



Press release

8th May 2006

ABSOLUTE RETURN FOR KIDS (ARK) RAISES A RECORD £18.4M FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

UK charity ARK held its 5th Anniversary Gala Dinner on Friday 5th May at the historic Marlborough House on The Mall. Attended by 1000 people from the financial industries, the single event raised an incredible £18.4 million (\$34.3m), exceeding all expectations. All of the money raised at the dinner goes directly to good causes, as ARK's trustees and patrons underwrite all the central administrative costs.

The success of ARK's Gala was supported by personal messages from President Bill Clinton and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. President Clinton said: "ARK has played an invaluable role in building a safer, healthier, and more productive future for disadvantaged young people around the globe. Your work is an inspiration to all who seek to improve our world."

The focus of the event was clear: ARK is expanding its programmes to transform the lives of children who are affected by poverty, abuse, disability and illness. ARK already has plans to ensure the money raised at the Gala will be used rapidly to achieve maximum impact. Tens of thousands of children will be saved from becoming AIDS orphans. ARK will close, for the first time, abusive state orphanages in Bulgaria, offering children a new life with families. ARK will sponsor at least 7 inner city Academies in the UK. ARK will also build innovative programmes for future school leaders. As ARK grows, it is maintaining its rigorous approach to philanthropy, ensuring measurability and accountability of all its innovative programmes. These focus on three core themes: combating **HIV/AIDS**; delivering **Education**; and **Closing Abusive Orphanages**.

The Gala Dinner was a spectacular occasion, hosted by Rt Hon Donald McKinnon, the Commonwealth Secretary General, and sponsored by Bloomberg. It was launched with an appearance by the Sultan's Elephant and closed by Sir Elton John. The auctions conducted by Lord Dalmeny of Sotheby's included a Damien Hirst spin painting, yoga with Sting and a guitar lesson with Coldplay's Chris Martin.

ARK's Chairman, Arpad Busson, was delighted by the success of the event:

"I am amazed by the generosity of my friends and colleagues, making me proud of what ARK has achieved. We will continue to transform thousands of children's lives thanks to their support. Elton was grandiose, Lord Dalmeny his persuasive best, and the visit of the Sultan's Elephant was an unforgettable experience. The style and organisation of the Gala were finessed by the work of event producers, Starlight, Rhubarb Food Design and Rob van Helden Floral Design.

"Every penny raised at our dinner will go directly to fund our projects. This means, quite simply, that more children will be given a new life away from abusive orphanages in Bulgaria and Romania; it means treating thousands more HIV positive mothers in South Africa so that their children don't become orphaned; and it means the chance of great schooling for disadvantaged kids in inner London."

Special tribute on the night was paid to the charity, Hope and Homes for Children (HHC) and its founders, Mark and Caroline Cook. Over the last four years, ARK has partnered with HHC, closing 7 orphanages in Romania. HHC founder, Mark Cook, commented:

"Those tens of thousands of children in Eastern Europe who are confined to institutions can be helped and offered a new life with families in a loving home. Working with ARK, HHC have already made great progress in Romania, and we are determined to extend our work to close down horrific child institutions across the region in the years to come."

For further information:

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Note to Editors:

Absolute Return for Kids is a London-based charity, supporting programmes for children in the UK and internationally.

ARK's mission is to transform the lives of children who are victims of abuse, illness, disability and poverty.

ARK's success is built on a rigorous approach to venture philanthropy. 100% of donations go directly to help those in need, thanks to our Board of Trustees and Patrons who ensure that the central administrative costs of ARK are met. ARK's Board and Executive apply the same principles and disciplines to managing ARK as we would to running a business.

ARK selects and manages projects as 'social investments'. We focus on maximising the transformation of children's lives through efficient, accountable implementation of programmes with measurable social returns. ARK develops scalable solutions to social problems that can be used by others, driving wider systemic change. ARK leverages additional funding and resources from governments and other donors, always ensuring long-term programme sustainability and impact.

ARK's programmes for children have:

- Prevented 11,800 children in South Africa from becoming orphans, by keeping 6,600 mothers with HIV/AIDS alive through rapid acceleration of treatment.
- Supported more than 2,000 orphans and vulnerable children in South Africa to access state grants, attend school and avoid hunger.
- Enabled 1,650 children to grow up in families by closing 7 orphanages in Romania - we are now extending this to become the first to close institutions in Bulgaria, the country with the highest rate of institutional care for children in Europe (2%).
- Addressed social exclusion in the UK for over 1,000 children and families through programmes to prevent teenage pregnancy, exclusion from education and family breakdown.
- Designed an innovative educational programme for London schools by sponsoring at least 7 Academies, transforming life opportunities for 4,500 children by 2008. We plan to open the first ARK Academy in Hammersmith in September 2006.
- Set up "Future Leaders" - piloting an innovative project with the National College for School Leadership and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust to train a new network of young leaders keen and ready to lead transformation in urban schools.
- Provided 3,000 children and families with post-traumatic counselling in Kosovo.