

APRIL 28, 2020 UPDATE

Girl Empowerment Pad (GEP) Program Reaps What It Sews

THE LATEST

In the midst of the COVID-19 threat, the GEP program continues to meet the ordinary needs of participants at an extraordinary time. But it also adds value by improving community resilience. GEP kits, assembled by Pittsburgh volunteers, include materials that recipients at the Nyadire Methodist Mission in Zimbabwe and nearby schools and clinics employ to make reusable cloth sanitary napkins; these enable women and girls to keep working and attending school during their monthly cycles. Now, given the onslaught of COVID-19, some of the fabric is being repurposed to make face masks that afford protection from disease. The repurposing also validates the program's approach of imparting general sewing skills that encourage self-sufficiency.

A fortuitous delivery of container shipments arrived in Zimbabwe in March 2020 just before COVID-19 led to local disease prevention measures. These shipments included 1937 GEP kits; 398 hygiene kits complete with soap, underwear, and age-appropriate menstrual education; 30 sewing machines; 16 irons; and materials to make more than 500 additional GEP kits. Due to the economic situation in Zimbabwe, a decision was made in Pittsburgh to send as much material as possible, even though it was not all assembled into GEP kits.

Upon receipt, the material was distributed with dispatch by our Zimbabwean partners, who separately received patterns to make cloth face masks through social media and other communications with The Nyadire Connection (TNC) team. (TNC is a faith-based, nonprofit partner of the United Methodist Mission in Nyadire, and is coordinated by Christ United Methodist Church (CUMC) in Bethel Park, PA.)





Immediately, primary school teachers made masks with the fresh supplies; they and their students also began making masks available to nearby medical facilities and schools. At the Hope of Hope (HOHO) orphanage at Nyadire, a student who is studying to be a tailor leads the efforts to teach the residents to make masks and sanitary pads. The student, who has received a Sister Rut scholarship, is giving back to the community by imparting new skills to the HOHO orphans.

GEP programs are now operating overseas at seven schools and waiting mother programs at the hospital and clinics served by TNC. In Pittsburgh, fundraising continues toward providing schools with sewing sponsorships that fund vocational sewing skills programs.

THANK YOU

The GEP team thanks **ALL** contributors in and out of Pittsburgh for their donations of money, fabric, and sewing machines, and for their fundraising and assembly of GEP and hygiene kits. The bottom line: Women and girls will **not** be stopped, and continue to provide the foundation of family well being in our world. In as little as two days, our Zimbabwean partners distributed supplies and set up face mask production, modeling for Americans an amazing resourcefulness in an environment of extreme scarcity.

NEXT STEPS

For now, the GEP team is considering its options in a post-COVID era, including local sourcing of supplies. We still plan to hold a fall 2020 event and will update you on particulars according to guidance from public health authorities. During the pandemic, in-kind donations will not be accepted, but please consider saving your machines and other sewing items for future collection. Checks are still accepted, made payable to Christ United Methodist Church (CUMC) in Bethel Park with *TNC GEP Sewing Sponsorship* in the memo line. Please send your donation to CUMC, c/o Richard Dickey, at 44 Highland Road, Bethel Park, PA 15102.

