

The power of a simple gift

Operation Christmas Child

Operation Christmas Child (OCC) is the world's largest children's Christmas appeal. The programme is an initiative of Samaritan's Purse – a Christian relief and development organisation. Last year more than 1.2 million shoe boxes full of gifts were wrapped, packed and sent to children in need by children and adults in the UK. Each shoe box directly impacted the life of a disadvantaged child, reminding them that they have not been forgotten at Christmas time.

So let's get the facts correct straightaway, OCC is not just about what you can do for the relief and development charity Samaritan's Purse, but it's about what they can do for you. It's a partnership.

As schools begin to use a simple tool like OCC, enabling school children in the UK to impact children in need around our world, teachers can hold onto the truths written by Paul in Ephesians 3:20, 'Christ is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.'

Last year alone, around 7,000 schools got involved, packing and sending their own shoe boxes. Each student was given the chance to think outside of their own comfort zone and give to a child who may not get a gift all year, with no expectation of receiving one back.



Shoe boxes bursting with joy

After you've filled your shoe box, OCC links with churches and local charities abroad to ensure that each shoe box is hand delivered, asking nothing from the child in return. All shoe boxes are given to the neediest children regardless of their background or beliefs. Where appropriate the local partners will also make available a booklet of Bible stories, which includes an explanation of the true meaning of Christmas – the birth of Jesus Christ.

The impact on each child receiving a shoe box is invaluable. For some children it's the first time they've ever received a gift and for your students it's a chance to get geared up and bring a smile to the face of a child whose life is worlds apart.

The shoe boxes are distributed to Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and parts of Africa. In every country the children love their surprise gifts, and the parents are so happy to see the smiles on their children's faces.

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One father, from a displaced persons camp in Kosovo, gave this response to his children's excited faces, 'Thank you very much for bringing these gifts for my children. It makes a big difference as we don't have the money to buy them.'

Samaritan's Purse has many volunteers who can't wait to be invited to your school to share about their personal shoe box experiences and encourage students to get involved in creating their own shoe boxes, bursting with exciting gifts. They can provide your school with the support you need to kick-start your campaign.

Practically using OCC in schools

OCC can provide all involved with an exciting opportunity to share about the love of Jesus and how he cares for every individual. Why not tie OCC into a message about Jesus wanting each of us to care for those who are less fortunate. Base it around the verse, Matthew 25:40 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'



Pupils at Oakham School preparing shoe boxes

A shoe box story

One of the Samaritan's Purse staff, Trevor Hammond, recently flew out to visit Swaziland. His story perfectly captures the journey of a shoe box – from the love behind the person who packed the box in the UK, to the child who joyfully opened the boxful of surprises. It's amazing how simple the idea is and yet how God's love and heart for each child is revealed through every shoe box.

It was difficult to tell Edward's age as he lay motionless in an old hospital bed, both legs held in traction vertically upright above his head. Looking around the rest of the small ward, six other children were visible, some in beds and some simply lying on the floor.

Speaking to Edward's mother I found out that he was eight years old and passed him a shoe box. It took a while for Edward's mother to assist him opening the shoe box as he was in such an awkward position and could only just roll onto his side.

As he looked into the shoe box, Edward's face lit up. His expression changed from one of boredom to excitement when he discovered what was in the box. A truly wonderful sight!

Kneeling down, I started to play with several small cars that he'd already taken out of his shoe box. We found a small space on his bed near his face, which became our highway! He held a car and I pushed two around making Brmmmm, Brmmmm noises ... well that's the noise my car makes!

Edward started off with a smile, then a chuckle, then a giggle until all I needed to do was move my hand and he would burst out laughing.

His Mother also began to laugh as she encouraged him to push the cars around.

Outside the small room, Edwards's mother explained that he had jumped off a high wall and broken both his legs. He had been in hospital for two weeks and had another four weeks to go.

She thanked us for the gifts and then explained that without these gifts her son's stay would have been unbearable. The simple monotony of lying on his back for two weeks had already made him very sad. But these toys would take his mind off the situation and make his stay more bearable. Now she had her fun-loving son back!



Pat, a retired headteacher from a Derbyshire primary school found OCC to be an excellent tool to use in his school:

'OCC added a tremendous dimension to our school ethos, the beauty of the whole campaign is that you can link it into almost every aspect of the curriculum. Parents, prospective parents and Ofsted were very impressed by the community perspective that OCC embraced.'

There are a number of ways that OCC can add value to your curriculum – helping teachers meet educational targets and enriching the learning environment for each student.

Here are some ideas of how you can practically incorporate OCC into various parts of your curriculum.

Geography

Use it to explore different societies and cultures. Take your class on a journey through places in Eastern Europe or Africa that the shoe boxes will be sent to. Encourage students to research the different cultures. Compare similarities and differences between the environments and how the UK is linked with these countries.

Religious Studies

Link OCC into Religious Studies by exploring the role of the family the shoe boxes will be going to. OCC is a great tool to bring a global context to religious traditions and an opportunity to research diverse religions that are predominant in each country.

PSHE

OCC works great in PSHE lessons by encouraging students to understand and appreciate different aspects of their own and other's cultures, challenging and extending their perceptions of themselves and other people. It is also a great way into exploring themes around compassion, mercy, justice and equality in today's global society.

Literacy and Numeracy

Encourage students to write a Christmas card and put it in the shoe box. Students could make lists

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Children unwrap their gifts

of the contents of their box and calculate the cost they spent. For older students you could link the costs into foreign currency, encouraging economic awareness by comparing with exchange rates of the countries the shoe boxes will travel to.

School Councils

Samaritan's Purse has seen OCC used successfully by school councils as an ideal platform to begin their term. The campaign is completed by November and so it gives a perfect timeline for a first term project.

The great part about OCC is that the blessing is at both ends

One school in the Midlands saw how their school council took ownership of the idea, providing the students with managerial experience, preparing agendas and running meetings. It not only engendered leadership, openness and awareness, but they were also contributing to the wider society as they

Information

If you would like to bring Operation Christmas Child into your school, please get in touch:

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Did you know? Operation Christmas Child adds fantastic value to your curriculum — providing resources to meet requirements for Ofsted, citizenship lessons, school councils and Every Child Matters.

OCC is an ideal way to encourage students to become active participants in the life of their school and local community.

worked with churches to organise places to drop off their shoe boxes.

Students have the opportunity to plan and construct letters to parents and to churches, asking them to get involved. They can even go as far as kick-starting a campaign on justice issues surrounding the developing countries the shoe boxes zoom off to.

Ofsted

OCC links schools and communities together, receiving a big 'thumbs-up' from Ofsted. You can invite local churches and members of your community to pack their own shoe boxes and use your school as a drop-off venue.

The great thing about OCC is that the blessing is at both ends. The receivers are full of smiles and shouts of joy as they open their gifts and the packers and senders are excited as they wrap and pack their gifts and imagine the response when the boxes arrive at their destination.

■ Lucy Mizen



Doesn't this say it all?



The Power of a Simple Gift

Operation Christmas Child impacts everyone who touches it. It teaches children in the UK that giving can be much more rewarding than receiving. And it tells children receiving the gifts that they've not been forgotten and that Jesus loves them.

To be a part of a wondrous event that changes lives, please visit our website www.operationchristmaschild.org.uk

or call us on 020 8559 1180.

CHARITY NO. 1001349

 Samaritan's Purse™
COMING TOGETHER FOR GOOD

