

TOGETHER, WE

TRANSFORM



# The fabric of a better life

Sewaid, an Australian charity founded and operated by PDG Tony Castley and his wife Sandra, helps women across the globe escape from poverty, by giving them the skills and equipment they need to make a better life for themselves and their family.

The Sewaid program is more than just a sewing program. By teaching basic dressmaking for simple clothes most suitable for sale in their local area, maintenance of their machine and hand tools, as well as the purchasing of supplies, business and sales basics, banking and bookkeeping, women learn all skills they need to start a small home business in dressmaking or alterations and repair. The program relies heavily on volunteer teachers, who donate their time and expertise, as well as fund their own travel to each program.

More recently, permanent workshops have been established in several countries, including the Philippines, Uganda, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. The workshops are planned and run so that participants are self-sufficient within a short time; selling what they are making and paying sewers a fair salary.



**PICTURED:** Sewaid recently establishing a permanent sewing facility for the employees of tuna canning factory Soltuna Ltd. in Noro, Solomon Islands.

## Sewaid in the Solomons

A tuna-canning factory in Noro, Solomon Islands, recently contacted Sewaid about establishing a permanent sewing facility, where their shift workers could sew and craft.

Soltuna Ltd. employs around 1500 women, who come from all over the Solomon Islands and stay one year at the factory on contract. Between shifts, the women spend their time at the Soltuna hostel with little to do, as Noro is a very small town in a remote area.

Sewaid agreed, and shipped 14 new sewing machines, four overlockers and large quantities of fabrics, haberdashery and craft items to Soltuna. In March 2018, six Sewaid volunteer teachers, led by Vera Loindas, of the Rotary Club of Holroyd, NSW, flew in to teach the sewing and craft courses.

Soltuna prepared a room at the women's hostel and 36 women turned up for the course. They were split into four groups of novice, intermediate and advanced sewers, plus a craft group.

Over the nine-day course, 100 garments were produced as well as a

table of craft items. A young man from the factory's engineering department was also trained to repair and service the machines. He trained with 12 old sewing machines; the women's own machines, which they brought in.

A presentation night was held on the last day of training, where the women had a chance to parade their garments, receive their certificates and engage in fun and frivolity to celebrate their new-found skills.

The final day coincided with International Women's Day, so the trainers joined the island women in a 2km dawn march, followed by further celebrations at the community centre.

Soltuna has made the training room available permanently so the women can continue to sew outside their shifts, and the young engineer is rostered to inspect and maintain the machines every two weeks. The room is also available to other women from local community and church groups.

In May 2019, Sewaid shipped an additional four sewing machines and four overlockers to the hostel, along with special fabrics to make feminine hygiene kits. •