

NOVEMBER 2014

The difference a pad makes...



In the shade of a tree... Milly speaking to students

It was in the early days of EI work in Pader, Northern Uganda, starting 2009, that Anita Bertrand started visiting schools, teaching girls how to sew their own sanitary pads and providing the flannel cotton cloth, needle and thread. First Cherry-Anne Bertrand, then Jacob Philpot and Curtis Legeihn, carried it on, as well as some visiting women's groups.

When I came to Pader in 2012, the national women on the staff, Doris and especially Milly, kept on saying that we should restart the programme because the girls in school really needed help. So in early 2013, when visiting Kampala, I went to the cloth marketing district to

look for the flannel. I found the cloth at the shop of a trader named Keera; we talked about pads (as one does with strangers of the opposite gender!) and she showed me some pad samples that used a polyester fleece and a waterproof layer, low profile and easy to wash and dry, not so different in appearance or use to modern disposables. It seemed a better proposition than the older style wads of cotton. Back in Pader, with some research and imagination, we arrived at a good pattern for our pads that minimised cloth wastage.

That first year we visited 10 schools and, in each, provided the 70 most mature



Milly, the friendly trainer

girls with needle and thread, the cut parts for two pads and two pairs of knickers. It was a bit shocking at first to find that while a few girls possessed one pair of knickers, most had none at all.

We learned a lot; hand sewing is not a normal skill here; a small number of girls sewed well, some were functional, many really had no idea. We did not see it as our place to become sewing teachers in every school. It also became apparent that two pads per girl was not enough for good hygiene.

This year I was on home leave until March, so we restarted in April. We started manufacturing the pads ourselves; Milly is now a quick, tireless and accurate marker and cutter and we subcontract the sewing to a skilful tailor. We started planning for 12 schools in the year but we soon realised that our pads production rate was enough to target 24, if the funds allowed. It was also beginning to dawn on us that a cap

of 70 girls per school did not match the need; some schools have hundreds of mature girls, so now we call all the girls of 12 years and over. This lower age limit seems to be about right here; it includes all the girls who have started their periods but also those who will start soon. We can prepare these younger girls so that their first period can be memorable without being disturbing; most mothers do not talk to their daughters before the event!

In God's goodness the funds did roll in and my home church (Chichester Baptist) agreed to underwrite any shortfall in the project year.

When we visit a school, Milly talks to the girls in the local language about some of the biology and practicalities of managing their periods, how to use the pads etc. I then talk to them about the women in my family, how important they are to me and then show from the Bible how each of the girls is uniquely made by God and is important to Him, all translated by Milly. Then we hand out one small black bag, 4 washable pads and 4 pairs of knickers, to suit their size, to each girl.



What you see is what they get - 4 pairs of knickers and 4 pads

This year, from April through to October, we have visited 24 schools within about 15 km of our Pader base and issued materials to 2647 girls.



Tom and Milly on their way to a school (Tom says “I only cycled to one school but it was a fun photo.”)



Tailor at work

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why do all the girls have shaved heads?



Because it is the normal policy for all school children. The reasons given are that it prevents head-lice and ringworm transmission and that it prevents girls from wasting their school years fussing with their hair.

How are the pads constructed?

The polyester fleece material forms the absorbent layer, a plastic sheet goes under this and then a poly-cotton bed-sheet cloth is used to back the whole thing. The three identically shaped pieces are sewn together on a normal sewing machine and then an over-lock machine is used to sew round the edge of each pad twice.

How much does this project cost?

Cost per girl is about £2.46 (3.68 \$US), so this year the total cost will end at around £6 520 (9 740 \$US). On behalf of the girls, we thank God for every giver!

Why Primary Schools?

Because the vast majority of school girls are in Primary and relatively few children enter Secondary. We intend that this ministry will increase the number of girls entering Secondary.

Thomas David Newnham



Sarah and Andrew Newnham have the pleasure of introducing you to Thomas David Newnham, who joined them in the early hours of Saturday 1st November, weighing 7lbs 14 oz. Sarah (née Dilloway) is an EIUK alumni to Malawi and Uganda, and has been a member of the EIUK Board of Trustees since 2007.

EI Handmade Cards

We are still looking for someone to take over from David and Jenny Bendell the task of creating and selling of cards to raise funds for EIUK. **Do you feel that you would like to succeed them?** Please contact Linda at the office (e-mail linda.fitzmaurice@eiuk.org.uk or telephone 01243 931094).

Membership!

Please renew your membership for the year 2014-15! We really appreciate your involvement in the work of EIUK.

Just complete a form and return with a cheque to the office (obtainable from the website or from the the office).

Dates for your diary

EIUK meeting with AGM:

21 February 2015

Is the project sustainable?

In the West providing pads to girls is sustained by the parents. The washable pads we make have good sustainability; they will last for several years with careful use. Washing water, soap and effort are sustained by the girls. But the project is currently sustained by donors. We are actively looking for ways of getting the parents to take this on, an idea that is not helped by poverty or traditional cultural attitudes towards girls.

Why don't the parents buy pads for their girls?

There are many answers to that. First it has to be said that 'Always' and some cheaper brands are available and that the more enlightened/cash rich parents do buy them for their girls but there are many who are truly poor. Family budgets are controlled mainly by the father and in quite a 'gender separated' culture, men do not concern themselves with women's problems (think of the West 60 years ago). Many mothers here did not go to school themselves, so do not see why it is a problem for the girl to stay home during her period, as they did.

Does it make a difference?

Anecdotally, the answer is yes. When we have revisited schools this year we have asked about last year's pads and they say they are still benefiting from them. The stated purpose of the project is to improve the retention of girls in school, so that should be indicated from attendance records. We have started gathering 'before and after' data from schools but as I write, it is too early to know if a clear change will emerge.

Article by Tom Edom, EI missionary in Pader, Uganda.