



Bridget Cowper-Coles

Being the wife of the British Ambassador may bring certain privileges. But watching the world go by, whilst doing nothing to help it along, is not among the options chosen by Bridget Cowper-Coles.

Having heard of the needs of the children of Iraq, and recognising that even on our own doorstep there may be a local requirement to help those less fortunate; Mrs Cowper-Coles has sparked a few ideas among the community in Riyadh for a number of fund raising events.

The RGBB has been asked to assist with the organising of a couple of them, but more about that later. First a flavour of what has already been achieved in the land to the north, to serve hopefully as a driver for our own activities.

(Many readers may recognise that the Dianne Wilton mentioned is indeed wife of Chris, both former residents of Riyadh)

THE BRITISH LADIES SOCIETY TRAIL BLAZE HUMANITARIAN AID PROJECTS IN IRAQ!

By BLS President, Janet Hubbard

The British Ladies Society, under the patronage of Mrs Dianne Wilton, wife of the British Ambassador to Kuwait, has made a significant impact on the humanitarian drive for children in need in Iraq, particularly in the Maysan area of Basra. It is hoped that the projects identified, will ultimately assist the Iraqi communities in redefining their own initiative and creativity. The venture began as a joint project with Society members Sara and Summer Al-Awadhi and the Kuwait for Kids Group. Having successfully delivered 3000 school bags for school children in Umm Qasr and Southern Basra during the aftermath of the war in Iraq, with the help of the British Army and the Humanitarian Operations Centre (HOC) in Kuwait, the ladies have since concentrated on specific projects that have been identified with the help of the British Military in Iraq. The excitement written on the faces of the children who received the gifts of school bags containing useful school equipment and everyday personal items will remain indelibly printed on the memories of those who went to Basra at the end of May to deliver them. It is the hope in the eyes of the shoeless children who waved from the grey, dusty streets and on the faces of the mothers carrying their young children, whose lips were dry from lack of water, which encourages the commitment from this group of dedicated ladies.

CHILDREN IN NEED IN IRAQ



Mrs Wilton hosted a charity fund-raising Coffee Morning for 250 ladies in June, with the specific aim of raising funds to help equip the many schools that were identified as in desperate need of refurbishment in the Basra area. Sergeant Rachel Webster and her colleague Captain Monica Clutson, both of the Royal Military Police who were based at the Command and Military Operations Centre (CMOC) in Basra, attended the coffee morning and gave an inspirational talk about their work with the school children in Basra and the visit to the Al Sai School in Basra made by representatives of the BLS. Rachel was thanked in person by the British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair who also visited the refurbished school in the Al Sai Province. A total of KD19000 was raised as a result of the Coffee Morning and generous donations from local Kuwaitis and businessmen. Later, a further KD16000 was pledged by a kind Kuwaiti benefactor who resides in the United States. This enabled the Children in Need in Iraq group of British ladies to set to work immediately, under the leadership of Dianne Wilton, to see how they may fund those projects that were being identified by the British Military in Iraq.

Captain Helena Lovell, based with the British Army, after liaising with the Minister for Social Affairs in Al-Amarah, identified two projects in July – the Al-Amarah Ophanage and the Al-Amarah School for the Deaf and Mute. These schools had been looted during the period following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and both facilities were undergoing rebuilding and refurbishment by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Iraq. They required furnishing and equipment before they could become operational again. Ladies from the group set to work immediately to purchase the equipment that would help bring smiles to faces of these children and their carers. The first consignment was collected in four 20ft container vehicles at the end of August and