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Cloud Rosa keeps girls at school

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When Somerset West resident Claudia Konicke found out that 10% of South African school girls between 12 and 18 years of age miss five school days each month - or drop out of school completely - because they cannot afford feminine hygiene ware when they start to menstruate, she was galvanised into action.

"Last year in October I came across an internet article about this," she said. "Because they cannot afford sanitary pads, they use old clothes, rags, leaves or even socks filled with sand instead. This is where the health issue comes into play as well."



Somerset West resident Claudia Konicke, founder of the Cloud Rosa project, hard at work sewing reusable sanitary pads for distribution to school girls who do not have access to feminine hygiene ware.

"This information disturbed me and I decided I wanted to do something to help. I searched the internet and came across washable sanitary pads," she said, and so Ms Konicke embarked on a project to make reusable sanitary pads, consisting of an absorbent multi-layer terry-cloth and cotton or flannel core, covered by a cotton outer, and a final layer of waterproof polyurethane laminate (PUL) fabric.

With proper care and cleaning, the pads can be re-used for two to three years, and are ecologically preferable to the single-use disposable variety, according to Ms Konicke.

She learned to sew late in life - at the age of 44 - after settling in South Africa from Germany nine years ago, but she set about prototyping her reusable sanitary pads, named Cloud Rosa.



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Unsure if the pads would be accepted or even how to distribute them, she sought advice from Sister Phillipa Nomalinde Mvambi at St Gabriels' Catholic Church in Gugulethu, where Claudia had been involved for some years.

“When I showed her the sample pad that I had made, and asked if she was interested in getting pads for the girls, she was very excited. She said this was a wonderful project and asked if I could even include women from her area to sew the pads so they could earn an income,” said Ms Konicke.

“This was the moment that changed my life. I had to make a plan to transform an idea into a business or at least a project that would create jobs and feed people.”

In need of materials for the project, Ms Konicke turned to Facebook, and posted a plea in the Somerset West Community Information forum.

“The responses, encouragement and support were overwhelming. I got more than 30 calls from people offering to donate unused towels, linen, and sheets,” she said. “Not only did I get a lot of material but was also referred to people and organisations who might be interested in the pads, too.

“I realised that there is a need right here in our townships, too.”

Ms Konicke is now in collaboration with other community organisations such as Helderberg Baby Saver - a flyer will be included in the sanitary pad packs informing women unable to care for their babies of the possibility of leaving their baby in a safe place - and PATCH Child Abuse Centre, which needs washable sanitary pads.

According to Ms Konicke the project is in its infancy, but there are a number of possible future distribution mechanisms: “These include approaching schools to buy for their pupils, direct sales to users, donations for sets to be given to specific persons, approach businesses to buy packs or single items for donating to people or institutions of their own choice, information or sales tables at schools or other functions, or a simple 80/20 business model whereby 80% of the pads produced will be sold to fund donating the other 20%.”

The pads will come in sets of three, with a plastic zip-lock bag in which to store used pads, and detailed instructions for use and care of the pads, packed in a drawstring bag.

In the meantime, in order for the project to gain traction, Ms Konicke needs more material and sewing machines. “I need donations of old towels, linen such as table cloths, cotton cloth, Velcro for securing the pads, and PUL material,” Ms Konicke said. “I also will need sewing machines if I’m to turn this into a job creation project.”

“A Cloud Rosa Facebook page and a dedicated website will follow shortly, but in the meantime, people can contact me via email on Claudia@cloudrosa.com or call me on 084 871 6611 if they would like to contribute,” Ms Konicke concluded.