

Glastonbury Festival Litter Picking Volunteers Raise over £100,000 for Disadvantaged Children in South Africa since 2013!

Friday 14 July, 2023

There are very few instances where a group of 120 volunteers could be persuaded to wake up at the crack of dawn after only a few hours' sleep and embark on a 6-hour litter picking shift each morning, across the course of a 4-day weekend; Glastonbury Festival is clearly an exception!

Since 2013, Shepton Mallet's SOS Africa Children's Charity has recruited teams of 100-strong litter picking volunteers to ensure that Glastonbury's iconic Pyramid Stage Field is cleared of rubbish each morning of the festival. This is no mean feat as each afternoon and evening the venue hosts 12 hours of live music, often attracting crowds of over 100,000!

And as our volunteers stagger down to the Pyramid Stage field, the morning after the night before, and see the extent of task which lays ahead, they would be forgiven for thinking it mission impossible.

Nevertheless, SOS Africa's motley crew joins a small army of volunteers recruited by a number of both local and international charities and gets to work. As they slowly but surely gather momentum, a quick glance back at the green grass left in their wake is often enough to boost moral and fuel them for the final assault towards the outer perimeters of the field.

By the time the clock strikes midday and the bands begin to play, there is neither a squashed paper cup nor stray crisp packet in sight; a job well done! In return for their efforts, in addition to being welcome guests at the biggest party of the year, our volunteers are treated to complimentary meals and hot showers, a real blessing after a morning toiling on the festival's hallowed turf.

"This was my very first Glastonbury - and what a fantastic way to do it! Joining the SOS Africa team was an absolute honour, and a particularly meaningful way to experience the festival. To kick off each morning restoring the Pyramid field to its former glory for the day ahead was so rewarding. Just knowing I'd done my bit. I made some friends for life, and we laughed until we cried and left feeling both exhausted and enriched in equal measure. I'm already looking forward to returning in 2024 to do it all over again!" Emma Sankey (1st Year Litter Picking at Glastonbury Festival)

But surely the greatest incentive of all is knowing the life-changing impact these combined efforts will make to the fortunes of disadvantaged children far away on the distance shores of the Western Cape, South Africa. And it is our great pleasure to announce that this year alone, our volunteers raised enough to fund over 80 years of school tuition for the SOS Africa children.

"I've had the privilege of joining the SOS Africa recycling crew for 7 years and I wouldn't want to 'do' Glastonbury any other way! Maybe it's the masochist in me but trudging down to the Pyramid stage with the other bleary-eyed volunteers for a 6am shift, passing the previous night's revellers meandering back to their tents, whilst invariably suffering slightly from our own overindulgences, somehow adds to the fun! The camaraderie of the team and sense of satisfaction as you look back at the field picked clean of litter, makes you feel like that you've contributed just a little to the magic of the festival, while the real magic is happening far away with the tangible changes made to children's lives through the funds raised and exceptional work that SOS Africa do in providing education and hope for future generations of South Africans." Bruce Philip (7th Year Litter Picking at Glastonbury Festival)

And once the final funds had been gathered from this year's formidable fundraising effort, we were delighted to discover that we had reached the as yet uncharted fundraising milestone of £100,000 raised for the SOS Africa children since the initiative first began in 2013! This had provided over 415 years of education for the children in our care!

One thing is for sure, no matter how great the challenge, once the final chord is struck and the last can recycled, it doesn't take long for the emails to arrive with the familiar question, "can we come back again next year please?" On behalf of the SOS Africa Trustees, staff and children, a big thank you and congratulations to SOS Africa's Litter Picking Heroes and the answer is of course yes... See you next year!

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