Probus Talk 26th March 2026

Mary's Meals: A simple solution to child hunger.

George Morehead

Mary's Meals is a charity that provides nutritious meals at schools for some of the world's poorest children, enabling them to gain an education and a brighter future.

The charity began in 1992 as Scottish International Relief, set up by Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow and his brother, delivering food and clothes to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Donations were collected in the family's lop-sided shed, which, remarkably, remains the headquarters of the charity!

In 2002 Magnus visited Malawi during a famine, and met a mother dying of AIDS – he asked her eldest son what his dreams were, and he replied 'I want enough food to eat, and to go to school one day'. This moment led to the founding of Mary's Meals, named after Mary, the mother of Jesus, who brought up her own child in poverty,

The simple premise of Mary's Meals is to serve lunch time mugs of porridge to children at schools, giving them the energy to learn and play. Two hours before school begins, volunteers, many of whom are mothers, prepare and cook the huge vats of porridge, sometimes for as many as 300 children, singing as they stir – quite a sociable routine. It is a sharing story, believing that love reaches everywhere, via little acts of love …

In 2015, Magnus published a book about the work of Mary's Meals, entitled 'The Shed That Fed Two Million Children'. Apparently, worldwide, there are 71 million children out of school. Mary's Meals now manages to provide more than 3 million children with meals on every school day. The charity is a volunteer-led movement, and states that 93% of the funds received goes directly into the work, which is currently carried out in 16 countries, including Malawi, Ethiopia, Yemen, India, Lebanon and Haiti. Having established local volunteers, help is sought from nearby farmers and businesses. No UK staff or volunteers work in the overseas countries, though representatives visit from time to time provide guidance and collect data.

One of the most challenging locations that Mary's Meals operate in is Haiti, where gangs aim to recruit young people simply offering them food – the volunteers have to be extremely cautious in their work there – some have had family members killed.

Mary's Meals keep their costs low to maximise the good they can do – it costs just 10p to provide a nutritious meal for a hungry child – and £19.15 for every school day for a whole year.

George Morehead is clearly dedicated to the splendid work of Mary's Meals, and his talk was certainly inspirational, leaving us with much 'food for thought' …

John Walker