

## **Supplementary Information about Operation Christmas Child West Kent**

Since the inception of the annual Christmas shoebox appeal in 1990, Operation Christmas Child has always been the aggregation of the efforts of teams of **local volunteers** mobilising their local communities, schools and churches to make shoebox gifts. A small national staff team only came into existence in the mid-1990s to leverage cost efficiencies of transporting consignments of shoeboxes from local processing centres to overseas destinations.

For many years Operation Christmas Child in Kent was organised by a team of volunteers in the Ashford area. In 2015 with the retirement of the Ashford leader volunteers, a new team stepped forward from the network of supporters in West Kent (Tonbridge). Since then the strong support of TMBC residents and community has seen the Kent operation becoming the largest in the South East of England processing and exporting over 130,000 shoeboxes in the last 5 years.

### **Contributing to High Street Visitor Economy**

In November 2019 at the former Woolworths premises in Tonbridge High Street, 413 adult volunteers and 113 children (under 16 years) checked over 28,000 shoeboxes. A sample survey of volunteers showed that 72% travelled 30 minutes or less to the centre, while 25% travelled up to 90 minutes. So, most volunteers were TMBC residents, but a significant proportion visited from outside the borough. Specifically, corporate groups were welcomed from the financial services sector: Lloyds Bank, Birmingham Mid Shires, Mazars Accountancy and Markerstudy, and from Electrosonic in Dartford. They ate at restaurants and bought items from High Street shops. Overall, our activity brought over 500 people into the heart of a TMBC-identified economic regeneration zone.

### **Purposefully activity for young people and vulnerable adults**

Additionally, shoebox processing offers a safe, enjoyable and purposeful volunteering opportunity for young people, vulnerable adults and other individuals with special needs. We hosted school and community groups (e.g. Tonbridge Guides, Paddock Wood Brownies, Holcombe Grammar School). In previous years groups of Tonbridge Grammar School Year 12 and 13 students have undertaken IB volunteering assignments. We regularly welcomed several unemployed individuals, persons with special needs supported by their carers, and lonely retirees (e.g. 91-year-old Joyce Alcock who was featured in the Kent Messenger).

**Thank you for considering this application to help Operation Christmas Child West Kent increase its ability to provide confidence-building volunteering for TMBC residents, increase community cohesion, support economic regeneration, and in turn benefit vulnerable children in marginalized context overseas.**