

In my assembly today I'm going to be talking about a charity called Manchester Aid to Kosovo. You can see the charity's logo up on the screen.

In 1999 there was a war in place called Kosovo. Kosovo is in Europe but it isn't a very rich country. You can see it on the screen. You'll also see a picture of Rita Ora - the singer. Her family actually came over to the UK as refugees in that war. The Kosovans had to stop using hospitals and schools. Children had to go to schools in barns and people's living rooms and they were living in fear all the time. Eventually, when things got worse, people were forced to leave their homes and to take a few belongings and to hide from the people who were trying to kill them. They had to leave family members and they didn't know if they would ever see them again. Some ended up hiding in the hills, some ended up in refugee camps and others were sent to other countries. Some refugees actually ended up coming to Manchester.

You might have recently seen and heard about people who are refugees from Syria who are trying to find homes in Europe. They are also leaving war zones and are trying to find new homes. It's the same kind of thing that happened to many of the Kosovan refugees.

Many people just had to leave their homes with no notice. They stuffed bread and bandages and paracetamol and water and anything else they could grab quickly into their pockets. Some of the children managed to take maybe a small toy or a photograph of a loved one with them.

I'm going to tell you about a family. It's quite a sad story because in the war they lost their mothers and many of their brothers and sisters. In fact, these young people who you see on the screen were actually left for dead by soldiers, but they survived. They were in hospital in Kosovo and they actually received one of the shoeboxes that a charity sent to them. You might have made one of these shoeboxes before? The children actually shared one of the shoeboxes and the toys in there became some of their most treasured possessions because they had nothing else. Eventually the children were brought to Manchester for medical treatment. They found that the parks in Manchester were a really healing place for them and they asked the charity Manchester Aid to Kosovo to create a park in their home town. They wanted the park to be dedicated to peace.

You can see on the screen the land that was chosen to be the peace park and the plans that were made to develop this land. Over the last 10 years the peace park has been developed and is now somewhere that local people use regularly. For the last ten years Manchester Aid to Kosovo has run a summer school in the park. You can see some pictures of the summer school on the screen. The children who come to the summer club go to school every day but their classes are overcrowded. Sometimes there aren't enough chairs for every student and they either go to school in the morning or the afternoon- they can't go all day because there aren't enough

teachers and there isn't enough space. The schools are nothing like they are here. There are no interactive whiteboards, hardly any display boards, often the tables and chairs are broken and the toilets are horrible! Many of the children have never seen resources like those that Manchester Aid to Kosovo take out to Kosovo and they don't get to do many creative subjects at school!

I just wanted to tell you a bit about the charity and I want to read you the dedication that is read each year at the summer school. The charity dedicate the peace park that they are working on each year. As I read it I'd like you to think about what you could do to promote peace in the world. I want to challenge you to make the world a more peaceful place and to do anything you can to stop war. War ruins lives and we must do everything we can to work for peace.

## **AN ACT OF DEDICATION**

In this place

may trees and flowers bloom

and peace and tranquillity reign in every heart.

In this place

may children play and laughter fill the air.

In this place

may there be safety, security and hope.

May the cries and anguish

of past years be stilled.

May the cruel noise of battle

be silenced

and the painful, poisoned memories of the past

be purified and removed.

May our desire be fulfilled

for this park to be  
an oasis of joy.

Here may beauty displace ugliness.  
May curses be transformed into blessings.  
May it be a park of dreams  
a place of dancing  
a place of rest  
a place of recreation.

We commit this space  
to be a sign of hope to all,  
where all can come together as friends.

We dedicate this park  
to all who yearn for peace  
in every land  
to all who yearn for an end  
to hating and hurting,  
brokenness and violence.

We dedicate this park  
to all with a vision of a world  
without sorrow and suffering  
without hurting and hopelessness.

May there be an explosion of joy  
and human happiness in this place.  
May we walk together hand in hand  
knowing our great value  
and celebrating our common humanity.