

mary's meals

**Mary's Meals to begin
feeding Syrian refugee
children in Lebanon**

February 2016

Mary's Meals to begin feeding Syrian refugee children in Lebanon

Moved by the suffering of Syrian refugees forced to flee their homeland, global child hunger charity Mary's Meals is set to launch its first-ever school feeding programme in the Middle East.

In an initial pilot, funded by players of the People's Postcode Lottery, the organisation is planning to soon begin providing school meals to around 1,000 children at a school in the town of Antelias, located 5km north of Beirut, Lebanon.

With the Syrian Civil War now in its fifth year, there are more than 1.1 million refugees who have crossed the border from Syria into Lebanon. This represents the largest concentration of refugees compared to a country's population anywhere in the world, and more than 70 percent are living below the poverty line – often unemployed, hungry and surviving in squalid conditions.

Lebanon, which has been placed under great strain by the influx, will become the thirteenth country in which Mary's Meals is working. The charity's other programmes – which today feed 1,101,206 impoverished children every day in their place of education – operate in countries including Malawi, Liberia, Zambia, Kenya, Haiti, India and South Sudan.

Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, Mary's Meals' founder and CEO, said: "I'm sure we all feel deep compassion – perhaps even outrage – at the desperate plight of refugees forced to flee from war-torn Syria. As always, it is innocent children who suffer the most.

"For a number of months, we have been investigating how Mary's Meals can do its small part in alleviating some of the suffering caused by this greatest humanitarian crisis of our time – and I am extremely pleased that, thanks to the support of People's Postcode Lottery and its players, we will soon begin serving school meals to a small number of Syrian children who have settled in neighbouring Lebanon, as well as to their Lebanese classmates.

"Amid the carnage of the conflict in Syria, Mary's Meals and its generous supporters can provide a glimmer of hope by attracting Syrian refugee children back into the classroom with a nutritious daily meal – just as we do in other countries around the world, where the introduction of Mary's Meals results in sharp increases in enrolment, attendance and academic performance."

The United Nations has warned that the more than two million Syrian children who are out of school are in danger of becoming a 'lost generation', with evidence showing that it becomes more and more difficult to get children back into school the longer they are out of it.

Magnus continues: "With 59 million children out of school around the world and many more chronically hungry, it's easy to become overwhelmed by the scale of poverty and suffering. That's why we always call on our supporters to help us reach the next hungry child waiting for Mary's Meals.

"When it comes to a terrifying conflict like the one raging today in Syria, the temptation to despair is even greater. But, since every single Syrian child out of school represents a lifetime's potential under threat, we are determined to do what we can – and we know our supporters will be determined too.

"Like all parents, those Syrian mothers and fathers who had to leave their homes want more than anything for their children to be fed and educated, so they can hope for a future beyond this current misery. This nutritious meal, served every day in a Lebanese school, will allow those children to learn – joining more than 1.1 million other children receiving Mary's Meals, who are now able to dream of something better."

The Syrian children receiving Mary's Meals will be fed and educated alongside Lebanese children, thanks to a "double-shift school system" implemented by the government in Lebanon. This means that local children attend lessons in the morning alongside Syrian children who have adapted well to the Lebanese curriculum, while other Syrian children are educated in the same classrooms during the afternoon.

Mary's Meals is partnering with Dorcas, a Dutch relief organisation which has been working in Lebanon since 2013, to implement the delivery of the programme on the ground, as well as collaborating closely with the country's Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

As with other Mary's Meals projects – where community engagement, empowerment and ownership is key – the preparation and serving of meals will be supported by volunteers from both the local and refugee communities, who are the parents or relatives of children attending the school.

During this pilot phase – which will see children initially receive healthy and substantial wrap sandwiches filled with various ingredients to suit local tastes – Mary's Meals will work with Dorcas to monitor the impact of the programme on Syrian refugee children and seek to continually make enhancements, with a view to potentially scaling up the intervention to reach more children later in 2016.

Mary's Meals has a long history of responding to humanitarian crises, with the most recent examples being the 2010 Haiti Earthquake, the 2011 Somalia famine and the 2014/15 Ebola crisis in West Africa.

Ends

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."
- The organisation began by feeding just 200 children in Malawi in 2002. Today, 14 years later, the charity feeds 1,101,206 hungry children every school day across five continents, in countries including Malawi, Liberia, Kenya, Zambia, Haiti, Uganda, South Sudan, Thailand and India.
- The average global cost to feed a child for a whole school year is just £12.20 / \$19.50 / €14.50.
- Counting on support from across the globe, Mary's Meals has registered affiliate organisations in Austria, Canada, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as international fundraising groups in Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland 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 65,000 in Malawi alone.
- 70% of the near-thousand children Mary's Meals will begin feeding in Lebanon are Syrian, while the remainder are either Lebanese or refugees from another embattled Middle Eastern nation.
- The success of the Lebanese government's "double-shift school system", which has opened up thousands of extra school places for refugees, has resulted in Turkey and Jordan pursuing similar initiatives.
- People's Postcode Lottery manages society lotteries on behalf of a range of charitable bodies. These lotteries support charities and good causes. Players of People's Postcode Lottery have raised more than £104.2 million for charity. Please visit www.postcodelottery.co.uk to find out more.

- Please visit www.marysmeals.org.uk to find out more about the work of Mary's Meals.

For more information, please contact:

Jane Hamilton, Head of Communications (UK & Ireland)

Tel: +44 (0) 141 336 7094 | Mob: +44 (0) 7779790541

jane.hamilton@marysmeals.org