



ARK'S CASA PROGRAM

What is the CASA Program?

ARK's CASA program came to life because we conduct home visits as part of our due diligence protocol, to families appealing for aid. This began in 2006. We felt it was vital to meet those asking for help. This enabled us to achieve a bird's eye view of each person's circumstance and ensured that we invested our donor's donations to those most in need. Generally, applicants were applying for food support, but hunger is always a symptom of other urgent needs.

Once in the homes we became shockingly aware of the dire living conditions that families, the elderly and children were living in. There are homes that have fallen into disrepair because of economic hardship, but predominantly the conditions were a consequence of Hurricane Ivan, subsequent storms, and seasonal rain.

After the hurricane countless families were not able to repair the extreme destruction. Major flooding caused internal walls to become saturated with sea water, walls could not be replaced because of the lack of resources. Roofs were compromised or completely removed, creating major leaks that caused ceilings to collapse or become dangerously unstable (many homes still use tarpaulins to remedy this).



Acts of Random Kindness

Over time this catastrophe resulted in the deterioration of countless homes.

We also observed that untold families were not connected to utilities. In many incidents, the storm, or years of deterioration, had wreaked havoc on the plumbing (and electrics) causing underground leaks and potential electrical fires. The utility bills were insurmountable, the families were then disconnected, given the mounting arrears.

Whilst not all homes are in ruin because of Hurricanes, they are equally in disrepair. Many homes have been handed down through the generations, often built by great grandparents, some of them even 'Wattle and daub'. Over the years and as families swelled, spaces have been added to the existing structure, however these are mostly made from plywood or poorly built, a great many with only cinder blocks and/or wood for foundations. These structures collapse over time, leaving disadvantaged and underserved families living in dire circumstances, without the means to escape or improve their living conditions.

Compounding the distress that these families endure, we also witnessed that children and adults had developed serious health problems. Many frequently, as often as weekly, having to go to the A&E. These health conditions have ranged from chronic breathing/lung conditions to disease and skin infections. In some cases, children have not been able to attend school, owing to concern by the staff that the condition could be contagious. The parents, struggling so desperately economically, can not even afford inexpensive, over the counter medications. We



believe, after 14+ years of firsthand experience, that the health ramifications have led to major illness and even death.

To tackle and remedy this appalling set of circumstances, the CASA program was born. Our vision is clear; to raise the standard of living for all persons in the Cayman Islands, to a reasonable and acceptable standard, for children and families to grow and flourish.

We began to galvanize community support, through generous donations of money, materials and time, sponsors, and community groups, to help fund the projects. Taking each story one at a time, sharing with the wider community (with the blessing of the recipient family) the family's terrible plight and unacceptable living conditions.

Support quickly mounted which enabled us to renovate homes quickly.

These home renovations ultimately revealed, by improving living conditions and providing the basic needs for a healthy lifestyle, that community kindness and compassion fosters hope and possibilities, improves physical and mental health and contributes to their capacity to rebuild their own lives.

It is utterly unacceptable to tolerate the current conditions of housing in the Cayman Islands. ARK believes it is our moral responsibility to transform housing across this nation. We believe this is entirely possible with the investment of private sector donations, donations of construction materials, skilled work by local development firms, including repurposing of the materials historically being disposed off and adding to the dump.

The negative impact of not launching an Island Wide campaign to combat deplorable housing and suffering is far reaching, the ripple effect impacting generations of children and families. Adversely, the life changing impact of community support, and a wave of housing renovations will positively impact and change lives, and our Nation as a whole, for generations.