

Operation Cover Up knitting project – Frequently Asked Questions

Who runs Operation Cover Up? Mission Without Borders is the organisation in charge. MWB is a registered charity (number CC37218). Operation Cover Up is a project operated almost entirely by volunteers – some assistance is given by our office, which comprises myself and three part-time staff. Liz Clarke is the National Coordinator of the project, with the North Island as her main focus. The South Island is managed by the collective efforts of folk in North Canterbury, Christchurch and Timaru. All Operation Cover Up workers are unpaid volunteers.

Who is the knitting for? Operation Cover Up is primarily knitting and supplying a variety of things for children in orphanages (State children's Homes), but also families, the elderly, disabled and sick, and even some homeless people. The poor come in many guises, and we in the Mission try to help as many as we can. All these folk are in the six countries in Eastern Europe that we work in: Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine.

How many knitters are there? There are an unknown number throughout New Zealand. Some have a Coordinator in charge of a group of knitters and who may be the local drop off point for a wider area. There are 110 or more Coordinators. Inquiries from prospective knitters are referred to the Coordinator in their area.

What happens to the knitting and who gets it? Knitting and other goods for Operation Cover Up are shipped by our NZ office to our international logistics people who then pass it to our field countries and they distribute it as part of their work with the needy. The children in the Homes have always been the first in line to receive the goods.

What is the process for getting it there? In the North Island, all goods go to a warehouse (lent to us for September by a charity called Samaritan's Purse) in Henderson where volunteers spend September counting, baling, boxing up and checking everything that comes in from the North Island (a full 40 foot container load – that is HUGE!). Up to 100 bales fit in a container, but there are always other things, like toys and stationery also to pack in. Something similar happens under the South Island operation.

The container is then loaded by volunteers one Saturday at the end of September and goes by ship to Eastern Europe. The containers go to Mission & Relief Transport in Holland and they take it for us by road

(for a reasonable cost) to Romania or wherever it is needed most. From there it goes to our warehouse depot, and then is distributed by our paid MWB staff there to children, families and others.

Who checks that it gets to those who need it? Everything is recorded from the moment it arrives at our depots in New Zealand, with detailed shipping manifests recording everything.

In the field countries, MWB staff take photos to record the deliveries. Thank you letters are solicited from families, State Homes directors and others so that we can convey back to you how much your gifts are appreciated. It is very systematic. It has to be as these are countries with big corruption problems and their border control officers and rules are difficult.

What is the donated shipping money for? We pay a donation for the Henderson warehouse to cover expenses. We also pay rent for a container kept for us in Christchurch. It comes out of the shipping money you and your knitters donate. That money also covers all OCU expenses for logistics, such as freight and cartage, insurance, storage, shipping, customs fees, inspections fees, fumigation (if required), bales and packing materials, volunteer expenses e.g. fuel, and some office expenses directly related to the project (pens, tape, postage and photocopying for example).

Usually the funds raised in New Zealand have been sufficient to cover the shipping costs. If they are not, the Mission covers any shortfall. We do get discounts from the shipping companies and try to ship in the off-season (second half of the year) which is less costly.

How much does it cost? We work on \$10-15,000 all up per container to have it shipped full of OCU goods from New Zealand to the field country. That includes about \$6,000 to \$7,000 for the cross-Europe component.

It is a lot of money, but it is worth it because the things are beautifully and lovingly made and cannot be bought or afforded by those that receive them.

Andrew Wilks
Director, Mission Without Borders NZ