

Front cover

Operation Noah's Ark – a Berinsfield initiative

- Day care for HIV orphans in Kenya
- An opportunity for young people in the UK to make a difference to their own lives – as well as the lives of others

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Noah's Ark is a day care centre at Mumias in western Kenya, which supports children orphaned by HIV. Currently located in an old roadside kiosk, it is to be knocked down by the authorities, since it is too close to the main road. Land has been donated, but a new purpose-built day care centre still needs to be built on it.

Noah's Ark was originally set up and supported by a single generous family, but the money is running out. Their work is being taken on by the Nasio Trust, recently set up for this purpose. However, the Trust is young and is therefore still without substantial funds.

Operation Noah's Ark has been set up by the Campus Youth Centre in Berinsfield, Oxfordshire, as a means of helping these Kenyan orphans, while also helping youth centre members to acquire new life skills and work-related knowledge.

Operation Noah's Ark hopes to enable a group of these young people to travel to Kenya, where they will assist with the work of Noah's Ark and help with creating the new day care centre. They will learn at first hand what it really means to be hard-up, putting their own lives in perspective, and adding to the progress they are already making towards a fulfilling adult life.

Their commitment has added value for the Berinsfield community, as anti-social behaviour reduces, as well as added value for local employers seeking employable young people. Operation Noah's Ark has the support of Oxfordshire County Council, which runs the Youth Centre, and of the Police.

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Operation Noah's Ark

Operation Noah's Ark provides the opportunity for young people at the Campus Youth Centre, in Berinsfield, Oxfordshire, UK, not only to raise funds, but also to participate in creating Noah's Ark itself, by visiting Mumias, and getting their hands dirty. When they visit, some will assist in construction and decorating, some with child care, and some may even spend a week teaching English. Hopefully, this will not be a one-off initiative, but a continuing responsibility – and a continuing opportunity - for Berinsfield youth.

The local benefits

The benefit to the orphans is obvious, but the benefit to the members of the Campus Youth Centre and to the Berinsfield community may not be.

The problems of the young in today's society hardly need spelling out. The reasons for the disengagement and boredom of a growing percentage of our youth are not to be debated here, but there are many young people whose perception of the world and their potential roles in it are limited by local horizons. This is a particular problem in single-economy communities such as Berinsfield.

The young in these communities may have all the potential in the world, but they often don't believe it, and too frequently descend into the type of behaviour which leads others to believe it too. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, a circle from which escape seems more unlikely every day.

Involvement with Operation Noah's Ark is providing an escape route, as the young people involved develop as socially-aware citizens, who will certainly achieve what they had thought out of reach. They are already doing so.

As these young people prepare for their trip, they are acquiring new skills, developing confidence in themselves, and contributing fresh ideas, for fund-raising in particular. In short, they are occupied doing something worthwhile, and in the process they are growing as people. Operation Noah's Ark provides an alternative to anti-social behaviour, with benefits for all.

This work can be a force for good for many years to come, and has immediate benefits for four identifiable groups

- The orphans in Kenya
- The young people themselves, as they develop responsibly
- Their community, as they occupy their time meaningfully
- Local employers, who see an increase in employable young people.

Operation Noah's Ark therefore has a unique opportunity to be an influence for good in two places at once.

Involvement gets results

Kenya is a long way from Berinsfield, but youth centre members quickly set to work to improve their understanding of the HIV-infected communities that make Noah's Ark important.

The volunteers are aged 15 to 18, although a couple of slightly older young men have also come forward. Their extra maturity is highly valued.

The group started to plan what needed to be done before they could hope to contribute to solving the problem. Everyone contributes ideas, virtually every week, to a flip chart, which is now groaning with good ideas. In particular, everyone started working on fund-raising and publicity, for it was recognised early on that getting over there would cost money, and that only an amazing effort would bring results.

One sub-group has designed a logo for The Nasio Trust, which operates Noah's Ark.

The members of the Operation Noah's Ark group are writing diaries about their involvement. These will provide invaluable memories one day, but will also produce revenue when they are edited down to create a book about the project's life. This will be sold to help enable another group from the Campus Youth Centre to go out to Kenya and take things further, perhaps building a playground for the orphans, perhaps helping to set up other Noah's Arks at new locations.

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The Nasio Trust

The Nasio Trust runs the Noah's Ark day care centre at Mumias, in western Kenya.

The Trust was set up in the UK in late 2003 to provide day care for children in Kenya, initially aged 3 to 8, who have been orphaned by HIV. The trust aims to give these children loving day care, clothing, an education, a healthy diet, medical care when needed, and medical, nutritional and social counselling as they grow older.

As funds become available, the Nasio Trust wants to be able to provide care for more children than the sixteen now being cared for. (On the first day more than 60 children turned up for the fifteen places then available.)

We hope to extend our counselling for the children to include counselling for the children's overnight carers too. They are as crucial to the children's well-being as we are. If we can assist both in enhancing their ability to care for the children, and in restricting the spread of AIDS and HIV, then we shall have made a real contribution to the communities we seek to help.

Once Noah's Ark is fully developed and successful, we would like the opportunity to develop similar centres elsewhere in Kenya.

The Nasio Trust has applied to the UK Charities Commission for registration as a registered charity, and this is expected in May 2004. More information about The Nasio Trust may be found on the Internet, at www.thenasiotrust.org

The need for day care for HIV orphans

Unlike the UK, Kenya is not a welfare state. Education and medical care have to be paid for, and in a relatively poor country covering a large area, they are not necessarily available. Even if a school can be afforded, there is a massive stigma in Kenya towards children who have AIDS or HIV, or who come from families whose members have AIDS or HIV. Early in 2004 a school was reported in the press as suing the Kenyan government for allowing HIV-infected children to enter it as pupils.

It is not unusual to find a 12 year old trying to provide for orphaned siblings, or a grandmother trying to do the same. Some of them manage to make out. However, many do not, and the future for these children is bleak indeed. Orphanages are few and far between, and are seldom free. However, there is an alternative – a dedicated day care centre.

Noah's Ark has been set up so that these orphans can lead a normal life in homes with grandparents, older siblings or guardians to look after them - although they may not be able to feed them, or provide them with anything

more than love and warmth. The issue here is not willingness but affordability, since many rural people in western Kenya live at subsistence level.

A day care centre can supply what is missing, more than the basics which a poor rural family can provide.

Nancy Hunt
Chair, The Nasio Trust

Noah's Ark

Noah's Ark's needs are simple - ideally a classroom (two, when it grows) a kitchen, lavatory, staff room, a dining room, a medical care room, store room and a room for one on one counselling.

Apart from acquiring a new building, the Noah's Ark day care centre also needs equipment and even the most basic furnishings, such as desks, chairs, cupboards and blackboards for the children. Donations of these items would be greatly appreciated.

At the moment the children sit on uncomfortable stools of the wrong size, and use a low bench as a desk. They have no textbooks, pencils, pens, exercise books or uniforms. Most have no clothes, other than those given them by Noah's Ark.

A day at Noah's Ark

Noah's Ark has a full time teacher and a cook to run it day to day. Each day begins with classroom lessons, followed by play. During the day the children's medical needs are assessed and any sick children are taken for treatment. The most common illness is Malaria.

A normal meal includes ugali (maize meal, not unlike our porridge) or rice with meat or vegetables. For some of the children this will be their only meal for the day.

Support for Operation Noah's Ark

This appeal will help to equip and send young people from the Campus Youth Centre to Mumias. Any surplus funds will be donated directly to The Nasio Trust to help pay for the design, construction, equipment and operation of the new Noah's Ark Day Care Centre. Any funds received after the date of travel will be held in trust to help pay for future trips of a similar nature.

Corporate Support

We hope that local businesses will quickly see the value of engaging the energies of Berinsfield's young people, and of their developing useful skills and adult attitudes through their commitment to Operation Noah's Ark.

Obviously, we need help towards our travel costs, as a priority, but this might take any one of a number of forms.

- "Adoption" of one or more Campus Youth Centre members. This would involve the underwriting of their return airfare, and the "adopted" young person making a presentation to the Company about their visit. You might like to hear from them before they go as well.
- Donation of air miles.
- A straightforward donation of cash.

But we also need help

- To help train our young people to contribute in Kenya. Such training could take place at the Campus Youth Centre or in the workplace. Skills to be developed include:- bricklaying; plastering; carpentry and/or joinery; IT; child care; first aid, and personal skills such as presentation and team working.
- To give them relevant work experience
- To offer them the prospects of work, as they become more employable. Hope is so valuable.

Individual Support

Any of the corporate support initiatives would be of assistance. However, if you can join us in trying to spread the word, that would be so useful, too.

Donations and Contact

Cheques should be made out to 'Operation Noah's Ark' and sent to Joanne Garvey, Youth Worker, Campus Youth Centre, Wimblestraw Road, Berinsfield, Oxon OX10 7LZ. Mobile: 07984 419396. Email: youth@berinsfield.fslife.co.uk. Please contact Jo if you have queries.