

MEDIA RELEASE

PNG women welcome local pad project

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TWO Doomadgee women have returned from a visit to extremely disadvantaged villages in Papua New Guinea with a renewed focus on helping women and girls in Australia's closest neighbour to manage menstruation with dignity and confidence.

Veronica Walden and Anthea Chong have been making Moon Sick Care Bags and reusable sanitary pads as part of an employment project delivered by social and economic development organisation My Pathway. The idea was introduced by Yolonde Entsch from YLE Enterprises, in her role as the Women's Program Manager for My Pathway in Doomadgee.

Leading a group of 10 women, Mrs Walden and Ms Chong have helped sew hundreds of Moon Sick Care Bags which were transported to the Treaty Villages, in the Western Province area of PNG, for distribution at a recent Women's Gathering.

"Travelling from Doomadgee to Cairns, then the Torres Strait and across to the Treaty Villages was an amazing but very sobering journey for Veronica and Anthea," Mrs Entsch explained. "They heard first-hand from the Treaty Village women about how difficult it is for them to manage menstruation each month, because they have little or no access to sanitary products.

"We don't realise how lucky we are in Australia – here we're welcoming the removal of GST from sanitary products but in villages just four kilometres from Australia's northernmost border women are forced to use old rags, toilet tissue, banana leaves or coconut fibre – it's unacceptable."

More than 100 women were at the gathering at the Treaty Village of Mabaduan and were taught by Mrs Entsch and Moon Sick Care Bag Project Co-ordinator Gay Muller how to use the Care Bags, which include washable sanitary pads, hand-made soap, underwear, a washcloth, a bag for soiled pads, and an educational diagram of a fertility cycle.

"Veronica and Anthea personally handed out 400 Care Bags to the women who attended," Mrs Entsch said. "Many of them were interested in learning how to make the bags themselves, to distribute or sell in their villages, and all were incredibly grateful that a group of women in Australia cared enough to make these bags for them."

My Pathway CEO Paul Synnott said the Moon Sick Care Bag project had demonstrated the impact that women from 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 continue to evolve,” he said.

“They’ve demonstrated unwavering commitment to complete the care bags and I’m confident they’ll build on their success as a micro-business with the ability to generate jobs and income.”

Mrs Walden said the visit to PNG had given her a new understanding about the level of disadvantage experienced by women every day in Australia’s closest neighbour.

“It made me feel so sad and so moved, if we hadn’t seen it with our own eyes we wouldn’t have believed that things were that bad,” Mrs Walden said. “We’re even more motivated now and committed to an ongoing relationship where the Doomadgee ladies can support the ladies in the Treaty Villages.”

Mrs Muller, who trained the Doomadgee women on making the different elements of the Care Bags, said the ladies from Doomadgee were “captured with concern” for the PNG women from the first moment they heard of their desperate circumstances.

“This concern motivated their efforts to complete the bags they had promised, plus more,” she said. “For Veronica and Anthea, having experienced their visit to PNG, the village ladies have now truly captured their hearts.”

The group of Doomadgee women are now focused on making another 400 bags, of which 200 will be provided to Getaway Trekking who will sell them to their trekkers to hand out to girls and women along the Kokoda Trail. It’s evidence of a successful micro-business opportunity as it will earn the Doomadgee women an income.

Mrs Walden and Ms Chong are also looking at ways to collect second-hand material which can be donated to the Treaty Village women along with sourcing cheap underwear.

Mrs Entsch acknowledged the invaluable support of My Pathway as well as SeaSwift, Australian Border Force, INLOC Group, the Reef & Rainforest Research Centre and the Government of Papua New Guinea for helping to make the visit possible.

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