Charity ‘chick knit’ recoups the cash for hospice

Tuesday 26 March, 2024

Knitters from around the globe picked up their needles after an appeal by Francis House Children’s Hospice to send in characterful knitted chicks and bunnies. Staff at the hospice in Manchester were ‘egg-static’ when a final count revealed a whopping 35,000 chicks had flown through their doors.

The cute creations are filled with a small chocolate egg, donated in their tens of thousands by schools, supermarkets and local businesses before being sold across the region for £2 each.

The Francis House Easter Chick Appeal helps to fund the hospice’s vital work in caring for children and young adults with life-limiting conditions and offering support and respite for the whole family. This year the fundraising appeal is expected to raise more than £55,000.

Rachel Nasiri, fundraising officer at Francis House said: “Our Easter Chick Appeal is unique in that it involves not just our wonderful knitters but the whole community going all out in their support. Businesses and individuals collect and donate creme eggs, dozens of volunteers pack the chicks into orders and heaps of fantastic venues sell the chicks and bunnies - it’s a huge team effort.”

This year chicks arrived from far-flung places including Hong Kong, Canada, Australia and almost 900 from Uganda.

Closer to home, Maria Dunbobbin from Cheadle knitted more than 1,400 chicks, some topped with beautiful bows complete with googly eyes. Maria even knitted a dozen Super Mario style chicks, which were snapped up by eager fans as soon as they appeared for sale on the hospice website.

Not all of the chicks arrive ready for sale and a band of volunteers set to work repairing crooked beaks, missing eyes and saggy bottoms that couldn’t hold a chocolate egg. Great-grandmother Beryl Wood from Denton made a daily 15 mile round trip to the hospice to collect the occupants of ‘chick hospital’ and single-handedly mended more than 1,000 chicks.

Beryl, aged 85, said: “When they showed me the chick hospital I picked out two chicks which were beautifully knitted but one had an eye on the side of its head – I couldn’t believe it! Other knitters I think are using an old pattern from when the eggs were bigger, now they’re smaller the eggs fall out. I’m happy to do the repairs as they bring a smile to your face.

"My mum taught me to knit when I was seven and I love it. So long as what I’m doing with my life has no negative impact on anybody I just do what I like. We’re on this earth to do good and if I can help an amazing charity like Francis House I’m really pleased to help out.”

Hospice volunteer Cheryl Thompson, from Heaton Chapel, unpacked sack loads of parcels and made up orders ready for delivery. Cheryl started volunteering for Francis House following her retirement last year as she didn’t want to ‘sit around and do nothing.’

For every chick and bunny knitted, an egg is needed to fill it. Keen to help on chick ‘stuffing’ sessions were staff from Taylor Wimpey Manchester, CHEP UKI and Equilibrium Financial Planning who took part during paid volunteering hours.

Delivering 35,000 chicks to participating schools and shops to go on sale required an army of volunteer drivers. Staff from AO’s Quality and Compliance team in Bolton swapped a day at their desks and delivered 3,800 chicks to 20 locations around the city centre, Salford, Wythenshawe and Altrincham.

More than 60 schools participated in selling chicks; among them students from St Vincent’s RC Primary School in Altrincham successfully sold 800 chicks.

Rachel added: “The funds raised through this year’s Easter Chick Appeal will go a long way in supporting the work of Francis House. We rely on the community’s goodwill to continue our services; it is very reassuring in this difficult fundraising climate to see so many supporters still prepared to give their time, efforts and money to help our hospice.”

Anyone hoping to buy a chick while stocks last can visit a Google map of more than 70 vendors https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1xiqdKy8KvNWbC9gvRb-77A2EhggvgQ4&usp=sharing

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Francis House provides care to the families of children and young adults with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions - services include respite care, homecare, sibling support, end of life care and bereavement support.

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