

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Got spare glasses? Help the people of PNG 'see a brighter future'**

12<sup>th</sup> June, 2018

THEY'RE hiding in cupboards and lurking in drawers... pairs of old glasses and sunglasses that are out of fashion, the prescription's expired or we just don't use any more.

So it's good news that these unneeded (although often expensive) glasses can get a new lease on life by helping restore the gift of sight to people in rural Papua New Guinea.

YWAM Medical Ships' Cairns Community Ambassador, Yolonde Entsch, is launching a campaign this week to collect 5000 pairs of unwanted prescription glasses and sunglasses from Far Northerners.

The glasses will be handed over to the optometry team onboard the MV YWAM PNG when it docks in Cairns next month on its way to PNG, so they can be distributed to patients on the ground.

Mrs Entsch gained first-hand experience working with the optometry team when she volunteered aboard the MV YWAM PNG last year on its circuit of remote PNG villages.

"Our vision is something we often take for granted," she explained. "It was a new feeling to see how people could be assessed and then provided with a pair of glasses on the spot, and suddenly they can read again.

"It's a huge improvement in just one visit and the smiles on their faces made it worth it a thousand times over."

Regaining their sight means that children can start or resume education, while for older patients something as simple as being able to read their Bible again means a great deal to them.

On the ground, the optometry team educates the Papuan people about the dangers of staring into the sun and by providing sunglasses, it means they can do daily activities without squinting and reduces the risk of pterygiums (growths on the eye).

"What shocked and saddened me was that there weren't enough sunglasses for patients who asked for them," Mrs Entsch said. "We had to limit them to the older patients and any younger ones who had the start of cataracts or pterygiums.

"I promised myself that when I came home, the next community campaign that I ran would be for sunglasses and prescription glasses, so I'd love to see just how many pairs we can collect."

Helping drive the campaign is Cairns State High School Year 12 student Morgan Elliston, one of the Cairns Youth Ambassadors for YWAM Medical Ships, who hopes to travel to PNG next year on an outreach visit.

“Morgan is doing a fantastic job – she’s been in touch with about 30 hotels and tourism businesses requesting that they go through lost property and ask staff to bring old pairs of glasses in. She’s also set up collection boxes at Cairns State High School and St Monica’s College and will be asking local optometrists to put a poster in their waiting rooms.

“Through word of mouth we’ve already had more than 1000 pairs of glasses donated, so I think we’ve got a fabulous chance of achieving our target of 5000 when we put the word out to the broader FNQ community.”

The YWAM Glasses Drive will run from Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> June to Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> July, ahead of the handover when the MV YWAM PNG medical and training ship docks in Cairns in late July.

Collection points can be found in all of Cairns Libraries’ eight branches at Cairns City, Babinda, Edmonton, Gordonvale, Earlville, Manunda, Stratford and Smithfield.

“Cairns Regional Council is pleased to be able to support this fantastic cause by making our libraries branches available as collection points for prescription glasses and sunglasses,” said Mayor Bob Manning.

“I hope the Cairns community will get behind the YWAM Glasses campaign to help improve the lives of our close international neighbours in Papua New Guinea.”

“It’s wonderful to have the support of Cairns Regional Council and Cairns Libraries along with Rotary District 9550 and the local community,” Mrs Entsch added. “We’re so excited to see how many pairs we can collect and to hand them over to YWAM when the ship docks in Cairns.”

#### **Media Opportunity:**

Yolonde Entsch and Morgan Elliston will be available for photos/interviews at the launch of the YWAM Glasses Drive this **Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> June at 11.00am**, at the City branch of Cairns Libraries (Abbott St, Cairns). They’ll also have a BIG pile of glasses and the Library collection bins for photos.

**Media contact:** Heather Law (0409 638 943) or email [playonwordsconsulting@outlook.com](mailto:playonwordsconsulting@outlook.com)

#### **Information on YWAM (Youth With a Mission) Medical Ships:**

*YWAM Medical Ships operates a training and medical ship, the MV YWAM PNG, in remote communities of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in collaboration with PNG's National Department of Health and provincial health teams. The vessel is equipped with an onboard dentistry clinic, day procedure unit and laboratory. In addition to the services provided onboard, YWAM Medical Ships deploys teams ashore to set up primary health care, health education, and optometry clinics.*

*Eye care is very limited in the rural areas of Papua New Guinea. In addition to providing patients with glasses, patients that are identified with cataracts and pterygiums (growth on the eye) are sent to YWAM's surgical team aboard the MV YWAM PNG for surgery, which in many cases, restores the patient's sight.*

*YWAM Medical Ships has a strong focus on education and prevention. The distribution of sunglasses can make a significant difference in protecting eyesight and reducing the risk of pterygiums.*

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