



# Sewpportive Friends

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*Please join us in our journey to empower women in challenged areas through providing healthy, handmade feminine care products and the education to produce their own.*

## Change the Way We Look at Things

"Change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." Quote by noted author, Dr. Wayne Dyer. It is difficult to change the way we look at things since Covid-19 is still very much present today. Over this past year, Sewpportive Friends has continued the mission work yet needed to adjust our approach.

Living and working in this current environment has impacted everyone's way of looking at life. Keeping positive has certainly been a challenge at times. Like many other countries, Zimbabwe has experienced intermittent lockdowns during this time. Businesses were closed or open very limited hours. Basic necessities and general supplies were scarce. Although, with unemployment high and drought conditions limiting rural farming, they were grateful for any basic need they could afford. Feminine products were not on the top of their list. Food and water were priorities.

In August, we were finally able to travel to Africa and had a group provide supplies to communities in Zimbabwe. They were overjoyed! Due to travel restrictions, we were unable to meet with the greater communities as in years past. Instead we were only able to meet with village leaders, teachers and local friends delivering supplies for their communities. We received messages sharing their appreciation.



Sewpportive Friends mission has pushed me to work harder this year and helped me to stay focused for all the friends, new and familiar, who have struggled tremendously during the pandemic. Life was incredibly challenging for our rural friends even before the pandemic, which then placed a greater strain on their abilities to support their families.

Our friends have taught me to look at things differently. See the beauty, keep things simple, and never give up. Despite what they have experienced these past nearly two years, they are still able to remain grateful and hopeful; that is how we all should see things.

During this time, people continue to reach out to offer their assistance: tracing, cutting, sewing, and offering the necessary financial support. We welcome new communities/groups from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Tanzania and India who requested more information about Sewpportive Friends pads, supplies, and instruction. The WhatsApp platform allows us to communicate with those in rural areas of Africa and other parts of the world. Applications such as this makes communication accessible and reasonably affordable for them.

Challenging times can either overwhelm us or can make us look differently for a solution. We are very grateful for all who have volunteered their time or who have financially supported this work. Thank you for the continued support of our volunteers, charity connection friends, community leaders, lodge/camp managers, transportation companies, our friends around the globe and especially Askari Safari.

Wishing you a very happy and healthy holiday season.  
With love and gratitude,

*Julie*



## A New Team Member

We are excited to welcome a new Zimbabwean member to our team, Margaret Dube. The following was written by Margaret sharing her background and motivation to become involved with the Sewpportive Friends mission.

“I was born in Monde village (Victoria Falls), a remote area stricken by poverty I witnessed first-hand the suffering of young girls who lacked clothes, shoes and even food to carry to school. In my teen years, raised by my father who got divorced when I was still a toddler I had no female role model to teach me about female hygiene. “A girl without a mother,” I had to depend on myself during my monthly cycle. Newspapers and blanket pieces became a monthly routine which was unhealthy; this made me

miss out on school as I had to hide at home. The love and passion to help other girls became inborn in me as I wanted to prevent them from going through the same difficulty as me.

In 1998 I got married to my husband Godfrey, a teacher who taught in rural Hwange District. This enabled me to interact more with the girl child as they always came to our house for extra-lessons. We would give them food, clothes and sanitary pads. Seeing girls wearing torn clothes motivated me to knit clothes for them by hand and learn to be a tailor. As a mother of 3 including my brother’s son, the passion to help others has grown as we are now looking after 5 children in Plumtree whose father is deaf.

Sewpportive Friends has become an eye opener on my journey of helping the needy as I am now able to sew pads which are safe, comfortable and re-usable. Life is about interacting and understanding others in their daily plight and giving back to the community in any way I can, hence my journey does not stop here.”

*Thank you Margaret for inspiring us  
and joining our team!*



## Life as a Girl Without Sanitary Pads in Zimbabwe

*Written by Margaret Dube*

Menstruation is a normal part of life for any girl or woman but it has led to the stigmatization of girls all around the world especially in Zimbabwe and rural areas. The issue of the lack of sanitary pads in rural Zimbabwe has always been overlooked causing girls to be seen as weak and inferior to boys. Various organisations have always donated plastic sanitary pads but what happens if the pads are not donated on time during the start of a girl’s monthly cycle? Sewpportive Friends has tackled

this issue through the introduction of re-usable and readily available sanitary pads.

A lack of information about menstruation leads to damaging misconceptions, discrimination and can cause girls to miss out on a good education. In some communities the tradition of excluding menstruating girls from normal activities and tasks such as entering the kitchen to cook and public places like schools exists. This has led to the stigmatisation of many girls as they always have to hide in their rooms during their monthly cycle thus disrupting their chance for an education. Even if they go back to school after their monthly cycles they would have missed crucial lessons in the syllabus, this frequent occurrence would end up forcing them to either fail or drop out of school.

In Zimbabwe, the Covid-19 pandemic has seen the re-shuffling and loss of jobs of many employees in different industries. 90% of those employees are mothers and fathers who work hard in a bid to pay school fees and even buy sanitary pads for the girl child in their families. In this case, “No job, no sanitary pads” applies, leaving girls with no choice but to use old dirty clothes, blanket pieces and even newspapers during their monthly cycle which is unhygienic. Poor menstrual hygiene can pose physical health risks and has been linked to reproductive and urinary tract infections.

Many girls and women in Zimbabwean rural communities like Monde and Binga have limited options for affordable menstrual materials. Life as a girl without sanitary pads especially in the Covid-19 era is a traumatic and depressing experience causing many girls to wish “if only they were boys.” The lack of sanitary protection during menstruation is often mentioned as a barrier to girls’ regular attendance in school. There is very limited availability of commercial sanitary products and those that exist are financially out of reach for most women and girls. In many poor families, providing adequate clothing for the whole family can be a challenge. Hence finding used fabric rags from which to make home-made sanitary pads can be very difficult.



## Staying Focused 2021

Early in 2021, we were connected with the organization Himalayan Naari. Founder, Kathy B. reached out for more information and was hoping to incorporate pad sewing in the area of northern India where her organization supports. Through email communication, phone calls and Zoom meetings, Sewpportive Friends was able to provide the tools for them to produce healthy feminine pads for their community. We are very excited to follow their progress. Thank you Kathy for all you and Himalayan Naari do in making life better for the girls and women in northern India!



*Groups/Communities we have supported in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, South Africa, Tanzania and India:*

Sianyanga Primary School | WhiteWaters Secondary School | Chisuma Sewing Group | Ethandweni Children’s Home | Days for Girls (Tanzania) | Ray of Choice Africa | Nduna Primary School | Himalyann Naari | Ngamo Secondary School | Jafuta Foundation | Rise N Shine Girls Club | Precious Pearls Trust | New Hope Waves | Ndlovu | Filabusi | Mothers Angels  
Zimbabwe

*A special thank you to Isabel Ndebele for leading the sewing class at Nduna Primary School in November 2021. Great work!*



From our home to yours, we wish you a healthy and happy holiday season.

