



*Helping to deliver self-reliance and hope to refugees and displaced people by grant giving.*

### The Early Years

In 1951 three schoolteachers, Joyce Pearce, Margaret Dixon and Ruth Hicks, brought a small group of Latvian and Polish girls from displaced persons camps (which had sprung up in central Europe after the Second World War) for education at Ockenden, a country house on the outskirts of Woking in England.

Encouraged by the success of this pilot project, they tried to extend similar aid to other children. The Ockenden Venture was born in 1955, created as a charitable trust under the War Charities Act of 1940.

Over the years that followed, we extended our knowledge and expertise, bringing displaced people to the UK for education, training and settlement, and building up a network of centres around the country.

By 1963 the Venture had a total of 16 such reception centres, and was to go on to be one of the main organisations in the resettlement of Vietnamese 'boat people' (allowed entry into the UK between 1979 . 1988).

### 1960s

By the mid-1960s, our original task of providing an education to displaced children was nearly complete. But continuing conflict and displacement around the world demanded that the work should continue.

Subsequent projects included those aimed at helping destitute and refugee children in Lebanon and Jordan, and Tibetan children living in exile in India.

### 1970s

Although our overseas projects started less than 10 years after The Ockenden Venture was born, many people still remember us for our work in the UK.

In particular, it was the high profile 'Vietnam airlift' of 100 children, organised by The Daily Mail, and the resettlement of 5,000 Vietnamese 'boat people', whose plight was seen around the world, that brought us to national attention.

The overseas emphasis began in earnest in 1971. We had organised practical training of much needed child-care workers amongst members of the local Vietnamese community, based in Hoi Duc An orphanage, Saigon.

It was this orphanage that was to be the focus of The Daily Mail's airlift in 1975. Supported by actress Ingrid Bergman, one of our high profile supporters, this became the subject of a BBC Radio 4 appeal in 1974, raising more than GBP4,000.

At the same time, we received some high-level publicity, culminating in the 1979 appearance of Joyce Pearce, on the TV programme 'This is Your Life'.

## 1980s

By 1980 our main overseas operation was in Thailand, where more than 340,000 refugees from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam had been granted asylum. The next year we embarked on a major aid programme to Poland, which was facing an economic crisis.

Having visited Poland, Joyce Pearce wrote to The Observer and The Sunday Telegraph, and managed to raise over GBP16,000 in an appeal. This provided enough basic food and hygiene stores to fill two 22-ton overland container trucks. A large number of volunteers were also recruited. So many helped, in fact, either by donating goods or helping to pack them, that it is one of the activities for which we're best remembered, more than 20 years later.

'Fulfilling' was the word used to describe our work in 1982, with the projects to help thousands of Vietnamese boat people drawing to an end.

It was time to re-focus again. By this point, our income had increased to just under GBP2 million . a little more than the expenditure needed that year. Everyone knew, however, that this amount would decrease as the current work came to an end. Ockenden would once again become dependent on voluntary contributions.

Our support of exiled Tibetan children helped to raise Ockenden's profile, and in 1984 his Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet gave a special address following our Annual Meeting at the House of Commons.

The next year our founder, Joyce Pearce, died. She had remained the driving force behind the charity, her determination and energy spurring us on through funding difficulties and the overwhelming amount of work needing to be done.

Tributes came in from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, who spoke of Joyce's 'dedication.... as an inspiration to people of every age and background for many years to come', and Janina (Janka) Stuttard, one of the very first Polish girls to travel to England under The Ockenden Venture.

In 1986 Ruth Hicks also died, leaving Margaret Dixon as the sole surviving founder. Margaret continued to play an active role in the work and management of Ockenden until her own death in November 2000.

In 1988 we took the decision to close our remaining UK projects.

## 1990s

The 1990s saw us enter a new phase. We would operate solely overseas, with the exception of one residential care home and one refugee reception centre in the UK (which later closed).

Derek Tonkin CMG was elected Chair of the Trustees and heralded a change in our management approach.

Internal changes aside, the world's crises continued. 1992 saw dramatic changes around the world, with serious implications for our work with refugees. The tragedy in the former Yugoslavia escalated. Around two million people were uprooted by the fighting and sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Afghanistan also became a focus and our projects in Sudan developed.

In June 1995 we appointed James Beale as Chief Executive. James had worked in a number of international development organisations and was able to bring with him extensive knowledge and experience of development issues.

By 1996 we consolidated our approach, appointing regional representatives, and focusing on skills training and education within local communities.

Our projects were based in northern Sudan, western and central Afghanistan, north West Pakistan, Vietnam and, in the UK, at Kilmore House and Coombe Head refugee centre. Work was also under way to determine if Ockenden could help within the refugee and displaced communities of eastern Iran, northern Cambodia (rather than Vietnam) and northern Uganda. Today Ockenden is operational in each of these areas.

In April 1999 we changed our logo and updated our name. The Ockenden Venture became Ockenden International. In that same year we received support from The Guardian's Christmas appeal, which raised GBP50,000 in support of a new programme in Uganda.

In 1999 our refugee centre at Coombe Head was closed and the English language programme it ran moved to another centre in London.

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## 2000 - 2007

The 21st century has brought with it a number of significant challenges agencies working with displaced peoples.

The international political climate has, and still is, changing rapidly. The aftermath of September 11th in the United States had a significant impact the world over. In Afghanistan, the Taliban were overthrown following international intervention to destroy Osama Bin Laden. The lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the occupation of Iraq threw up additional challenges for agencies such as ours.

At the start of 2000 Ockenden had overseas programmes in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iran, Pakistan, Sudan (north) and Uganda. The HQ in the UK and regional offices in Dubai and Kampala supported these countries. Most of our work was focused on displaced communities and working to achieve self reliance. Even where we responded to emergency needs, such as in Afghanistan or Sudan, these interventions were designed to meet long term requirements.

During 2003, the country profiles changed. Ockenden made a decision, for different reasons, to withdraw from Iran and Uganda. In the case of the former, it had become very difficult to work according to some of the criteria laid down by the government. In Uganda, a strategic withdrawal was necessary in order to focus on refugees moving back into southern Sudan.

In south Sudan a programme started around Maridi in western Equatoria province providing support to displaced peoples within local communities and those returning from Uganda, D.R. Congo or from elsewhere in Sudan.

Ockenden International also made the decision to work with two new population groups and to extend directly our support to another. We worked with Palestinians in Lebanon, part of the world's largest refugee population.

In Iraq Ockenden was invited to assist in the process of post-invasion recovery. Despite the difficult conditions we assisted in the process of meeting both short- and long-term needs in three governorates.

Meanwhile, in Nepal our work was significantly increased with Tibetan and other displaced communities.

In 2006 it became apparent that the volume of work Ockenden was embarked on was not sustainable in the long term. Changes were therefore planned and these are described on the 'Ockenden Today' section of this website.

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