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Sew Love volunteers make dresses for impoverished girls

By Elizabeth Marie Himchak
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NORTH COUNTY — Once a month, a group of women gathers at the Poway home of Cynthia Rhine to cut dress pattern pieces out of colorful cotton fabric to help little girls they will never meet.

They then take the fabric pieces with them so they can sew dresses over the next month from the comfort of their homes.

This variation on the sewing bee has led to the creation of over 300 dresses in the past year that quite possibly are the only new clothing girls in countries such as Uganda and Kenya will ever own.

The dresses not only clothe the girls, but help protect them.

"When we give a girl a nice dress, it keeps away predators; they will not steal (the girls) as often," Rhine said she has heard from missionaries who deliver the dresses to impoverished countries.

In these Third World societies, girls are considered to be "non-per-



Juli Edwards, Kathie Browning, Cynthia Rhine, Teri Rebelez, Cathie Chludzinski and Kathy Lahr with dresses they made. **BERT RHINE**

sons," she said. But if the girl has a pretty new dress, she appears to be more valued by her family and consequently gains protection.

Rhine said the group of around 15 women, mostly from Poway and Rancho Bernardo, in the Sew Love group do not make clothes for boys because "they are treated like royalty" by their families since they are deemed important. Boys

are given nicer clothes.

Sew Love was started by Rancho Bernardo resident Diane Hamilton in September 2023. While she has stepped away from making the dresses, she still collects them from the volunteers and delivers them to North Coast Church in Vista.

The church sponsors around eight mission trips a year to places like Haiti, Guatemala, Mexico,

Costa Rica, the Philippines and various countries in Africa, such as Uganda and Kenya.

Its mission trip volunteers go to villages and directly give the girls the dresses made by Sew Love and similar groups, according to Rhine.

"What inspired me, was a few years ago I saw a random post (on social media) about an old woman who was more than 100 and was sewing dresses for little girls in Third World countries," Hamilton said. "I thought, I want to be productive like that."

Hamilton said she looked into various things she could do, and starting an old-fashioned sewing bee appealed to her, even though her sewing skills were limited.

"I thought women could share doing this together in a unique community-type of thing," she said.

The dresses have to be made only from cotton since it is the fabric that best withstands the way the clothing is handwashed in rivers.

The dresses also must have straps or ties at the shoulders and no elastic, buttons, zippers or Velcro since

the girls will not be able to repair these since they lack the sewing skills. If buttons are included, they can only be decorative, Rhine said.

The fabric must also be bright and colorful, since that is what people in these areas prefer, she added.

Hamilton recruited some members and they initially met at her church in Rancho Peñasquitos to cut fabric and sew. But lugging sewing machines was an issue and the room was not always available.

After about a year, Rhine offered her Poway home as a meeting place to lay out patterns and cut fabric.

"The whole purpose of the group I started was to help these little girls," Hamilton said. "This will be the only brand new dress most ever receive, so we want to do our best work."

They meet from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on the first Friday of each month.

Sew Love is accepting new volunteers. The group is also accepting donations of cotton fabric and sewing supplies. For details, email Rhine at Cynthia@brmarketing.com.