

After a spectacular fundraising effort in 2008, there's much speculating on what we can possibly do to match it in 2009. In 2008, David Riley's efforts alone, in promoting the Manchester United Shirt almost equalled the previous years total, but what a fabulous start to the year with the RGBB's donation from the Open Golf Championship.

Gary Richardson with his willing (I'm told) team of volunteers has put SR110,000 into this year's kitty already so that's only about a million we need to look for now!

But although we've all (hopefully) had some run in raising the cash, there is of course a serious side to our efforts and that is deciding where the cash is spent.

Sadly, year on year, we learn of more disasters and needy cases outside of our area of interest and it's good to see others in the community doing their bit. The SANGCOM half marathon is mentioned elsewhere in this magazine but many of you may not know that some of the individual runners were also raising cash for charity in addition to the main pot. Stuart Birkwood for example, raised a bundle for Cancer Research by participating.

But what have we done with the money?

Firstly in Saudi Arabia we have been pleased to support two new (to us) charities in the last year with donations to Ensan, a charity supporting Saudi orphans and the Saudi Autistic Society. Additional contributions have also been made to Open Skies, the therapeutic riding facility in Jeddah and DSCA, the Down Syndrome Childrens Association.

Outside of the Kingdom, prompted by the news of the terrible happenings in Gaza, we donated to MAP - Medical Aid to Palestinians for a specific request to supply emergency medical kits for children under 5 who had been displaced by the fighting. It beggars belief that more than 80% of Palestinians now rely on humanitarian assistance with UN food aid now going to three quarters of the population in Gaza.

Another emergency situation where we were pleased to offer assistance was in the Yemen where floods had wiped out facilities in several villages. Sultana al Quaiti wrote to advise us that many families, whose houses have been completely destroyed by the floods, had stated that, even if they start saving from now for another 30 years, they will not be able to rebuild their homes. In the areas of al-Qatn, Hawra, Wadi al Ain, Sah, Doan, Shibam, Ba'alaal, Tarim and Qasam, 36 people died in the floods while 6802 are sheltering in schools and 3076 are living with other families or relatives. 1148 houses have been completely destroyed and 406 partly damaged. The FoH

Where does the money go?

Newsletter in January made particular mention of the ICING contributions towards school building in the region and I notice several other 'anonymous' donations from the Kingdom have also been made. The work of the FoH (Friends of the Hadramaut) continues and as has been said before, we are so impressed with how well they have used our previous donations, we would hope to continue to offer support when the occasion demands.

The Sudan seems to be off the radar at the moment as far as international news is concerned but actually the situation on the ground continues to worsen. Sally Hunt from Kids for Kids wrote to us only a few weeks ago having received reports from the villages of Darfur that water shortage is already affecting many families. This follows consternation at the expulsion of 13 aid agencies from Darfur. Although these were concentrating on providing aid to the hundreds of thousands of people living in the camps, it is thought that the only chance many families will now have is to return to still surviving villages. KIDS FOR KIDS, the only organisation that has continued to provide long term help to villages, strengthening communities so that people can remain in their homes, is calling for urgent help to enable villages to provide a refuge for people once again forced to flee.

Conditions in the villages of Darfur have been ignored throughout the conflict, despite increasing deterioration as the affects of the ongoing insecurity have hit home. Whilst the aid agencies provided handpumps and food for the camps, virtually nothing has been done to help villages. Few pumps have been provided in remote areas and people have been forced to walk for many hours to reach water, despite the risk of attack. Existing pumps that have broken down, have been left unrepaired. Even basic health care is not available. An influx of refugees will further undermine the chance of survival for these villages.

In 2008 we were pleased to have sent over SR400,000 to assist in Sudan and hopefully in 2009 we will be able to add more.

Another first for ICING in 2008 was to be able to make a contribution to UK charities. Equal amounts were sent to four Children's Hospices in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I confess it was something of a surprise to me to hear that these facilities were not fully funded from central government funds. What was even more of a surprise was to learn that in at least one case, their services were at risk because funds were being saved in one of the banks that has collapsed because of the credit crisis. We wait to see if their savings can be recovered.

