

# Bear Comfort by The Reverend Ken Gray

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Since 1998 approximately one hundred men and women, mostly located in the Western Communities, have produced over 26,500 bears for children in over 50 countries around the world.

It's worth pausing for a moment to consider this momentous statistic. Biblical miracles employ equally large numbers. Four thousand or five thousand men, women and children were fed from loaves and fishes, with twelve baskets left afterward. Here is a miracle of compassion happening right here in our own back yard, facilitated by men and women for children.

**26,500 bears have been produced in eight years through the industry of around one hundred men and women scattered throughout Canada. Amazing!**

**Some of the 26,500 Bears that have been produced in just eight years by volunteers! Amazing!**



Founder Melody McQuitty got the ball rolling in partnership with Christian Blind Mission International to distribute emblems of hope and love to children in need. In recent years it has been Sylvia Hatfield who has carried the torch for youth in need. Joined by her husband Don, Sylvia gathers with members of the Church of the Advent, folks from other local churches and some with no church connection at all. They all see a need and want to respond.

**The morning I visited a dozen or so volunteers worked busily at cutting and sorting fabric. The project of the day was bears for Pakistan,**

**especially for the northern emergency camps where stories of children facing amputation without anaesthesia stretch the realm of reality.**

Busy volunteers serged and sewed bright coloured fabric. Some wrapped medical bandages. Others sorted and sized and secured decorative elements to each product. Still more placed Canadian flags in highly visible places on each item going out from this factory dubbed by some 'Sylvia's Sweatshop'.

The stuffed bears are carefully assembled and finished as if each one was destined for a relative. All these however go to strangers. The attention to detail is impressive.

**They are designed with the special needs of recipients in mind. For victims of landmines care is given to the strings that bind the bag carrying the bear. Where only one hand is available, special design is required. Where the recipient is blind the face must be tactile and the fabric varied to the touch. For those who can see facial expressions must be encouraging, happy and full of love.**

In the short span of seven years Canada Comforts (first called Bears and Bags) has switched distribution away from CBMI and now utilizes the Compassionate Warehouse in Victoria, a special ministry associated with the Church of the Nazarene. With other non-profit organizations, they are able to package and transport the bears to local organizations in afflicted regions of the world. This eliminates the possibility of black market abuse, theft or destruction of these specially crafted items.

Destinations over the years have included Afghanistan, Uganda, the Philippines, Guatemala, China, former Soviet bloc countries and El Salvador.

A final note. I picked up a colourful toque. I noticed the careful stitching, assembled and finished with love. I would have been proud to give it to my own children when younger. It was for an AIDS baby. I knew where the clothing had come from. I knew where it was destined. I knew why it was made. I felt good. Something was working out in the midst of global tragedy. ***People working together can and do make a difference!***  
***For more information on this wonderful project please contact Sylvia Hatfield through the Church of the Advent in Colwood at 250.474.3031.***