

Newsletter

Despite recent distressing events, like the economic downturn and natural disasters, it is reassuring to know that people are still dedicating their precious time to helping other people and making a difference.

A lot of wonderful things have happened in the last couple of months. I travelled to the red light district of Calcutta (Kolkata) to meet with a New Zealand couple Annie and Kerry Hilton. They have now been there 10 years and have set up a factory producing jute bags and tee shirts. They are taking young girls and mothers out of the sex industry and giving them full time employment, a steady wage and all the training and support they need to transform and empower their own lives. The organisation is called Freeset and they currently employ 150 women and are about to employ another 100.

I was introduced to a number of the women and girls and got to hear their life stories. There was a common thread. All were from situations of extreme poverty; the women were sold as children to the bonded labour man (money lender) and into prostitution as teenagers (the family's only access to capital). If their families had access to best practice microfinance (see www.opportunity.org.au) most would not be there.

You can now buy Freeset bags from the Virtual Bazaar (no minimum order) or from Freeset (www.freesetglobal.com), minimum order 100 bags. They can print company logos, greetings for conventions or names etc for birthdays and weddings.

It's almost the end of the financial year and all of us have felt the fallout from the Global financial crisis, downturn and recession. Friends and families are losing their jobs, investments and also losing their value. For many the natural reaction is to sit tight and wait it out, however I'm also hearing about lots of great initiatives that people have taken to make a difference and help out.

One colleague, a former CFO of a large corporation, gives his time 2 evenings a week manning a crisis line and giving financial advice and support to those who phone in.

Another colleague is supporting a new initiative to raise awareness and support for business managers and professionals who have abruptly found themselves unemployed without an income and with very highly gifted lifestyles which are suddenly completely unaffordable. The incident of suicide is rising drastically and in this group so the support being given is invaluable.

A number of local groups will be offering services to deal with these issues, including Lifeline and Salvation Army, so ask around in your area. Homelessness has easily doubled and all organisations offering services will be looking for volunteers.

For the last 3 months I have been helping build a business model for a fantastic charity called StreetSwags. They have been making water proof sleeping bags, much like an Aussie swag, and distributing them free of charge to the homeless Australia wide. This charity was started by a young Brisbane mother and teacher, Jean Madden, who saw the need and decided to make a difference.

StreetSwags has now distributed almost 12,000 swags and is in the process of distributing more with the general need escalating so is their need for funding. If you would like to support them so find out more go to www.streetswag.org.au .

Auzzie Mozzie, a charity focused on securing mosquito nets to prevent malaria in struggling countries, has found great success despite the difficult times. Girl Guides Australia has kindly supported their endeavour and has shown great commitment to the Auzzie Mozzie philosophy; identifying a challenge and empowering self and others though being part of the solution. We are expecting a great number of young Girl Guides to become supporters of this brilliant charity, with the Girl Guide Jubilee fast approaching. If you're a Girl Guide, have a daughter who is one or know of some in your local area perhaps they'd like to become part of the Auzzie Mozzie solution (www.auzziemozzie.com).

We sincerely hope and wish you the best in these hard times, but remember the tireless people endeavouring to improve this world and hopefully you can become one and truly make a difference as well. Best wishes.