



Mary's Meals Ireland (A company limited by guarantee)  
For the year ended 31 December 2023

# Mary's Meals Ireland Trustees' annual report

Company number: 420286 RCN: 20061920 CHY: 16897

mary's  
meals

a simple solution  
to world hunger



## Directors and other information

### Directors

Fr. Eamonn Kelly  
Jimmy Murphy  
Deirdre Kenny Rudden  
Paul Galvin  
Bert Main  
Caoimhe McCabe  
Arthur Coary  
Patricia Brandon

### Company Secretary

Patricia Friel

**Company number** 420286

**RCN** 20061920

**Charity number** CHY16897

### Registered Office and Business Address

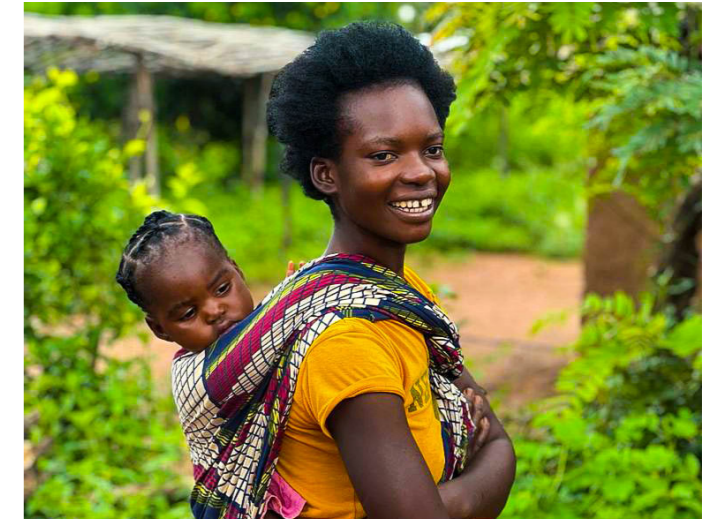
St. Patrick's Hall  
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Griffith Avenue  
Dublin 9

### Auditor

Clive Curran  
Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditors  
24 Court Street  
Enniscorthy  
Co. Wexford

### Bankers

Bank of Ireland  
Carrick On Shannon  
Co. Leitrim





B.M.

**Bert Main**  
Chair, Mary's Meals Ireland

## A Message from the Chair and Executive Director

It is with a sense of deep gratitude and hope for the future that we present the 2023 annual report for Mary's Meals Ireland.

Conflict, food insecurity and the continuing cost of living crisis all had a significant impact on our mission in 2023. Against this backdrop, it is pleasing to report that Mary's Meals was able to keep our promise to the children we serve who rely on us – and it is thanks to the unwavering support of those who firmly believe in our vision that this was possible.

In Ireland, our income once again exceeded €2 million in 2023. This meant that, together with our global family, we were reaching approximately 2.5 million children in 18 countries at the end of the year.

It is particularly encouraging to report that towards the end of 2023, feeding had recommenced at schools in the northern Tigray region of Ethiopia, following a gap of approximately two years. Ethiopia is one of the poorest and drought-prone countries in the world, exacerbated by a civil war in recent times. During the war, Mary's Meals continued to provide food aid, offer trauma counselling and set up classrooms for internally displaced people. It is pleasing to note that following an expansion to the programme in Tigray in December, we closed the year reaching over 45,000 children in the region, across 59 schools.

In November 2023, several trustees and volunteers from across the Mary's Meals family, including nine from Mary's Meals Ireland, had the opportunity to visit Malawi on a self-financed trip to the feeding programme where Mary's Meals first served just 200 meals at two schools in 2002. Since then, the programme in Malawi has grown to provide meals to over 1 million children each school day. It was a very moving and poignant experience for everyone involved, and following their return, Mary's Meals Ireland instigated a communications campaign to inform supporters of the positive impact of Mary's Meals in Malawi, raising awareness of our work there and reaching new audiences.

Throughout the year, food prices and other costs continued to rise significantly, but through effective operational management, at the beginning of 2024 we announced that the cost to feed a child with Mary's Meals for an entire school year remains unchanged from 2023 at €22.00.

Of course, the cost-of-living crisis has also had an impact on people living in Ireland. We are very grateful to our supporters for their kindness when they may have been facing difficulties of their own, generously giving more than €2 million.

We never cease to be amazed by the outpouring of love from our Mary's Meals family – whether through donations, prayer, time or goods. We give heartfelt thanks to everyone who supports our mission.

We know that every donation entrusted to us is precious – for the children that we serve, and to the people who have chosen to help us feed those hungry children. This is why we remain determined to meet the innate goodness of our supporters with good stewardship.

We stand by our commitment to ensure that at least 93% of all our income goes towards our charitable activities and we are delighted to share that in 2023, a figure of 95.5% was achieved globally.

Our promise to keep our running costs low is only possible because of the many thousands of volunteers who give their time so freely to Mary's Meals. In 2023, this included 165 active volunteers from all corners of Ireland.

The Mary's Meals volunteers are each unique and different in their own ways, but all are focused on feeding the next child waiting for a nutritious meal.

2023 was an eventful year for our volunteers in Ireland. We had everything from a fashion show in Longford to our long-standing online quiz. There have been craft sales, car boot sales, plant sales, cake sales and, in a first for Mary's Meals Ireland, there was an art sale in Donegal, at which hundreds of donated paintings were sold. One of our newest volunteer groups in Tipperary has also had enormous success delivering Church talks.

Our wonderful "Step by Step to Feed the Next Child" Walk (our largest fundraising event on the island of Ireland) was again a remarkable success. This event brings so many of our volunteers together in solidarity with the little children we serve.

Two of our youngest volunteers - Gabriel, 11, and Gemma, 8, from Nenagh - are amongst Mary's Meals' youngest advocates. Their fundraising journey started with growing produce in their garden during the Covid-19 lockdown. Now they are household names in their local community, selling homemade baked goods, supporting Mary's Meals Ireland initiatives, and raising awareness for our work.



This year saw Mary's Meals being chosen as the charity of choice for the Tullamore Show.

We had the great honour this year of being acknowledged by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, when he remarked on the wonderful work we are doing in countries gripped with famine.

Also, this year, Mary's Meals was presented with the prestigious Princess Asturias Concord Award in Spain. As a result of this, Mr. Ion de la Riva, Ambassador of Spain to Ireland, held a reception for Mary's Meals Ireland volunteers and supporters.

Father Eamonn Kelly, who had not shaved his beard in 31 years, decided that 2023 would be the time to do so to raise money for Mary's Meals. He subsequently decided to shave his head also, raising almost €12,000 and awareness of Mary's Meals when he appeared on the RTÉ "Today" show and was interviewed on the "Moncrieff" show on Newstalk.



With the next hungry child in mind, Mary's Meals Ireland contributed to the development of Mary's Meals International's global plan, which outlines the extent of the Mary's Meals family's aspirations to provide life-changing meals to many more hungry children as soon as possible.

With great thanks to our supporters, employees, volunteers and trustees for staying true to our mission, we continue this work of ours with much determination, hope and ambition that, together, we will reach the next hungry child waiting for Mary's Meals.



Patricia Friel

**Patricia Friel**  
Executive Director



# Trustees' annual report

## 1. Mary's Meals - Who We Are

In 2002, our founder Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow visited Malawi during a time of terrible famine and met Emma, a mother of six young children who was tragically dying from AIDS. When Magnus asked her eldest son, Edward, what his dreams were in life, he replied simply; "To have enough food to eat and to be able to go to school one day".

And so, inspired by Edward's moving words, Mary's Meals was born; in that first year we provided nutritious meals to a group of 200 children each day they attended school in Malawi.

Since then, we have witnessed the amazing impact that school meals can have on entire communities. The children who eat Mary's Meals can grow up happy and healthy, to provide for their own families, communities and countries. Just over twenty years since that first meal was lovingly served, we are now feeding over two million hungry children every school day in some of the world's poorest countries, including Malawi, Ethiopia, Haiti, India and Kenya.

As a volunteer-centred organisation, we partner with local communities to attract children into school with the promise of a nutritious meal. This means that instead of begging, working or searching for food, children can concentrate on their lessons and look towards a future free from poverty. In schools where Mary's Meals is served, research shows that hunger is reduced, enrolment increases, attendance improves, dropout rates fall, absences dwindle, parents are less anxious and children are happier.

As this annual report demonstrates, our work simply would not be possible without the kindness and generosity of people in Ireland who share our belief in the transformative power of a meal at school.

### Our Vision

Mary's Meals' 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 Mission

Our mission is to enable people to offer their money, goods, skills, time, or prayer, and through this involvement, provide the most effective help to those suffering the effects of extreme poverty in the world's poorest communities.

### Our Values

- We have confidence in the innate goodness of people
- We respect the dignity of every human being and family life
- We believe in good stewardship of the resources entrusted to us

### Our Charitable Objectives

- To provide a daily meal, in a place of education, for children in the world's poorest communities
- To provide relief for those suffering, in any part of the world, as a result of humanitarian crises or poverty; to help people escape poverty; and to provide care for orphaned, abandoned and vulnerable children
- To raise awareness in Ireland and worldwide of poverty issues through education



## 2. Feeding Programme

Throughout 2023, we continued to serve children across 18 countries globally thanks to the hard work of our four Programme Affiliates and 23 Programme Partners implementing feeding programmes.

An exercise to consolidate the global feeding programme began during the year, resulting in the initial reallocation of resources to priority locations and this will continue in 2024.

## 3. Responding to Emergencies in Malawi and Syria

During 2023, Mary's Meals was able to respond to requests from across programmes where emergencies impacted the communities where we work and where Mary's Meals was equipped to respond effectively and efficiently. During the immediate aftermath of Cyclone Freddy, which hit Malawi and caused catastrophic flash floods throughout February and March 2023, we quickly adapted our programme to respond to those in need. Mary's Meals served daily meals to 24,000 displaced people sheltering in some of Mary's Meals programme schools across seven districts between 18 March and 7 April 2023. Many of those being served in the shelters were children who would usually receive our meals at school. During this time, we also maintained our school feeding programme as normal in other parts of the country.

Following the earthquake that struck northern and western Syria on 6 February 2023, Mary's Meals was quick to respond through our partner there. Within hours of the earthquake striking, our partner was able to deliver life-saving food aid to thousands of people in the city of Aleppo.



As the crisis developed, this expanded to delivering additional and essential support to families and children.

As well as providing feeding for two months for 7,000 families housed in temporary accommodation, we also provided 600 family hygiene kits, 600 warm jackets, trauma workshops for 4,618 children, and summer holiday feeding for children in schools where 'catch-up' classes for children were held, benefitting approximately 1,000 children on a daily basis.

## 4. Resuming school feeding in post-conflict Tigray, Ethiopia



In Tigray, Mary's Meals is working with our partner, Daughters of Charity, to respond to the dire need that is the result of a recently ended civil war coupled with drought. Throughout 2023, and as many thousands of people returned to their villages to begin rebuilding their lives after the civil war, Mary's Meals supported Daughters of Charity to carry out community food distributions, providing essential staples to those families in the greatest need.

In October 2023, we were pleased to be able to report that basic school feeding for around 10,000 children across 14 schools was able to resume. In the short term, the menu was dictated by available facilities and supplies and children were receiving high energy biscuits and hot tea. In the months following resumption of school feeding, the programme and menu were expanded as cooking facilities that were destroyed or looted in the fighting were replaced. School meals remain vital for families as they begin a long road to recovery, and the promise of a daily meal in a place of education continues to help to bring stability for children who have endured unimaginable trauma and hunger.

Following an expansion to the programme in Tigray in December, we closed the year reaching over 45,000 children in the region, across 59 schools. Sister Medhin from our partner, Daughters of Charity, pictured above with our

founder Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow by her side as lunch is being served, notes the importance of our presence in Ethiopia: "They [Mary's Meals] make sure we know that we are safe. There is a source of hope and then the source of strength that comes with that. Every time I think about dark moments, I think of the love, the care, sensitivity, concern, and thoughtfulness that is shared by the Mary's Meals team. I have never felt alone."

## 5. Fuelling efficiencies in Liberia

As we implement school feeding programmes, we take care that all our activities are carried out in an environmentally responsible manner, while remaining alert to continual organisational learning opportunities in line with these values.

During 2023, we made strides in Liberia to reduce the environmental impact of school feeding by implementing fuel-efficient eco-stoves across the programme. Over the course of 2023, we installed 254 stoves in schools across 5 counties in Liberia, which we will continue to expand upon in 2024.

To determine the sustainability of the stoves for the communities, we conducted a survey with 38 volunteer cooks and 19 teachers.

- 98% of respondents stated that they prefer the energy efficient stove to the previous method used in their schools, primarily due to reduced cooking time
- 94% of respondents reported that they have experienced no challenges using and maintaining the energy efficient stove

The fuel-efficient stove allows for more efficient heating and cooking which in turn requires less firewood and cooks faster. The stove has a 30-80 percent overall reduction in air pollutants, and 30-40 percent overall reduction in fuel consumption. Fuel-efficient stoves use fuel that is accessible in Liberian communities in a more efficient and sustainable way. The photograph below shows one of our amazing volunteers in Liberia, using one of these fuel-efficient stoves to prepare the meal for the children.

This intervention has proven to be an effective strategy for reducing wood consumption in the school feeding program. Feedback has been positive, with volunteers reporting safer kitchen spaces with less heat and smoke from the fires, in addition to fuel efficiency and promotion of environmental protection.





## 6. Impact of our feeding programmes

### Child-focussed impact evaluation

2023 marked the first full year of implementing a child-focussed model of impact evaluation across our four Programme Affiliates. This was facilitated using surveys and selected focus groups. Surveys completed with children incorporated child-friendly language and images to better capture children’s perspectives. Our approach to understanding and demonstrating our impact has been intentionally designed to gather and consider feedback from the key stakeholders involved in our programmes: children, teachers, volunteers, and the parents of children who are accessing Mary’s Meals school feeding.

Throughout 2023, 3,100 children were surveyed about the impact of daily school meals on reducing hunger, and improving school attendance, participation, and ultimately, progression in school.

- 74% of children stated that they felt hungry before the meal was served. This dropped to 1% after the meal was served
- Only 1% stated that they missed school due to hunger (of 1,507 children who reported missing school for various reasons)

- 84% of children never leave school early due to hunger
- 36% of children felt that they could concentrate well before the meal was served. This increased to 98% after the meal was served

### Evidencing the impact of Mary’s Meals programme expansions

During 2023, we reflected on the impact of recent expansions that were achieved during 2022, and early 2023. For Mary’s Meals, understanding and demonstrating the effectiveness of expansions is critical to ensure that we are expanding in areas where children, schools and communities are in the most critical need.

In Zimbabwe, and in partnership with the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), we expanded to an additional 45 schools and through this, our programme reached a further 14,042 children. In the first quarter of 2023, we conducted a post-baseline study to better understand and demonstrate the impact that entry of a feeding programme into a school can have on educational outputs and achievement-related metrics.

Across the 45 schools that we expanded to, within three months of the start of feeding, we observed a 4.3% increase in attendance of children.

This amounts to a further 604 children attending school as a result of the commencement of the school feeding programme.

We spoke with 471 children from 30 of the 45 schools where we expanded to. The age of children that we spoke to range from Early Childhood Development (ECD) through to Grade 8.

- 79% of children reported that prior to the school feeding programme being introduced at their school they would worry about hunger to some extent during the school day. Since school feeding has been introduced, this dropped to 8%
- We asked children about the extent to which hunger impacted their ability to concentrate. Prior to feeding, 33% of children reported that their concentration in the classroom was impacted by feeling hungry. This dropped to 6% after the feeding programme was introduced
- Children also reported that they are less likely to either leave school early or miss the entire day due to feeling hungry, with 93% reporting that they never leave early since the programme started

### The impact of school feeding on households

As a process of continually reflecting on how our programme supports communities, households, and their children, we facilitated rapid evaluations that support us to better understand the thematic implications and impacts of the programme, beyond the direct school environment.

During 2023 in Madagascar, and in conjunction with our partner, Feedback Madagascar, we facilitated household level research to understand and document the impacts that school feeding may have on households where children receive Mary’s Meals at school. Findings suggest that parents and caregivers can spend a longer time attending to their smallholder farms and/or farming activities as the school feeding programme has absorbed the impact of stark inflation being experienced in Madagascar.



## 7. Princess of Asturias Award for Concord

In October 2023, Mary's Meals was awarded the prestigious Princess of Asturias Award for Concord, a global recognition of the impact our work has in both feeding children in greatest need and the impact on their communities. The Award was made in Oviedo, Spain at a televised ceremony attended by the King and Queen of Spain, in addition to the Princess of Asturias. The photograph below shows Mary's Meals' representatives receiving the award from HRH The Princess of Asturias. Receiving this internationally renowned award put Mary's Meals in front of a global audience and we hope it will inspire growth for our National Affiliate in Spain and beyond.



## 8. Global Campaigns

2023 began with an emergency appeal for the victims of the Syrian Earthquake which raised almost £1 million from donors across a range of locations.

In May, we launched the 'Small Change – Big Impact' campaign which focused on how the small things our supporters, volunteers and donors do have a cumulative effect to drive big impacts for the children we serve. It was designed to highlight our work to a new audience and, globally, we welcomed 59 new supporters a day during campaign periods.

Our 'Stop Child Hunger' campaign launched in October, focusing on three of our programme countries (Ethiopia, South Sudan and Kenya). The campaign detailed the unique challenges each of these regions face and was created to support year-end giving for our National Affiliates.

## 9. National Affiliate Initiatives

In early 2023, we were confirmed as the next charity partner of Clarins and began the work, alongside Mary's Meals France, of internally promoting this partnership across Clarins markets and Mary's Meals National Affiliates. The partnership officially launched in February 2024.

Mary's Meals Czechia celebrated their 5th anniversary with a series of talks and a sold-out concert, with over 1,000 people in the audience in Brno, which was broadcast live on TV.

Mary's Meals Austria celebrated their 15th anniversary at the Palais Liechtenstein in Vienna, with the Country Director for Malawi in attendance as a guest speaker.

Mary's Meals Germany launched their first 'Night of Hope' event at the end of November in Frankfurt. This was a new type of event for Mary's Meals, where the aim was to encourage donors to give in an auction-style environment. Over 100 supporters were treated to an evening of powerful presentations from Programme Affiliate and Partner representatives. The event was a great success and raised both income and awareness of our global programme.

A new International Fundraising Group joined our growing movement in Hungary. They undertook a launch event in Budapest in late 2023 and will continue to develop and grow awareness of Mary's Meals across Hungary.

The photograph below shows our founder Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow with Antal Kiss, one of the founders of Mary's Meals Hungary, at the event where they spoke about Mary's Meals before a short film with Hungarian subtitles was shown to give an overview of our vision and work.



For the first time, Mary's Meals had a presence at World Youth Day in Lisbon. This event hosts over 1.5 million young people from across the world. We held a film screening for over 800 people and hosted a week-long stall where we spoke to hundreds of new people about the work of Mary's Meals.



Mary's Meals Medjugorje hosted our presence at the annual Mladifest Youth Festival, where we presented to 60,000 pilgrims in attendance and held a large gathering of Youth Ambassadors throughout the week at the event.

Mary's Meals UK piloted a new campaign called 'From Dalmally to Malawi', a virtual challenge which encouraged new and existing supporters to cover some of the miles between the village where Mary's Meals was founded and the country where we first served school meals, with videos from along the route.

Mary's Meals UK and Mary's Meals USA ran their annual Matched-giving Campaign at the end of 2023, allowing supporters to have their donations doubled. These campaigns remain highly successful at engaging existing supporters, but also draw new people into our movement. In addition, Mary's Meals UK offered to triple Direct Debits to encourage further donations.



### Thank you

As an amazing year full of incredible milestones, achievements, and growth, the ongoing contribution from Mary's Meals Ireland to our global movement is greatly appreciated.

During this time, which sees communities across the countries in which we work face the unimaginable hardships caused by climate change, conflict, and rising food insecurity, your steadfast support, encouragement and hard work to raise awareness for our work continues to have a tremendous impact on the children we serve.

By working together to provide a daily meal, we are ensuring that children's immediate hunger needs are met and that they can concentrate and learn in class, giving them the opportunity to gain an all-important education.

On behalf of all the children guaranteed a daily meal because of the dedication of everyone who supports us – **Thank You.**







**Mary's Meals Ireland**

St. Patrick's Hall, Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9

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