

News Release:

**RAF FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION LINKED CHARITABLE APPEAL COMPLETES HUGE KENYA DELIVERY VISIT**

A charitable appeal operated from RAF Shawbury, in North Shropshire, has completed its largest delivery visit in the 17 years since its inception, to Kenya in East Africa.

The RAF Football Association (RAF FA) Taking Football to Africa and Beyond Charitable Appeal delivers ‘Aid through Football’ by collecting donated items of football kit and redistributing them to children and adults across the globe. The Appeal, which is organised by Wing Commander Neil Hope MBE and Squadron Leader Mark Smales, was set up in 2006 to deliver kit to Africa. It quickly became global and to date has delivered 348570 items of kit, including over 98935 football shirts to 63 countries worldwide.

The Appeal team departed for Kenya on 10th April with a mixed Military and Civilian group of 16 people and completed 34 separate deliveries in and around Nairobi and in Gilgil, 2 hours north of the capital on the Great Rift Valley. In total, the team delivered 19000 items including 5800 football shirts. In completing the deliveries, the team interacted with children and adults in the major slum areas of Kibera, Kibagare and Mathare as well as schools, orphanages and football teams who were all in need of essential, life changing aid. Kibera is Africa’s largest slum with over one million people living in an area of around 3 square kilometres with no permanent running water or electricity supplies and no sewerage system. In Gilgil, the team were honoured to be able to spend 2 nights at the Restart Centre, founded by the incredible Mary Coulson MBE. The centre is beloved by the Appeal as Neil’s daughter Charlotte volunteered there for a month in 2019. Charlotte was tragically killed in a car crash on 9th April 2022 and her mother Helen was seriously injured. As the first trip since Charlotte passed away it was poignant that 2 of her university flat mates and one of her work friends joined the team on this trip. Additionally, the Hearts of Ruiru, a team who the team have worked with for many years, organised a brilliant Tournament in Charlotte’s name which the Appeal provided trophies and kits for.

Kits delivered included items donated by football teams and individuals from across the United Kingdom; from England (The Football Association) and Premier League clubs including Leicester City, Brighton & Hove Albion, Aston Villa, and Wolverhampton Wanderers. The team also delivered a large amount of kit donated by the Appeal’s local club, and one of its top links, Shrewsbury Town FC, as well as items donated by clubs throughout Grassroots football including County Football Associations; member clubs of Sheffield & Hallamshire CFA, Hampshire CFA, Essex CFA, Worcestershire CFA, and Wallsend Boys Club amongst many others.

Neil said, ‘This delivery visit was superb in allowing the Appeal to renew its friendships across Kenya. Building on our huge successes of 2022 coupled with this being my 17th Kenya delivery trip and now with over 100 people taking part over the years was special, especially given the emotional issues in returning to the country and people my daughter cherished. Charlotte intended to gain her Primary Education degree and move to teach in Kenya to allow her to continue her voluntary work with the Restart Centre. The trip was emotionally difficult but made easier by the excellent team of people joining and supporting me. Helen and I continue to raise funds for the Restart Centre as a legacy to our beloved daughter. Helen is currently training with the aim of completing the Market Drayton 10KM on 7th May. More detail at <https://justgiving.com/fundraising/helenhope28>. I would like to thank all the people, clubs and schools that donated items delivered on this visit and to the Appeal, as well as all who have helped us achieve this amazing success, especially the team at Shawbury who help with the Appeal including Supply Receipt and Despatch and also at RAF Brize Norton, BATUK, and Braeburn Garden Estate School. The Appeal has started 2023 strongly due mainly to the hard work of Mark Smales with 16 deliveries across the world completed to date, including new countries added with Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Georgia. So far, this year we have dispatched an incredible 14711 items, including 4528 shirts to 9 countries. We look forward to continuing another exciting year.’

NOTES:

Kenya 23 Delivery Team:

Organisers:

Wg Cdr Neil Hope MBE – Danger Area Airspace Manager and Head of BM Assurance – RAF Shawbury

Sqn Ldr Mark Smales – Master Controller and OC A Flight, 19 Sqn, RAF Boulmer

Team Members:

Wg Cdr (Retired) Chris Skaife – Secretary at the England Rugby Football Union

Sqn Ldr Lee Wood – Safety Inspector – RAF Honington

Flt Lt Al Molloy – Air Traffic Controller, RAF Shawbury

Cpl Pip Wilson – Physical Training Instructor at RAF Shawbury

Cpl (Retired) Claire Kelly – Resides in Jersey

Mr Taylor Wood – About to graduate at Middlesex Uni – son of Lee and brother of Ellesha

Miss Ellesha Wood – Student currently joining the RAF – daughter of Lee and brother of Taylor

Miss Daisy Smales – Student – daughter of Mark Smales

Miss Alanis Anderson – Chef from Shawbury

Miss Sophie Goodwin – Runs family café in Wrenbury

Miss Jess Greenwood – Student at Uni in London – Daughter of Claire – From Jersey

Miss Abbie Barford – Student studying Primary Education at Edgehill Uni

Mr Mark Foote – Lead at the FA Kit Store in Stafford

Mr Chris Hope – Regional Lead South for Gardex Intl – Son of Neil

Contact through:

Wg Cdr Neil Hope – 07903135508 – neil.hope684@mod.gov.uk or neil.hope999@btopenworld.com

Or

Sqn Ldr Mark Smales – 07800603478 – mark.smales425@mod.gov.uk or mismales@hotmail.com