

INSTITCH

THE NEWSLETTER OF SEWING A PEACE



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Kyrgyzstan, a Land Behind

Kyrgyzstan, and beyond, by David Schweidenback

In preparing for this newsletter I tried to reach out to a number of programs from a number of years ago trying to get some feedback as to the longevity of the sewing machines we ship. Programs are always excited when they receive a shipment but my goal was to ask how they would feel about it six or eight years later. ¿ Did it really help? The main problem in this attempt was finding some degree of connectivity. People change emails addresses and in many of the places we work, people are not looking at their email every day in fact might not even have it.

In 2008 with the aid of a Peace Corps volunteer named Roberto Hernandez Pedals for Progress shipped 25 sewing machines to Cholopon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan. I know Roberto is back in the United States, pretty sure he's in Los Angeles, do you have any idea how many Roberto Hernandez there are in Los Angeles and the surrounding area? This type of research is fraught with dead ends.

Then one day not too long ago an email appeared from Nurila Choloponkulova from SOS Kinderhof which ran the program in 2008. She certainly remember the program. It was designed to bring in women who needed to learn a skill, teach them to sew and then return them to their villages to practice their newfound talents. Nurila understood what I was looking for but these ladies left to go home with their sewing machines eight years ago.

With a bit of searching and traveling around Nurila was

able to find eight women who still owned the sewing machine and had been using it every day to earn a living since 2008! I was astounded, at least a third of the sewing machines functioning after eight years! And quite possibly many more it's just she hasn't yet found them.

And the final result of my searching here is the incredible story of Jipargul.

Jipargul is a mother of six children. Her husband passed away leaving her with the responsibility to care and provide for their children. Because of the time needed to care for six children, she had not been able to find steady



employment, making it difficult for their basic needs to be met. She could not find any help in her small village in the mountains, so she came to the Family Strengthening Project (FSP) to receive training and support.

Through FSP, she enrolled in sewing classes where she learned how to professionally produce and alter clothing, traditional Kyrgyz mats/blankets and souvenirs. After completing her courses, she was one of the only villagers in her area to know how to perform this important work. Because of this, she went from being an unemployed struggling mother to a successful business owner providing for the needs of her community.

Without the donated sewing machines from Sewing Peace, none of this would have been possible. Not only did these machines allow for the Family Strengthening Project to offer courses, extra machines were given to beneficiaries like Jipargul so that they could work at home while raising their children.

With the success of her business, Jipargul was able to move out of her two room apartment to a larger house. The generous donations from Sewing Peace have changed the lives of Jipargul and her family, and ultimately the community that she is serving stitch by stitch.

footnote: with connection to SOS Kinderhof reestablished, and the continuing generous support of our donors, it was just a natural instinct that we had to make another shipment of sewing machines. July 18, 2016 an additional 30 sewing machines arrived in Cholopon-Ata to further promote the Family Strengthening Program of SOS Children Village Cholpon-Ata. This is an expensive program as everything going to Kyrgyzstan must be sent airfreight, but with such a record of success, how can we not continue the program. This second shipment will be distributed in the Issyk-Kul region.

15 Years of P4P Collections, An Appreciative Retrospective by Jackie Johnson, Granby CT

Five years ago, I wrote an article for In Gear that began as follows-

It was a small article appearing in Hope Magazine (long out of business) that first prompted me to call Pedals for Progress in September of 2002. The article told the story of Dave Schweidenback's launching P4P following his Peace Corps experience and referenced the 57,000 bicycles that had been collected and shipped to partners in sixteen countries, at that point.

So, to take you back in time a bit, it was a year beyond 9/11 and our nation was on the verge of war in the fall of 2002. I was feeling a burning need to do something positive and meaningful, ideally involving my husband and two children who were then ten and twelve. The article was so inspiring that I immediately called P4P and said I wanted to orga-

nize a collection. Despite my being further from High Bridge (in northwestern Connecticut) than any previous collection, the response was positive and I was encouraged to organize a spring collection. I ultimately spoke with Dave and explained that I really didn't want to wait until spring. He was reluctantly convinced and our first Pedals for Progress collection was held at Holcomb Farm, an arts and environmental center, in Granby, CT on December 7, 2002. A very chilly 42 bikes were collected and processed that day, by an enthusiastic group of volunteers who have shown up every year since.

Five years from the time of that first article, we just held our 15th collection, with a grand total of over 2,000 bikes and



more than 100 sewing machines collected to date. While making a difference for individuals and communities in the developing world has always been at the heart of our 15 years of collecting, there has been an unexpected benefit in the community created here at home. Many donors are moved by the opportunity to build a bridge from our small Connecticut town and to touch lives abroad and offer to help spread the word about future collections. Our dedicated group of volunteers has grown to include a long list of



folks who have shared email addresses and offer to post flyers and share through social media each year. Stories shared by donors, like that of the bike of a lost and beloved daughter, the sewing machine from a mother or grandmother, have created meaningful moments and stories that have fed and inspired our group of volunteers.

This year, we welcomed two new volunteers who took the lead in coordinating the Granby collection. Kate and Rachel are high school students and National Honor Society Members at the local high school. They eagerly publicized the event and brought in a new group of student volunteers. Kate and Rachel plan to use this year's experience to mentor two students from the class behind theirs', continuing to grow a committed community of young people.

Being part of the P4P community for 15 years has been a privilege and great source of joy. We here in Granby look forward to gearing up for many more!

New Partner in Tanzania

Pedals for Progress has a new partner in Tanzania: the She Can Foundation, SCF (formerly known as the Tanzania Women and Youth Development Society, (TWYDS). The



foundation is a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded in 1994 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, West Africa. She Can has programs in education, health, business, agriculture, natural resources, and policy advocacy.

In June 2016 we shipped 74 sewing machines to She Can. SCF will offer training in the use and maintenance of the sewing machines and then distribute the machines to the people they've trained with the goal of improving their standard of living.

P4P picks partners based not only on their sewing machine or bicycle programs, but also on their other projects in their communities. Our partners often focus, for example, on education, business, or the environment. SCF has programs in all these areas. But from SCF we hear stories we do not

hear from our other partners. SCF founder Sophia Mwakagenda has more than once been called on to rescue girls from underage marriages. These marriages are illegal in Tanzania but still occur because of tradition and because of the poverty of the girls' parents. In April 2016 Sophia was approached by the mother of an 11-year-old Masai girl who, for 16 goats, had been sold into marriage to a 75-year-old man. With the help of the police, Sophia had the girl released from the arrangement and brought back to school. We welcome the She Can Foundation as a new P4P partner.



Good luck with the Sewing Peace project and all your other excellent work.

Tinkerers Wanted!

When we solicit sewing machines at collections and from the public at large we always specifically ask for working sewing machines. Therefore a high percentage of the sewing machines which are collected by Sewing Peace are in perfect working order. There are 25% to 30% of those we



collect which need to be looked at. Many of the questionable machines are in good working order and then there are others which need varying amounts of repair from

the replacement of a belt to serious surgery. That's where Dennis Smyth comes in.

Dennis, a retired Exxon system engineer, has become an incredibly important cog in the wheel of Sewing Peace over the years having repaired hundreds of sewing machines for shipment overseas. As diligently as Dennis can work on the machines selected for repair, with our growing production of sewing machines, he needs help. Just as we have many people who collect bicycles and sewing machines we need another one or two are willing to learn the skills necessary to be able to diagnose and repair sewing machines.

New Partner in Fiji

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In a shipment of bicycles to Fiji sponsored by the Friends of Fiji, Sewing Peace included 20 sewing machines which were donated to Rise beyond the Reef, a Seattle-based non-profit organization focused on improving the educational infrastructure, health, safety and economic development opportunities for women and children throughout rural communities of the South Pacific.

<<http://risebeyondthereef.org>>



A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS AND MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS

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