



SCOUTING

'I wanted to do something in the outdoors that
would inspire and empower others'

Scout Ambassador, page 42



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Above: Young people in Cambodia enjoy just one of the many books donated by Bookbridge
 Left: Kaira Konko gets its very own hand-hygiene demonstration from the Hampshire Explorers

Beyond our borders

If you're planning a community impact project, there's no reason to limit your plans to your own turf. Instead, let these three international projects inspire you and your section to achieve true greatness in places that need it the most

Words: Helen Pearce | Pictures: Alan Hands, Letitia Northcott and Marvin Takel

Scouting has always encouraged young people's natural curiosity and it's this curiosity that leads to the acquisition of knowledge and a thirst for adventure. This curiosity also opens their eyes to the world around them. Looking around, it's plain to see there are problems in our world today, but rather than turning our backs on challenging issues, as Scouts we focus on finding solutions and making the world a better place.

By including community impact in our programme, we develop kinder, more tolerant individuals who are better skilled to make a positive contribution to society. Many Scouts have taken their commitment to community impact beyond the borders of the UK. These three inspiring projects involve UK Scouts working with Scouts from other countries to make an impact on our global community while learning about other cultures and global issues.





Project 1: Kaira Konko, Soma, The Gambia

In 1989, a Hampshire Scouts Expedition (HSX) spent six weeks building classrooms in the Gambia. Through this trip great friendships were formed and two years later, HSX sponsored four Gambian Scouts to participate in Hampshire Venture One, an international camp.

When the time came for the Gambian Scouts to head home, Marion Christmas, who at the time was the Assistant Group Scout Leader at 2nd Bentley Scout Group in Hampshire, asked them what, out of all the things they'd seen while in the UK, they would most like to have back home in The Gambia. 'A Scout Centre like Ferny Crofts (the Hampshire Scout centre in the New Forest)', they replied.

So, Marion and the 2nd Bentley Scout Group decided to make it happen. They fundraised money in Hampshire to build a Scout centre in Soma in The Gambia. The land was purchased and the Gambian Scouts built Kaira Konko Scout Centre, which officially opened in 1998. In 2002, Marion wanted to formalise the support in the UK so set up a

fellowship (which is now a Scout Active Support Unit) to look at long-term objectives for the centre and provide support from the UK. Since the formation of Kaira Konko Scout Active Support Unit, the centre has gone from strength to strength.

The Kaira Konko Scout Group, which today has over one hundred Scouts, meets every Friday evening at the centre. The aim is to offer every Scout a better education, a sense of community and a brighter future. For instance, during those times when the electricity goes off in the village, Kaira Konko gives Scouts the opportunity to do their homework at the centre, where there are lights powered by solar panels installed on the lodge roof.

The centre is also used as a base for Scout Explorer and Network expeditions and as accommodation for visitors to Soma, including teachers and NGOs working on projects in the local area. Any profit that is made from guests is reinvested in Kaira Konko to improve facilities and Scouting equipment and spent on community projects.



Facing page and left: Explorers work alongside Gambian Scouts on vital community projects. Of course, no matter how pressing the project at hand is, there's always time for a quick kick-around...

'Our initial goal was to make the centre self-supporting and we succeeded by 2007. We now look at community projects and improving the quality of Scouting by providing programme support to the Gambian Scouts,' says Jackie Heath, who joined the initial fellowship in 2002, and as an Explorer Leader has since taken eight groups of Hampshire Explorers on expeditions to Kaira Konko.

During the expeditions, UK Scouts undertake community projects in and around Soma, working alongside Gambian Scouts and using funds raised by supporters in the UK. The aim of these expeditions is to give these Explorers the opportunity to experience the challenges of living in a developing country first-hand while developing skills such as independence, leadership skills and the ability to work in a team. 'The UK Scouts work directly with the Gambian Scouts. It's a real partnership and a wonderful opportunity for Scouts from both countries to get to know each other properly,' says Jackie.

Lamin Kinteh, who was one of the original four Scouts to

visit the UK in 1992, and who is now the centre manager, manages the community projects and is the main point of contact for expeditions. He was awarded an honorary MBE in 2012 for devoting 20 years to the Kaira Konko project, building up the Scout Movement in Soma and supporting educational projects in the area. 'He knows what projects work well and understands the community's needs. We are very passionate about the fact that our projects are driven by need in the community. We don't produce any white elephants,' says Jackie.

So far, projects completed by expeditions have included setting up libraries in schools (and cleaning and sorting donated books in order to fill them), buying paint and painting the Soma mosque, building toilets at the back of the mosque, repairing homes that have been damaged in the rainy season, teaching in schools and setting up community gardens.

For more information about Kaira Konko Scout Centre, visit kairakonko.com.





Above: Scouts in the UK sort through the thousands of donated books while their Cambodian counterparts wait to help unpack the boxes

Project 2: Bookbridge

Almost 10 years ago, a group of German Scouts visited a Mongolian Scout camp on an international trip and noted that the local children had a real thirst to learn English but had very few books and limited resources. Back in Germany, the Scouts started to collect books and within a few years, had succeeded in raising enough money and collecting enough books to open the first learning centre in rural Mongolia.

The centre in Mongolia had a dramatic impact on the local community, with access to books

expanding to include English language lessons and teacher training, with the centre becoming a financially self-sufficient heart of the community.

The German Scouts set up Bookbridge as a registered charity that aims to improve children's access to education in developing countries by establishing learning centres, training teachers and providing children's books for use in the centres. As a result of this work, young people and local Scouts have the opportunity to learn English, build self-confidence, and develop practical skills through these learning centres.

‘The important thing is that we’re teaching our young people about global issues and other cultures’

George Devine, International Scout Support Unit Manager

Officially a charity, Bookbridge continued to open learning centres across the Asia Pacific region in partnership with local Scouts. They also partnered with UK Scouts who started a drive to collect English books for the centres. Over the last five years, UK Scouts have collected, sorted and packed over 100,000 children’s books in aid of Bookbridge.

By learning about the issue and working with Bookbridge, UK Scouts can achieve their Community Impact Staged Activity Badge and Global Issues Badge, while making a difference to fellow Scouts and other young people in Mongolia, Cambodia and Sri Lanka.

Bookbridge learning centres are the hub of the local community. ‘The centres are run by local entrepreneurs as financially self-sustained social enterprises. These are local people empowered to make local decisions based on local need,’ explains Alan Hands, who is a Bookbridge Book Champion. His role involves building international bridges to enable Scouts in the UK to donate books to learning centres in the developing world.

This year a group of Explorer Scouts followed the books that they had sourced, collected, categorised and dispatched to their final destination in Mongolia. On the trip, the Explorer Scouts spoke to over 6,000 Scouts at the workshops they ran in the ‘Better World’ zone of the Asia Pacific Jamboree. They also spoke to senior Scouting volunteers from across the Asia Pacific region, spoke on local media outlets, helped deliver training to the Bookbridge centre managers at their annual gathering, and visited the newest Bookbridge centre, which opened in 2017 on the fringe of the Gobi Desert.

Since returning to the UK, they have become pro-active advocates for Bookbridge, attending Gilwell Reunion, assisting in the Programme Zone, and visiting Scout Groups where they speak to other young people about how they can get involved. There are now 23 centres across Mongolia, Cambodia and Sri Lanka open and thriving.

For more information about Bookbridge, email ukscouts@bookbridge.org.

Project 3: Scouts Against Malaria

In early 2015, delegates at the 8th Hampshire International workshop were asked to list the top 10 problems that were affecting the planet. Disease was at the top of the list; AIDS, the Zika virus and the hidden killer, malaria, were mentioned most often.

The delegates realised that as Scouts they were in a unique position to help communities in malaria-affected areas. They could utilise links with local Scout Groups usually attached to schools that could help with the distribution of nets and education; why it’s important to use the nets and how to use the nets correctly and safely.

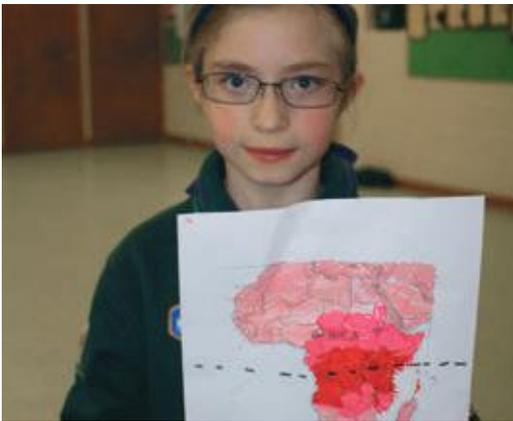
Until 2014, Marvin Takel was Assistant Scout Leader at 8th Camberley Scouts in Surrey. Over several years of expeditions to Uganda, he developed extensive knowledge and insight into the country and so, in 2015, he discussed a possible initiative with representatives of the Ugandan Scout Association. The initiative was welcomed by the Ugandan Scouts and they committed to support it logistically.

And so, Scouts Against Malaria was launched. Scouts Against Malaria’s mission is to provide programme ideas and resources to teach young people about malaria and its effects. They are then encouraged to raise funds in order to supply African Scouts with mosquito nets that they can distribute to vulnerable families in Sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated 43% of people at risk of malaria in Sub-Saharan Africa don’t have access to malaria nets or insecticides. By learning about malaria and what can be done to limit its impact, young people can make a difference and save lives while broadening their minds and learning about the world.

‘When I was first approached about this project, I raised some questions about whether it was the right thing for us as an organisation to become what was to all intents and purposes, an aid agency. That’s not what we do, we do education,’ admits George Devine, Manager, International Scout Support Unit.

‘However,’ he continues, ‘I liked the principle of getting UK





Scouts involved and becoming more aware of the affects of malaria and what it was doing in other parts of the world. I feel strongly that we need to remember that our role is education and personal development. The important thing is that we're teaching our young people about global issues, as well as teaching them about other cultures, and if the spin-off of that is that we're helping people who are in need, that's brilliant, but it's not the main objective.'

Once Scouts in the UK understand the issue, they complete badge criteria to earn a Scouts Against Malaria Challenge Badge. The Scouts then fundraise £5 per badge, and after sending the money to Scouts Against Malaria they receive their badges. The corresponding number of mosquito nets is then supplied to the Scouts in Africa. Once Scouts Against Malaria have been

informed of where the nets have been distributed, the information is uploaded to the website so that interested fundraisers can see exactly where in the world their efforts have helped those in need.

Local African Scouts allocate the mosquito nets to individual homes in their communities. The Scouts meet the family and teach them the importance of using the net and how to set it up correctly. They then keep in contact with the families to ensure that the nets are maintained and used correctly. For taking part in this initiative, the African Scouts also earn the Scouts Against Malaria Challenge Badge. 🍀

For more information about Scouts Against Malaria, and how you and your Scouts can get involved, visit scoutsagainstmalaria.org.uk.

Above: Mosquito nets are distributed to families in Bugembe, Uganda, while UK Cubs learn how mosquitos pass malaria on to humans and attempt erecting their very own mosquito nets