Just a bit of 'Comic Relief'

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One thing I have learned over the years about the British public is that you just have to give them a worthwhile cause and almost without fail will they dig deep into their pockets to help out. Whether they are in the middle of an economic recession or not, whether it is pounds or pennies, they give what they can. During the course of the year, apart from the regular donations to different charities, there are numerous fundraising events taking place across the country trying to raise money for various causes but the most well known one has to be Red Nose Day.

When I say Red Nose Day, I am not referring to a blisteringly cold winter's day where people in the UK go about their business with the after effects of excessive nose blowing due to a bout of the sniffles! On the contrary it is actually a biennial telethon which is held in March and televised live on BBC1 to raise money for charity. The charity in question is Comic Relief.



PHOTO: AFP

British super model Kate Moss sports a Red Nose Day T shirt.

It all began in 1985 when comedy scriptwriter Richard Curtis and much loved British comedian Lenny Henry founded Comic Relief, an operating British charity, in response to the ongoing famine in Ethiopia. The aim of the organisation is to "bring about positive and lasting change in the lives of poor and disadvantaged people" and it also believes that this "requires investing in work that addresses people's immediate needs as well as tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice" The first Red Nose day was held in 1988 and since then has become the highlight of Comic Relief's appeal.

I still remember being in university when Red Nose Day was broadcast for the first time. It had a number of live performances, challenges and skits, and almost 150 celebrities and comedians took part in the event. Somehow it managed to bring the plight of millions in need in Africa and disadvantaged groups in the UK (e.g. young people with mental health issues or alcohol problems, victims of domestic and sexual abuse, the elderly, women seeking asylum in the UK etc) to the forefront with the help of entertainment and comedy, not a combination that you would think would work but it did. In fact the appeal was so popular; it managed to garner a staggering 30 million viewers and raised an even more amazing £15 million. Since then, the initiative has snowballed into a massive charity fund raising event and has raised approximately £800 million and Comic Relief has been aiding over 70 countries around the world!

One of the ways Red Nose Day has managed to raise money is by sales of plastic (or at times foam) red noses! In the last twenty five years these plastic noses have evolved from being a plain red nose to being made in the shape of a tomato, a monster, a red triceratops, one with spectacles and even one with fuzzy hair. Who would have thought that a red nose could earn the charity millions of pounds to help people in need.

Over the years, celebrities, comedians, singers, politicians and people from all walks of life have done some extraordinary things to help raise money for Red Nose Day. We have had sketches with the likes of Sir Elton John, George Michael