

■ PURLS OF WISDOM: Plastic milk bags can be fashioned into sleeping mats

NORTHUMBERLAND TODAY

If you can crochet, you can help quake victims

JULY 29/10

CECILIA NASMITH

Northumberland Today

HAMILTON TOWNSHIP — Attention all crocheters who want to help a good cause: Dorothy Harnden has just the thing for you.

The Hamilton Township resident is currently keeping busy by crocheting sleeping mats out of milk bags for children left homeless by January's earthquake in Haiti.

That outer milk bag that holds the three smaller one-litre bag is what she prefers, though people engaged in this pursuit have been known to use shopping bags and even those sleeves your home-delivered newspapers come in.

Harnden is not sure where the idea originally came from, but she first heard about it at a Women's Institute convention. Her daughter has also sent her a newspaper article from London about a woman who made these mats to protect African children from the parasites they risked in sleeping on the ground.

A knitter and crocheter her-

self, Harnden began saving her milk bags until she could attend a workshop and learn how this is done.

It all starts by trimming the outer milk bags and cutting them into a length. Harnden has perfected a cut that goes on an angle to turn one milk bag into a 15-foot length of two-inch-wide plastic that she can crochet with a larger size-6 or -7 hook.

For a 30-by-48-inch child's mat, she makes a chain of 52 stitches, then does simple single-crochet rows. It would take longer rows to make a 36-by-60-inch adult's mat.

She cuts up 15 to 20 milk bags at a time, winds the strips into a ball (like yarn) and goes to work. Even if she only has time to do two or three rows, that large crochet hook produces results quickly.

Because it is an unfamiliar material, getting the tension even has been tricky. But she figures a child who might otherwise be sleeping on the cold ground won't care if the mat is a bit wider or a bit narrower here or there.

Getting the bags has proven

to be no problem. Her daughter is saving them from the nursing home where she works, and various members of the Cold Springs Pastoral Charge (three churches strong) are also setting theirs aside for her.

"Last week, I got 15 bags from church on Sunday and, by Monday, they were gone," she said. Fortunately, her daughter soon came along with another pile.

The colours have been interesting — red bags for whole milk, brown bags for chocolate, varying shades of blue and white for skim and 2% milk. It all comes together for an interesting look, and the mat itself is sturdy.

As to where she plans to take the finished mats for distribution, the newspaper article mentioned a church that is not far from where her daughter lives.

Harnden's concern is that there are so many children who need sleeping mats, and her lone crochet hook seems so inadequate to the task. She would love to hear from people who would like to help,

from those who want to cut the bags and prepare them for her to those who would like to crochet along.

It's not hard, she said, and she'd be happy to show anyone how it's done. She'd love to think of groups forming, like old-fashioned sewing circles, to produce something that the homeless people of Haiti could use very badly.

It's a great project for clubs and church groups, Harnden said. And even younger people interested in a greener world might like to get involved, because a single adult's mat can keep up to 300 milk bags out of a landfill where they would otherwise sit decaying over a 20-year period.

Anyone interested in finding out more is welcome to call Harnden at 905-373-6004.

cnasmith@northumberlandtoday.com



CECILIA NASMITH Northumberland Today

Hamilton Township resident Dorothy Harnden shows off the almost-finished child's sleeping mat she is making for a homeless Haitian child out of — of all things — cut-up milk bags.



www.northumberlandtoday.com