

Media Release

Washable sanitary pads continue to connect women

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IN the lead-up to International Women’s Day, a home-grown partnership between two Cairns businesswomen is providing Aboriginal women with income-generating opportunities while improving the education, health and wellbeing of girls and women in Papua New Guinea.

Yolonde Entsch, Founder of Empowering Women | Empowering Communities, has been working on the Moon Sick Care Bag project with women in the remote Queensland Aboriginal community of Doomadgee since August 2017.

“My Pathway, the social and economic development organisation here in Cairns, contracted me to work with the Doomadgee ladies to identify ways to grow their skills and potentially produce some income,” Mrs Entsch explained.

“Moon Sick Care Bags really caught the women’s enthusiasm - they contain everything a woman needs to manage menstruation, including four washable sanitary pads, underwear, face washer, soap, a diagram of a monthly cycle and a colourful bag for all the contents.

“When gifted to women and girls living in remote areas of PNG the Bags make a tremendous difference to their lives. Instead of girls being forced to miss school each month, and women having to withdraw from family duties, they can manage menstruation with dignity and confidence.”

A group of Doomadgee women were taught how make all the different items and in October 2018 two members of the group travelled with Mrs Entsch to the Western Province of PNG to personally hand out 330 completed Bags.

“It was a heart-warming experience for all of us involved and one which wouldn’t have been possible without My Pathway’s belief in our program and ongoing support,” Mrs Entsch said.

“It also opened the door to a purchase order for 200 Bags from Getaway Trekking here in Cairns. I had an incredible experience trekking Kokoda with Getaway in 2016 so when Sue contacted me about ordering some Bags for Getaway to distribute on the ground in PNG it seemed like the stars were aligning.”

Sue Fitcher, Managing Director of Getaway Trekking, said she heard about the Moon Sick Care Bag project and immediately saw the potential.

“We were very keen to get involved - our trekking business operates in PNG so we feel it’s our responsibility to provide some support to the people we work with,” Mrs Fitcher said.



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“Our business is also owned and run predominantly by women so opportunities around education, women’s health and wellbeing and creating micro-businesses are very close to our hearts.”

Getaway Trekking is no stranger to ‘giving back’ to the communities with which it works. After lobbying extensively for a female health worker to be based in the village of Buna on the north coast of PNG, an area home to most of its staff, the business committed to fund the position itself.

“This is what now gives us the opportunity and means to distribute the Moon Sick Care Bags, by encouraging women to come into the health centre for checks,” Mrs Fitcher explained.

The order was completed by the Doomadgee women in November and the Bags are expected to arrive at the health centre in the coming weeks.

“In order to be given a Bag the women will need to come in and have a health check. This will create a relationship with the health centre and – hopefully – will make them more likely to be proactive about their healthcare in the future,” she said.

After the 200 Bags are distributed, Getaway will look at ways its trekkers can help support the women in Buna to make and sell washable sanitary pads themselves as a microbusiness venture.

For now though, the women in Doomadgee have received payment for their 200 Bags and Mrs Entsch said they felt “happy and proud” to have generated independent income for themselves.

“They’re also now more confident about selling items they have made and this includes selling 20 Bags to women in the Aboriginal community of Ampilatwatja in the Northern Territory,” she said.

“While they’re still producing Bags for PNG, the new focus is on helping women in remote Australian Aboriginal communities who feel ‘shame’ at purchasing sanitary products from their local store.”

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