



Sewpportive Friends

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

Nothing is ever too small when it comes to giving

For many, life is choreographed with hustle and bustle; not enough hours in the day to meet our commitments, trying to balance between family, work, school, chores, commute, appointments, financial and other responsibilities – which can certainly be stressful. I admit sometimes I need a break from the busyness of life and need to take a step back, refocus and just breathe.

Our friends in Africa find they struggle with many of the same stresses mentioned above, but in addition often lack some of the basic amenities that we often take for granted here in the USA. Some of the communities we have visited do not even have electricity and the nearest water source is a few miles walk away. Others have the privilege of electricity, but usage is limited to only a few hours a day. Anyone who has the luxury of a vehicle might have to wait hours for fuel. Just yesterday, a friend messaged me that he waited 6 ½ hours in line for gas to fill up his car.

This past year, the worst drought in decades covered most of southern Africa causing devastation and suffering for the many who need to live off the land. Friends were sending photos of their gardens dwindling down to nothing and many of their water resources had dried up. Water was not within walking distance to fetch anymore and in turn the drought and other issues caused drastic inflation making basic goods seem like unaffordable luxuries.

A recent article published in Zimbabwe shared wages of different jobs. A domestic worker average earnings are around ZWL \$168.48 per month which converts to \$6 - \$7 USD per month. A package of feminine pads cost around \$3 USD and they include eight pads. For one menstrual cycle, one might need two to three packages (\$6-\$9USD/month). Imagine the choices that have to be made.



Why share this information? Sometimes hearing the struggles of others can have a very powerful impact on putting things into perspective. Whether we live in the USA, Europe, UK, Australia, Africa, India, etc., we all march forward with many of the same hopes and desires; to live a happy and healthy life, provide for our families, and make time for those we love. In addition, we try to be responsible for our commitments, be kind and

compassionate to others, and also remember to take time to care for ourselves.

Even when there are not enough hours in the day, lending a hand, a kind thought, a warm smile, can change a moment, a day or even a life. Give when you can and what you can; an ear to listen, share some time, provide a donation, friendship, volunteer, any form of kindness is important. Nothing is ever too small when it comes to giving.

As each of us walk along our journey, it is always important to remember that we need to give to ourselves too. Be compassionate, forgiving and understanding to yourself. Allow time for you and do things that help you reset and grow. This is something I have put on the backburner over the past few years because of “not enough time.” Well, it is a new year and a new focus, and I’m making the time.

We will never be able to make everyone happy nor be able to give enough to solve the world’s problems, but we need to give when we can or when we are led. Listen to your heart. Make a conscious effort to do one kind gesture every day. It truly makes a difference.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

With gratitude and love,

Julie



November 2019 Overview

Written by Julie

Our group, Margie, Kim, Rachael, Sarah, Nelle and Emma, left for Zimbabwe early November with a busy schedule ahead. Our journey started in Matopos. We were welcomed by our friends at Big Cave Camp, Lin, Tawanda, Sherpard, and the other wonderful staff who we have come to know over the years. The day of arrival is always filled with excitement and exhaustion after 24+ hours of travel. We settled in, relaxed and enjoyed the beauty of Big Cave landscape. Our first visit was to see our friends at White Waters Secondary School. Isabel Ndebele had

coordinated with the students a wonderful gathering of songs, speeches, games, and dancing. We provided supplies and had another incredible time with friends both new and familiar.

We had time in the afternoon get in some exercise and enjoy some wildlife viewing, and take in a beautiful sunset over the Matobo kopjes.

Friday, we visited new friends at Ethandweni Children’s Home. Lucien, Executive Director of Ethandweni, and I met in September and we planned a sewing class to teach the women and girls at the home during our November visit. We arrived to this home which was nestled in and around the kopjes. It was lovely. Everyone we met greeted us with a smile and excitement. Lucien gave us a tour of the area introducing us to his “family.”



We proceeded to a room where we setup up our sewing supplies and the class began. The girls were very polite and quiet in the beginning. After things got going, we enjoyed hearing their questions, thoughts and seeing their amazing sewing skills. What a pleasure it was meeting and working with everyone at the Ethandweni Home.

We arrived as welcomed guests and left feeling part of their family. We are so grateful to Lucien and his group for opening their home to us and for taking on this project.

After enjoying some more wildlife and hiking in the Matopos area, we were off to Bomani Tented Camp for a few days of



adventure and safari time. I have been to Zimbabwe quite a few times now and am always in awe of the incredible wildlife. Every visit, I am more aware of the amazing efforts that are truly needed to protect these creatures. Each and every day matters when it comes to conservation.

From Bomani, we visited the Sianyanga Primary School. They always greet us with smiles and songs. My heart fills with joy as the community feels more like home. Village heads, the School Committee, Mr. Ncube, Headmaster, and Mr. Munsaka, Lead Teacher, greet our group with handshakes and hugs. The children waving and the mothers smiling, and greeting us in their local language. It does not matter the language difference, joy is expressed and known.

The school community performed a beautiful program of song, dance and speeches. We provided both the school and sewing group with supplies. To end our visit, we were brought to a classroom where there are hundreds of baskets made by our friends. Each of us enjoyed the artistry and purchased as much as we could carry.

After this special and memorable visit with our friends at Sianyanga, we departed for Gorges Lodge, which is located 25 minutes outside of Victoria Falls.

This was the last stop of our trip. As we drove into the meeting place in Chisuma village, the lovely women were singing and dancing... all we could do is smile and feel their love, joy and excitement. It felt like I was finally here visiting with my sisters. We enjoyed many beautiful songs and speeches. Pepsi, the wonderful woman and friend who introduced us to her community, continues to host a weekly sewing group and keeps us up to date with their progress. It was another extraordinary visit with our friends.

It is difficult saying "until we meet again," to these dear ladies. Their dedication, motivation and progress are inspiring. Tears of joy fill my eyes every time we leave our friends. When we work together and help each other a lot can be accomplished!



"Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends leave footprints in your heart."

Our thanks go out to all of our friends in Zimbabwe for their kindness and love.

What we thought was our last evening in Zimbabwe, changed overnight. South African Airlines went on strike. Our departure flight was cancelled. We arrived at the airport on our day of departure to talk with a South African Airlines Representative. No flights were available until the next week. Our trip was extended another three nights due to flight availability. Our friends at 528 Victoria Falls Guest House, Meredith and Paul, were our hosts and took wonderful care of us. What a fun-filled extension to an already amazing trip!

Thoughts from our friends

It's always great to hear the thoughts and experiences from our friends who join us on a journey to Africa.



Written by Kim Knepper

My friend and co-worker, Margie, told me about an opportunity to work with a charity, Sewportive Friends, to make feminine pads for women and young girls in Africa. She decided to go to Zimbabwe to deliver the pads and to bring school supplies to support the local schools there. Little did I know that I would take the journey with her a year and a half later.

When Margie came back from her trip, she glowed with enthusiasm about the charity work in Zimbabwe. There are so many struggles that young women have to obtain an education-long journeys walking to and from school, caring for family members and missing school because of the lack of proper feminine hygiene supplies. Other struggles included lacking school supplies such as paper to write on, pens to write with, a ball to play with or the ability to pay for school tuition and uniforms. To travel half a world away to make an impact on their lives was very empowering. The safari pictures of lions, giraffes, hippos, rhinos, zebras and elephants, the history and landscape were amazing. Margie was going back to Zimbabwe November 2019 and I asked if there was room on the trip.

YOLO! I wanted to be part of this experience and what an awesome experience it was!

I read Julie's story about how she started her charity. It was a wakeup call as I didn't think about how women dealt with their periods if they didn't have proper supplies. It was certainly something when I was growing up, I didn't give a second thought about. As I prepared for my trip I wanted to contribute as much as I could traveling from Iowa. I collected pens, pencils, and made baby gowns and diapers from T-shirts. I even inspired my dad to donate money which paid for the education of 9 primary school children in addition to a donation to the school.

I was very impressed with the supplies that Julie, Margie and the Sewpportive Friends team provided to the schools and community. These were very well thought out and beautifully constructed kits. It was amazing the amount of work and supplies put into the kits to teach the women and girls to sew the kits. Everything was considered, from the organic and non-irritating materials, zip lock bags for soiled items, to a carrying bag to keep it all private. Every group that we shared the supplies with had much enthusiasm, not only to have to have the completed kits, but also to learn how to make them for themselves and to share with others. Before we started the sewing lesson at the Ethandweni Children's Home, Julie shared a special message to the young girls. Women's bodies are beautiful and precious with the ability to carry and support a baby. Women no matter where they are in the world all have to deal with their periods. It is nothing to be ashamed of but something to embrace. It is a powerful and beautiful part of being a woman.

I went on this trip with 6 fun, adventurous women and took away from it a lot of great memories. I think about Zimbabwe every day since I have been home. The country has so many challenges from unemployment, infrastructure and drought. But the landscape, the amazing animals, food and more importantly the PEOPLE of Zimbabwe made the journey amazing.



Sharing Smiles

By Margie Bower, Director of Development

Every day, I carry with me all of the smiles that were exchanged during the recent trip to Zimbabwe. Returning to see the friends that I met during my first trip and meet many new people whom I am now proud to call friends.



There were seven women in the travel group and at the beginning, I only knew two of them, but after our journey, we shared an experience that has us connected for life.

Thank you again to all of the people that helped make this trip so successful through volunteering to cut and trace, sew the pads, donate school supplies and fabric, etc. Without you, we wouldn't be able to do all of this.

Looking forward, Julie and I are going back to Uganda in March to visit a new community, Kayunga-Bbaale, outside of Kampala to teach classes on how to make the washable, reusable feminine pads. There are 250 young women in this community in need of assistance. Because of limitations on luggage, we can only bring enough supplies to train a group that will be the instructors for the others. We are busy with our volunteers packing the training kits that includes everything needed to hand sew a pad and 3 inserts. We also leave yards and yards of bulk fabric for them to use to make pads after we leave. To think that there are that many women in just one of communities near Kampala that can use our help really touches me that our work continues to help women across Africa. Please follow our journey on Facebook and Instagram, @sewpportivefriends.



Letters from our Friends in Africa

My Life Experience with Sewpportive Friends

By Babongile Angel Tinarwo

Meeting Julie has brought an excessive impact in my life. In the fact she was my shield in every schooling burden I had. She paid for my school fees, bought me uniforms, a bike, all the stationary needed at school and paid my writing examination fees. She has assisted me with lights for studying. She is also my life lecturer, in the sense that through WhatsApp she taught me cumbersome things about life which assist me very much.

The introduction of washable pads assisted me a lot because it swallowed the burden of money shortage. Julie has created a bond with us, and even some Sewpportive Friends. We might be distance apart but at the same time, we are together in spirit.

In my family it is not me alone, but my grandmother and younger siblings have been getting assistance. We have surely found a shoulder to lean on. The motivation that we get from these friends of ours keeps us going and continuing to look forward for the future. There are also crafts and baskets that the visiting friends have been buying when they visit here. These have also left us with a life-long skill that we shall forever cherish in our lives.

Thank you.
Babongile



Written by Sisosenkasi Sango

Upon making hand-made pads, I felt proud of myself that I am now an able young girl. I told myself that I was now a leader and am going to teach other girls and women in my society. Those pads are an advantage because they are washable and they can be used continuously. Another advantage is that you can't go and buy sanitary pads in the shops and thus they save money. I wish that everyone must learn how to sew those so that they can learn how to save money and how to do things with their own hands. Sewing the pads is very enjoyable and its very motivating that everyone must learn how to do handmade items instead of buying from shops with high prices.

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Our Journey with Sewpportive Friends

Written by Isabel Ndebele

Lead Teacher, White Waters Secondary School

It all started after meeting Julie a few years back when she visited our school. She has impacted our lives so much in a positive way ever since we met her. Since 2016, we have been visited by so many friends from the USA and trust me, this has been the most wonderful experience as we get the opportunity to share life experience and make friends with different people.

Meetings with the Sewpportive Friends has built a family, that is made up of children and their families from the other side of the world. This family started with 3 sponsor children and has grown to 38. Our children at school have benefited a lot from those families. They received school fees, stationary, bicycles, cell phones for some, exam fees and clothes. There was also the introduction of washable pads, that has assisted our girls and



women so much. These have reduced the burden of buying the sanitary pads for the parents and guardians, and it also reduces the number of pupils failing to attend classes during that time of the month. Sewing classes were formed to teach the learners to do them for themselves. This seems to be an interesting time for the girls as they take pride in doing them for themselves. The classes also gave the opportunity to discuss issues pertaining to the girls and thereby it created more understanding to the girl's experiences to the teachers. Recently, the community women have also taken a step, a few of them have decided to join the sewing of the washable pads and we are hoping to have more of them joining in numbers, to assist the other women and the girl child. All this good work we give thanks to Julie and Sewpportive Friends.



Thank you for your continued support.