

Oxfam's Blanket Knitting Campaign

Dear Parent,

Your child has been learning about how some mothers and babies in many poor countries don't have the healthcare they need to make sure that they survive pregnancy and that their children stay healthy. The topic has been handled sensitively, and your child has been assured that this is not a problem affecting mothers in the UK, but in poorer countries around the world.

You are invited to help your child create knitted squares for a blanket, being contributed to by knitters all over the UK, to show their support for the importance of healthcare for mothers and their babies. If someone in your family knows how to knit, perhaps they would like to teach your child or work with your child to create squares.

This sheet provides lots of information about Oxfam's blanket knitting campaign, and overleaf are instructions for how to contribute knitted squares. If you have any questions that are not answered here, please contact Sarah Blakemore, sblakemore@oxfam.org.uk

All knitted squares need to be received by 1st August 2008.

Why is Oxfam encouraging people to knit blanket squares?

Each square of the blanket will represent a pregnant woman who would have survived to care for her baby if she had received the basic medical care she needed. The finished blanket will demonstrate how much the British public cares about the lives of mothers around the world, and how rich countries like the UK have a responsibility to use their aid to help improve health services for women, and for all people.

How will the blanket be used?

Oxfam will present the giant blanket to the UK Government ahead of an important meeting in September, where world leaders will discuss progress on the Millennium Development Goals aimed at halving world poverty by 2015. Millennium Development Goal 5 is to reduce the number of women who die in childbirth. Every minute, a woman with no medical care dies in pregnancy or childbirth. Millions of mums in poor countries get low-quality health care, or are forced to go without it altogether. High fees, a shortage of hospitals and clinics, and not enough doctors and midwives mean women struggle to get the medical care they need. All too often they don't survive to look after their babies.

What will happen to the blanket?

After being presented to the UK Government, the giant blanket will be dismantled into smaller blankets. Most of these will be sold at Oxfam shops and festivals to raise money for Oxfam's work – so your knitted squares will also provide further opportunities for Oxfam to fight poverty. Some of the blankets will also be used by groups of knitters to do more campaigning in their area.

The money raised from the sale of the blankets will go towards supporting Oxfam's work to fight poverty. Oxfam works in over 70 countries around the world, helping to improve the lives of men, women and children. This is just a small part of the picture though, as the blanket's main aim is to keep the pressure on the UK and other rich countries to deliver the billions needed to support health systems in poor countries.

Why can't Oxfam send blankets overseas to where they are needed?

Sending blankets and clothing overseas is very expensive, and Oxfam has a responsibility to use the money it receives from the general public in the most effective way possible in the fight against poverty. There are many local initiatives in poor countries where women knit or make clothes, and Oxfam tries to support them by buying their products and distributing them through its programmes. This ensures women can learn new skills, earn an income and support their families, buy crops, send their children to school and to get any healthcare needed.

Instructions for Knitting Squares for Oxfam Blanket Campaign

Each square should be nine inches in size and preferably made using double-knitting weight yarn. You can use any type of yarn, provided that it is washable. All colours are welcome. Superwash wool or washable cotton yarns are particularly suitable.

Typically this weight yarn will knit up to around 21–24 stitches to 4 inches in stocking stitch on 3.75–4.5mm needles (depending on how tightly you hold the yarn, you may need to use a different sized needle to get the right gauge). At a gauge of 24 stitches to 4 inches, you will need to cast on 54 stitches to make a nine inch square. If your gauge is different, please make sure that you use the right number of stitches and rows to give a nine inch square – odd sized squares can be very difficult to piece together.

Plain stocking stitch always curls up at the sides. You can prevent this by knitting a narrow border of garter stitch all round the square. To do this, just knit the first and last five rows (no

purling!) and always knit the first five and last five stitches of every row with your stocking stitch in between.

Many people like to make patterned squares. You can find a dictionary of stitch patterns available free at each of the sites below:

<http://tinyurl.com/2ketdl>

<http://tinyurl.com/2v556p>

<http://tinyurl.com/369xvz>

Others may wish to use up different coloured odds and ends of yarn to make striped or multicoloured squares. Some ideas and examples are available here:

<http://tinyurl.com/5rrf4>

<http://tinyurl.com/32dcbq>

If you want to design your own multicoloured pattern, you can find special graph paper to do it at the sites below – just print out a sheet and have a go at creating your own unique square.

<http://tinyurl.com/pp9wm>

<http://tinyurl.com/5fnkw>

Crochet Squares are also very welcome. There is a wonderful selection of free patterns at the site below. You can enlarge the small squares by adding a few extra rounds until you reach nine inches.

<http://tinyurl.com/cbsje>

To finish please weave in all yarn ends on your squares and, if necessary, block them neatly to size. This will save lots of time when it comes to assembling the blankets.

Will Oxfam let people know about the results?

When people send in their knitted squares, they should include their name, address and email address. We will contact them to invite them to the hand-in, update them on the results of the action, thank them for taking part and direct them to future campaigning activities.

Where should finished squares be sent?

Sarah Blakemore, Oxfam Campaigns, 47 Park Square East, Leeds LS21 2NL **by 1st August 2008.**

Thank you.