

Mary's Meals launches new school feeding programme in war-torn Aleppo

Global child hunger charity Mary's Meals has expanded its school feeding programme into the Syrian city of Aleppo, in an effort to help long-suffering children rebuild their lives following years of brutal civil war.

Mary's Meals, in partnership with the Dutch organisation Dorcas, is working in six schools across the city, providing nearly 1,500 children with a daily meal in their place of education.

In a country where 1.7 million children are out of school and 69% of the population lives in extreme poverty, the Mary's Meals programme is designed to attract children – who for a large part of their young lives have endured unimaginable trauma – into the classroom where they can receive a nutritious meal and an all-important education.

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, Mary's Meals' founder and chief executive, said: "After a four-year long battle for Aleppo and tens of thousands of needless deaths, the siege – at least for now – is over. At last, children have the chance to start regaining their lost childhoods.

"Through Mary's Meals, both the immediate, desperate needs of today, and the longer term necessity of education, will be nourished and nurtured through each meal served by local volunteers.

"The promise of this simple meal, made possible by the continuing love and generosity of Mary's Meals supporters all over the world, will provide hope and encouragement to communities taking their first tentative steps on a very long and uncertain road to recovery."

This expansion into Syria follows on from the launch of Mary's Meals' first pilot programme in the Middle East last year, when – alongside its regional partner Dorcas – Mary's Meals began working in Lebanon, providing daily meals to Syrian refugee children and their Lebanese classmates in a school near the capital, Beirut.

The programme in Lebanon, which sees Lebanese and Syrian mothers volunteering side-by-side, is helping to ease tensions among both communities, in a country which is now hosting 1.5 million Syrians, the largest concentration of refugees compared to a country's population anywhere in the world.

The success of the Lebanon pilot means that Mary's Meals has also recently expanded its work in that country to reach children at the Bourj el-Barajneh refugee settlement in the southern outskirts of Beirut, bringing the total number of children benefiting from Mary's Meals in Lebanon to 1,430.

With two-thirds of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon still out of school and 74% of refugee families across the country food insecure, Mary's Meals and Dorcas are providing much-needed assistance to vulnerable people who have been forced to flee their conflict-ravaged homeland.

Magnus continues: "With the Syrian conflict soon to be entering its seventh year, it would be easy for us to give in to feelings of despair and hopelessness. We faced that same bleak temptation almost 25 years ago, when the work of our organisation first began as a response to the horrific Bosnian conflict.

"But, just as we journeyed hand-in-hand with our great friends in eastern Europe all those years ago, I am incredibly thankful that we now have the opportunity to walk with our Syrian brothers and sisters and share even a small portion of their all-too-heavy load. Thank you to all those generous Mary's Meals supporters throughout the world who have chosen to journey with us – one step at a time, one meal at a time, one child at a time."

Mary's Meals' expansion into Lebanon and Syria means it now works in 14 countries. The charity's other programmes – which today feed 1,187,104 impoverished children every day in their place of education – operate in countries including Malawi, Liberia, Zambia, Kenya, Haiti, India and South Sudan.

The average global cost to provide a child with Mary's Meals for a whole school year is just £13.90 / €15.60 / \$19.50.

Notes to Editors

- Mary's Meals is a simple idea that works. The charity provides one daily meal in a place of learning in order to attract chronically poor children into the classroom, where they receive an education that can, in the future, be their ladder out of poverty.
- The Mary's Meals campaign was born in 2002 when Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow visited Malawi during a famine and met a mother dying from AIDS. When Magnus asked her eldest son Edward what his dreams were in life, he replied simply: "I want to have enough food to eat and to go to school one day."
- Counting on support from across the globe, Mary's Meals has registered affiliate organisations in Austria, Canada, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as international fundraising groups in Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Portugal, Slovenia, and the United Arab Emirates.
- Mary's Meals is committed to spending at least 93% of donations directly on its charitable activities. This is only possible because most of the charity's work is done by an army of dedicated volunteers – including more than 80,000 in Malawi alone.
- Please visit www.marysmeals.org to find out more about the work of Mary's Meals.

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