

## OUR HISTORY

- **Mary's Meals** is often referred to as a **Fruit of Medjugorje**. Mary's Meals' founder, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, visited Medjugorje in 1983 and experienced deep joy during his time there. His family also visited and were inspired to open Craig Lodge Family House of Prayer, out of which Mary's Meals eventually grew.
- In 1992, news reports showing scenes of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina shocked Magnus and his brother who remembered a beautiful and peaceful place from their trip almost a decade before. After making a small appeal to family, friends, and the network of visitors to Craig Lodge, Magnus began delivering aid to support those affected by the war and the first donation was taken to Medjugorje. The influx of donations continued, and Magnus returned more than 20 times to deliver aid gifts during the war. The resulting charity, Scottish International Relief, also undertook various other aid projects during the years of 1992-2002 in several countries including Romania and Liberia.
- The concept of Mary's Meals came about in 2002 in Malawi, when Magnus visited a mother called Emma and her five children. Emma was dying of Aids and had already lost her husband to the same disease. Magnus asked her eldest child Edward, who was 14 at the time, what his ambitions were in life and he replied: "I would like to have enough food to eat and I would like to be able to go to school one day." Magnus was struck by this stark and shocking answer. Out of this came the vision for a school feeding initiative called Mary's Meals.
- Mary's Meals remains rooted in Medjugorje, having a physical presence in Medjugorje for over 20 years. Many of our volunteers and those involved in our support groups around the world have heard about Mary's Meals through Medjugorje.
- Mary's Meals was named in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary – hence Mary's Meals. Many of our activities in Medjugorje such as our Fasting initiative and the monthly Rosary, where we pray and fast for the work of Mary's Meals, are inspired by the messages of Our Lady of Medjugorje.

## WHO WE ARE

- Mary's Meals is a global charitable organisation that operates school feeding programmes in 16 countries and reaches more than 3 million children every school day in some of the most challenging, unstable and food-insecure contexts in the world. Our steadfast vision is that every child receives one daily meal in their place of education and that all those who have more than they need, share with those who lack even the most basic things.
- Our unique and robust school feeding programme is owned and run by local communities. Mary's Meals provides the support, training, ingredients and monitoring required, while the day-to-day running of the programme including preparing and serving the meals is undertaken by local volunteers – often parents and grandparents of the schoolchildren. Our work is only possible because of the commitment and hard work of local communities who partner with the school and Mary's Meals to deliver school feeding. In dangerous or difficult-to-reach areas, we work with trusted, local partner organisations (usually small charities) to support communities and deliver the programme.

- Mary's Meals is a truly global movement, powered by the actions of many thousands of people all over the world. People from all walks of life are playing their part in this work doing all sorts of different things, and it all comes together to make something truly amazing happen. We call these personal actions little acts of love. The many and varied things people do on our behalf are quite incredible – collecting and raising funds that can help to serve more meals, planning all sorts of awareness-raising activities and events that bring people together and spark more interest in our work, and using their own talents and networks to spread the word far and wide about the life-changing nature of our school feeding programme.

## **OUR APPROACH**

- In the countries where our meals are served, no two contexts are the same. The communities we work with are all carefully selected in places of great need, where factors such as extreme poverty, conflict, and climate-related issues drive up rates of child malnutrition and hinder access to education. All too often, the meal the children receive at school is the only meal they will eat that day.
- When planning our programme and pinpointing where our meals will be served, we first identify countries where children experience high levels of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, and where there are also low rates of school enrolment. We then assess whether we can deliver school feeding safely and if there is a reliable supply chain that will allow us to source appropriate food and consistently deliver the meals efficiently.
- Governmental and non-governmental feeding programmes already in operation are also considered, and whether our programme would fit in a context where any existing intervention may already be in place.
- When our meals are being served successfully in a place of education, we channel our efforts into reaching every school in the same area, if the need exists. This approach ensures that children can attend their nearest education centre and won't be drawn to a school further away because of the meals (which can skew enrolments and put pressure on teachers and resources in oversubscribed schools).
- Schools and places of learning look very different across the countries we work in, and children's experiences vary too. Mary's Meals not only provides meals to huge numbers of children attending government-run schools across Africa, but also brings daily sustenance to children accessing learning in non-formal education centres in India; young people engaging in education while awaiting trial in prisons in Madagascar; children affected by the ongoing conflict in Syria (through our feeding programmes in Aleppo and in neighbouring Lebanon); and many thousands of young learners in Haiti, a nation that has suffered years of political unrest, violence, and repeated damage from natural disasters.

## **OUR MEALS**

- At schools where our meals are served, every child receives the same meal and no one is left out, encouraging inclusion and equality among learners.
- It is essential that our daily meals use ingredients that are reliably available, simple to prepare and cost effective. Wherever possible, the ingredients for the meals are sourced locally. It's also important that the food is culturally appropriate and in keeping with local tastes. In India,

for example, children enjoy a vegetable curry or lentil dhal with rice, in Syria and Lebanon, it's a sandwich wrap and fresh fruit, and in Malawi, children are served a corn-soya blend porridge fortified with essential vitamins and minerals, known locally as likuni phala.

- It's a very important feature of our programme that the day-to-day tasks of preparing and serving the meals are done by committed volunteers from the local communities we work with. This not only allows us to deliver a high impact programme at low cost but helps build community engagement and cohesion. It also proves the model to be sustainable and scalable as an example to governments and local authorities who are interested in providing school feeding.

## **OUR IMPACT**

- Our school feeding programmes are playing a vital role in the complex fight against hunger and having a powerful positive impact on communities worst affected by food insecurity and extreme poverty for so many different reasons. School feeding improves children's chances of accessing education, boosts their health and nutrition outcomes, and more broadly, supports whole communities by providing an important safety net for struggling families, as well as helping to strengthen food systems and economies.
- Every day, millions of children around the world go to school on an empty stomach, and hunger affects their concentration and ability to learn. There are also millions of children – particularly girls – who simply do not go to school because their families need them to help by working or performing domestic duties. In conflict-affected countries, children are twice as likely to be out of school than their peers in stable countries – and that increases to 2.5 times for girls. Our aim is to provide young girls and boys with a meal that will give them the energy to stay in their place of learning for the whole day, fill them up, and enable them to concentrate and participate in class!
- A few years ago, Mary's Meals conducted a multi-year impact assessment in Malawi, Zambia and Liberia and the findings from that research project ultimately demonstrated that as well as encouraging children into the classroom and improving enrolment and attendance, school feeding has the power to reduce classroom hunger, increase energy, improve concentration and participation in class, and affect children's overall happiness and hunger-related anxiety – making it a key investment in a country's future and a cost-effective route out of poverty for the long term.
- Our latest research conducted across four of our largest school feeding programmes – Kenya, Malawi, Liberia, and Zambia – found that 84% of children reported that they never left school early because of hunger, and 99% of teachers stated that meals reduced the number of children dropping out. The report also noted that school feeding increased children's ability to focus, participate and learn. Before the meal, only 36% of children felt they could concentrate well, but this increased to 98% after they had eaten.
- Data collected from our school feeding programmes in Madagascar and Zimbabwe surveyed pupils in schools serving Mary's Meals for the first time – with research conducted before feeding was introduced, then repeated after the programme was established. Before the meals were introduced, 39% of children surveyed in Madagascar reported that they missed school at least once a week, often because of hunger. After school feeding began, only 7% missed school and never because of hunger.

- But what about the lasting impact? How does the promise of a daily meal in school affect young people's lives beyond education? We caught up with former recipient of Mary's Meals, Symon from Malawi, to find out about his life since leaving school. Symon recently started a sausage-making business: "We are 12 children in our family. Three of us learned at Chipini Primary School, and we ate Mary's Meals porridge. My other two siblings who learned at Chipini are now working, one is a nurse and the other is a teacher. The school feeding programme helped our family because our parents did not worry about providing breakfast for us when going to school. We would go to school and eat porridge there. My business has helped me in my everyday life because I have enough money and I am self-reliant. I learned sausage making from my friend. Business is really profitable, and I have many customers because my sausages are good."

## OUR COMMITMENT

- In 2022, 29.6% of the global population (equivalent to 2.4 billion people) were moderately or severely food insecure. That's an increase of more than 122 million people suffering the effects of hunger since 2019. These alarming figures are reinforced by the UN, which confirmed in July 2023 that the world is "far off track" from meeting its Sustainable Development Goal of ending hunger by 2030. In fact, it is projected that 600 million people will still be enduring hunger by the deadline, which is a sobering reminder of the scale of the task in hand.
- At Mary's Meals, we talk about keeping our promise to the children that we serve, and we strived to do this throughout a global pandemic and school closures, during natural disasters such as those witnessed in recent years Malawi, Madagascar, Haiti and India, and during times of conflict, such as the harrowing war in Tigray, Ethiopia, the ongoing conflict in Haiti, and unstable contexts like Syria.
- Global hunger is predicted to increase as a result of increasing prices for grain, oil, fuel and fertilisers. Africa, in particular, is likely to be hardest hit by rising food costs, since its nations import large quantities of grain from Ukraine and Russia. In terms of our programme costs, we are already seeing the effects.
- For just £19.15/ €22 / \$25.20 USD, you can provide school meals for a child for an entire school year. That's 10p/ 11c EUR / 13c USD per meal! And the impact of such a gift goes further than you can ever imagine.

Thank you.

[Open floor to questions]