

WFP-Australia sends sewing machines to Imaelone Village, Vanuatu

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Our members and villagers on the island of Tanna, one of eighty islands that make up Vanuatu

Five years ago, WFP Australia donated manual sewing machines to Imaelone Village, on Western Tanna. The women used them while sitting on mats on the floor of their women's center. Recently, Ingleburn High School in Sydney upgraded their sewing room machines and graciously donated their used machines to WFP Sydney.

We transported these to Vanuatu, where FFWPU missionary, Rev. Dueg Yoo Jong, had arranged for electricity to be connected to the community center in the village.

Upon our arrival, we ceremonially presented the seven machines to Tess, the wife of the Taffeta Province president, Nakau Natuman, who accepted them on behalf of the village. Great excitement ensued as men brought tables from homes in the village to be used as worktables. Women quickly covered them with colorful cloths. We unboxed the machines, put them in place and plugged them in.

Celine began with the basics, filling the bobbin. The sound of the bobbin filling caused shrieks of delight to explode from all the women. Threading the machine correctly was a very serious affair and then came the time to sew, again the speed of the action caused shrieks of delight and wonder.

Men stood and wandered around in the background, quite curious and a little in awe of what their women were experiencing.

Everyone was eager to have her turn at this newfangled machine. Many women proved to be quite adept and soon the sound of the racing machines filled the air as one by one they took them over. Brightly colored fabrics seemed to suddenly appear from nowhere, as some women rushed home and returned, eyes wide with determination and the intention of sewing new curtains, new dresses, new tablecloths. There seemed to be no stopping them.

For those not at a machine we began to teach them to crochet, suggesting that they start with simple squares, recommending the resulting products as good cleaning cloths. When we returned the next day great progress had been made with the crocheting but cleaning cloths were not the desired product. Everyone wanted to make a bag.

On the first day, we held a four-hour session before packing up for the day. The following day we held a six-hour session interspersed by lunch, which the women had prepared. The bag of fabrics and notions was unpacked on this day. The women were initially hesitant to investigate but quietly and surely each piece of fabric was taken by the end of our session with skirts, cushion covers, shirts, and curtains, all in

the process of being made. Embroidery settings were shown to one woman who sewed and sewed until unfortunately her machine burnt out.



Celine Okada helps guide a villager through use of the machine.

Overall, it was a wonderful experience for all. To provide an activity for women to come together and be productive is a wonderful thing. While caring for their babies, toddlers and small children, they can create items for their families, for gifts or for sale. To hear the sound of women chattering and laughing as sewing machines buzzed and children played and cried in the background was truly a joyous experience. Even the local dogs gathered around us and one puppy slept while resting its head on a skein of yarn.

We felt privileged to be given the opportunity to interact with such warm, generous and proud people. It was a shame that it was only for two days, but we certainly hope to visit them again, next time with more fabrics patterns, notions, machine spare parts and reading glasses. Many of the women's eyesight seemed to be poor. At one stage, the women were sharing a pair of glasses, handing them around to aid in the threading of needles and even crocheting. To this end, I ask members and friends if they could please donate some of this type of item to be included in our next shipment of goods to Vanuatu.



The seven sewing machines delivered to the villagers.