you can actually make products to be sold on.

“The women have now been contracted to make 200 bags at \$20 each (total \$4000) for Getaway Trekking to on-sell to their trekkers, so they can give them out to girls in school along the Kokoda Track, and the next project the ladies will embark on is making curtains to sell to the community.”

At the event, Mr Synnott also announced that two of the women, Veronica Walden and Anthea Chong, will travel to one of the 13 Treaty Villages in the Western Province of PNG, this October, to personally hand out the bags to older girls and pregnant women.

“The trip will be about forging connections between the two groups of women,” Mrs Entsch explained. “I’m hoping it’ll be the start of a long relationship. Veronica and Anthea will be able to experience firsthand the conditions that the PNG ladies live in, but also see firsthand the importance of their kindness and generosity and what an impact it’s had.”

Although it will be a challenging journey, Mrs Walden said she was excited to meet the women who they’ve helped through the care bag project.

“Gay explained it to us about the ladies in the villages, what they use and how they aren’t fortunate to have the things that we have. Even things like getting water, the life they live over there is very difficult.”

Mrs Walden hoped today’s celebration event would encourage some of the younger women in the community to come along, see what’s happening and take part in future activities.

“Our next project is making curtains for the community, and we’ve got another 200 Moon Sick Care Bags to make so we’d like to involve more young people,” she said.

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Background to Moon Sick Care Bags:

Papuan women living in rural, remote and isolated villages do not have electricity, access to shops or sanitary products. They have no choice but to use old rags or coconut fibre.

On a trip to Africa in early 2017, Ipswich woman Gay Muller came across washable sanitary pads being produced. She knew after working in Papua New Guinea that this was something the Papuan ladies and girls desperately needed.

Gay decided when she got home she was going to make and gift Moon Sick Care Bags to women in isolated villages. She pulled together a small team of volunteers who cut, sew and thread cord. Besides donating their time and skill, many women have donated material and money.

To get the first batch of bags transported to PNG, Gay partnered with Yolonde Entsch and RRRRC Connect, the philanthropic arm of the Cairns-based Reef & Rainforest Research Centre, which was working in 13 isolated villages. She suggested the bags be given to every woman and older girl – 2000 bags – an ambitious project, but Gay and her team of volunteers are determined to do it.

RRRC Connect delivered the first batch of bags in September 2017. There was much surprise and disbelief that Australian women were so kind and cared. The women called them their Magic Bags so the men would not know what was inside.

Through existing partnerships, Yolonde Entsch has arranged for the 330 Moon Sick Care Bags made by the women of Doomadgee to be shipped to the Treaty Villages in the Western Province of PNG at the end of July. For more information, visit www.gofundme.com/sanitary-pads-for-girls-in-png

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