

BERINSFIELD INITIATIVE

Operation Noah's Ark was set up by two Thames Valley police officers and the Campus Youth Centre, in Berinsfield, Oxfordshire, UK, as a means of helping Kenyan orphans, while also helping youth centre members to acquire new skills and work-related knowledge

Its aim is not only to raise funds, but also to participate in creating Noah's Ark itself, by visiting Mumias, and getting their hands dirty. Since November 2004, 25 young people have travelled to Kenya and assisted the work there. The work done ranged from site clearing, construction, decorating and cleaning, along with spending time with the children and assisting in their English lessons.

The youth centre members learned first hand what it really means to be hard up, seeing the challenges and obstacles faced by the children in Kenya helped them to put their own lives in perspective. Many young people have returned from Kenya calling their trip a "life-changing experience" and continue to give their support to The Nasio Trust.

Their commitment has added value for the Berinsfield community, as this positive involvement helps reduce anti-social behaviour. This also benefits 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.

If you have any questions about Operation Noah's Ark, including how to start a similar scheme in your area, please contact John Cornelius on john.cornelius@thenasiotrust.org

{/slide} {slide=A report of their visit to Kenya (November 2005)}

PC John Cornellius and Anti-social behaviour Co-ordinator Louise Russell flew out to Kenya in November with children from Berinsfield, to open an orphanage in Mumias for children who have lost their parents through HIV.

The joint initiative between Thames Valley Police and Oxfordshire Youth service, called Noah's Ark, was set up in 2004 as a diversion project from anti-social behaviour in Berinsfield. Last year young people of the Campus youth centre on the estate fundraised towards the new day-care centre.

PC Cornelius said: "Before our trip we were all keen to learn and help the Nasio Trust with their project of building the new centre. But after visiting the Noah's Ark day-care centre we returned with a new and even greater enthusiasm to help support the children.

"The effect the trip has had on Berinsfield's young people is remarkable. They are now more confident and appreciative of what they have here. Since returning from our trip last year they have attended and spoken at a conference and in school assemblies.

"After clearing the site and laying the foundations last year, we are proud to be officially opening the new Noah's Ark Day-Care Centre on our visit. The new centre will be able to accommodate double the amount of HIV orphaned children, and above all we are looking forward to spending time with them."

Louise Russell said: "This project and the fundraising events have really brought the people of Berinsfield together as a community. Because of last year's trip there was a lot more interest amongst the young people in going to Kenya this time round. Many of these were involved in fundraising throughout the year in one way or another and it was difficult to choose the seven that were finally selected."

They were followed to Africa by a BBC reporter who filmed a day-by-day account of the trip.

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Fundraising Caberet

