

British charity fundraiser sets up children's home in village called 'Orphans'

By Jeremy Armstrong

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Exclusive



A British charity fundraiser has achieved a lifelong ambition by setting up a children's home - in a tiny village called 'Orphans'.

Mark Townson, 52, has just returned from a Christmas trip to Poland which saw him deliver presents to youngsters with no families of their own.

The trip marked the culmination of a remarkable two years in which he set about fulfilling his dream of giving needy youngsters a proper start in life.

He has now made it a reality, setting up his Family Children's Home in the Polish village of Sieroty - which translates into English as 'Orphans' - to help kids left without parents.

Mark, a financial advisor from Newcastle upon Tyne, and his wife Sue, 52, set up the charity 'Our New Family' in 2007.



They bought and converted a £62,000 property which now houses eight children and two full-time carers and have taken teams of volunteers from Britain to build a play area and carry out extensive refurbishment.

They have raised £46,500 of the £92,000 needed to finish the improvements and buy their new 'family' a minibus.

At Christmas, they handed out presents donated by friends, supporters and a pupils of a school in Birtley, Gateshead where Mark gave a talk about his work.

Mark, who has two grown up children Josh, 27, and Alix, 23, and 11-month-old granddaughter Zoe, explained: "Sue and I really enjoyed bringing up our children and always felt sad when we heard about children who did not have a mum or dad who loved them.

"I went to a talk called 'Live Your Dream' by motivational speaker Marc (c) Griffiths and decided that it was no good dreaming that it would be great to set up an orphanage, I had to do something.

"So I did."



With the help of social services in Poland, they found Gosia and Piotrek Magdziak, who have three children of their own and have adopted five with special needs - Natalia, nine, Daniel, age seven, Kuba, a boy aged five, Laura, also five, Marzenka, three.

Natalia is deaf and blind, while Kuba takes daily growth hormones to try and improve his development.

Mark travelled to the industrial town Gliwice, about an hour and a half north east from Krakow, and found the perfect property for his children's home in the nearby village of Sieroty.

It has five double bedrooms, a kitchen, two bathrooms, and a huge garden which has now been converted into a play area.

He said: "Our children may have been from families with drug and alcohol abuse problems where they have been neglected or abused.

"The state orphanages are unable to give them the individual love and attention that they receive in a family home.

"They had their first Christmas in the home last year, but this time we had so many presents from England, and they were so excited.

"We had children giving donations from their pocket money, and sending presents for each child."



Mark has been back and forth to Poland eight times since November 2007, and gradually built up the home. There is now a "mini-theatre" for them to put on their own plays, alongside play equipment and toys in the specially adapted garden.

Volunteers from the Kelvin Grove Fellowship, a church in Gateshead, have given more £7,000. Members of the church also travelled to Poland to help build the adventure play area in September 2009.

The long term aim of the charity is to pay for the orphanage to become an independent operation, with Piotrek going out to work once the youngest children are at school, allowing his wife Gosia to work at the home full-time, with the social services' support.

Mark says: "Once the refurbishment is done, Piotrek and Gosia can run it and look after the children.

"The home will always belong to the charity, and we will continue to support and monitor its work.

"We wanted these kids to feel the love of their own family and that is what they have now.

"They are doing so well and it is great to see how much their lives have changed, we really wanted to make their childhoods special.

"Our vision is for those who are not a family to become one, and to give them the stability, security and love they need.

"It sounds so simple, but they had never experienced a Christmas like it because they had never had a mum and dad before.

"Seeing their faces as they opened their presents was something special."

To donate, you can write to Our New Family, 55, Moorside South, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 9 BD, cheques made payable to our new family, go to the web site www.ournewfamily.org or make a donation direct our new family, CAF Bank Ltd, sort code 40.52.40, acc no 00017005, charity number 1124157.

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