



Inmates turning their lives around by sewing Days for Girls kits

Inmates of a Victorian women's prison are transforming both their own lives and those of women and girls in developing countries by helping international not-for-profit organisation Days for Girls in its mission to turn periods into pathways.

THREE years ago, prison staff from the industries section of the Tarrengower Prison, in Maldon, Vic, contacted the Days for Girls Melbourne Victoria Chapter Inc. to investigate the possibility of a partnership. They offered to provide labour and machines, if Days for Girls would provide raw materials and training.

The industries section team saw the benefits of inmates becoming involved in such a project, which makes a life-changing difference to girls and women in developing countries. Without the sustainable and washable sanitary kits Days for Girls provides, many girls are forced to cease education or work while menstruating. As a result, many end up leaving employment or schooling to stay home permanently.

As part of their rehabilitation, inmates are asked to select projects to take part in that capture their attention and allow them to develop new skills. Days for Girls volunteers set up a day workshop to show the scope of the work involved to inmates considering taking part.

There were several teething problems at the start, however, the program has

now been running for three years with great success. There is now a strong nucleus team sewing components for the kits up to four days each week.

Quality assurance has been an important part of training, as most inmates have little to no education and limited work experience. Now the more experienced members of the team help carefully check the work of others, fuelled by their desire to help the less fortunate, ensuring everyone is producing an exceptionally high standard of work.

“I feel my skills are being used for something very useful, helping keep girls in developing countries stay in school and complete their education,” said one inmate who is involved.

Their work on the project is helping prepare them to turn their lives around once they return to the community. Many participating inmates have even indicated they wish to continue their work with Days for Girls after their sentence has finished.

“Their sewing skills have grown enormously, their enthusiasm to be involved is inspirational and their self-worth has grown exponentially,” chapter president Margaret Cunningham said.

Days for Girls is supported by many Rotary clubs through sponsorship and fundraising activities. Margaret has given many talks to Rotary and Probus clubs, informing members of the Days for Girls program and activities. •

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RIGHT: An inmate from Tarrengower Women's Prison sewing Days for Girls kits. **OPPOSITE AND BELOW:** The washable feminine hygiene kits enable girls and women in developing nations to continue attending school and work throughout their menstrual cycle.

