

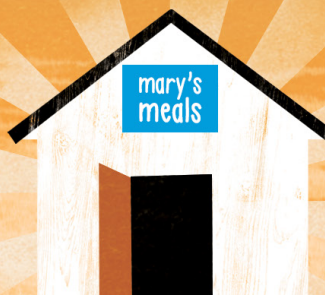


# LITTLE ACTS, BIG DIFFERENCE

**Complementary resource to Mary's Meals Ireland's  
youth programme: teacher / youth leader guide**

## Excerpts from The Shed That Fed A Million Children

**by Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow**



With thanks to the publisher,  
William Collins  
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# Introduction

This resource includes short excerpts from the bestselling book 'The Shed That Fed A Million Children', written by Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, founder of Mary's Meals. It is specifically designed to be used alongside the **Little Acts, Big Difference** youth programme.

We hope you enjoy working through these excerpts and the rest of the youth programme.

There is a longer version of this resource available (which contains a further four excerpts and accompanying questions). For more information on Mary's Meals or The Shed That Fed A Million Children and accompanying resources, please visit [marysmeals.ie](http://marysmeals.ie) or call Patricial Friel on 0863140814.



## LITTLE ACTS, BIG DIFFERENCE

mary's  
meals

a simple solution  
to world hunger



The information and figures in the excerpts from *The Shed That Fed A Million Children* were correct when the book was published in 2015.

Our movement has grown since then and we are reaching even more children with Mary's Meals. You can find out more at [marysmeals.ie](http://marysmeals.ie)



# Where to begin?

(page 141 – 142)

Magnus remembers receiving school meals at his small primary school in the Scottish Highlands and talks about the millions of children around the world who are hungry and unable to attend school.

## Questions

1. What is the link between food and learning?
2. Do you remember a time when you couldn't do something because you were hungry?
3. Can you think about some of the reasons why so many impoverished children remain out of school or unable to learn?
4. Look up the word highlighted in blue and discuss or write down the definition.

Of course the idea of serving meals in school is hardly original. Most school children take it for granted they will eat each day. I certainly did. Each morning in our little primary school in the Scottish Highlands, a sense of anticipation built as a van carrying steel containers of food, cooked at the bigger school at the other end of the loch, arrived at our gates. At least I think that is where it came from – it was always a bit of a mystery to me. We would carry them inside, guessing what might be in them. To find that the bigger containers held steaming meatballs and mashed potatoes made it a good day, although that was a short-lived feeling if the smaller lids were then opened to reveal rhubarb crumble. But I cannot ever remember going through a school day without eating, or even contemplating such a thing. School meals are accepted as essential across the developed world, whether they are funded by governments or by parents handing over 'dinner money'. In fact, globally, around 368 million children are fed daily at school, but while nearly every child benefits in this way in the world's richest countries, only around 20 per cent of children in the developing world are provided school meals, with the UN's World Food Programme feeding nearly 15 million of them. Meanwhile 57 million **impoverished** children remain out of school, while 66 million more attend the classroom hungry and unable to learn properly.

The more we talked and thought about Mary's Meals, the more the beauty of this idea captured Ruth and me. The board and all those involved in Scottish International Relief back home were immediately supportive of the proposal to start this new campaign. We decided to set up a branch of Scottish International Relief in Malawi to begin this work there (as well as the various other projects we were by now committed to in that country). Gay Russell did a huge amount of work to get the organisation set up in the right way, roping in a friend in Blantyre who was a lawyer, and before long she joined Tony Smith and me as the first Trustees of the new Malawi organisation. Meanwhile we began fundraising for our new Mary's Meals campaign.

We all agreed that the vision of Mary's Meals should be for every child to receive a daily meal in their place of education. Clearly there was a lot of work ahead of us. We just had to decide where to begin.



## Questions

1. Why do you think it is important that the Mary's Meals programme is 'owned' by the local community?
2. What are the benefits of purchasing local produce for the meals?
3. What can you do to help people in need?
4. Look up the words highlighted in blue and discuss or write down the definition.

From the outset we were convinced that Mary's Meals could only be effective and long-lasting, if the local community 'owned it'. We felt strongly that each school community needed to believe in this project and have a desire to support it at least as much as us. We wanted to avoid, at all costs, the mistake of imposing an idea on people; rather, we wanted it to be theirs more than ours. This would require a genuine respectful partnership in which the local community would give what they could to enable the provision of daily meals to their children, while we would support by providing the food and other required assistance that they were unable to afford. Specifically, this concept would depend on local volunteers making a commitment to organize and carry out the daily work of cooking and serving the food. We were determined to ensure this was not seen as another emergency feeding project, but a very specific, community-owned intervention aimed at schoolchildren and linked always to education. At Chilomoni, it became clear that the Parent Teachers' Association (PTA) was the appropriate local body through which to organize. Following some community meetings at which a huge desire and enthusiasm for the Mary's Meals project was amply demonstrated, the PTA agreed to take responsibility for organizing a rota of parents and grandparents who would take their turn in giving up a morning to prepare the meals.

Another thing we felt very strongly about was that, whenever possible, the food we provided should be locally grown rather than imported. We wanted to support the economy of the country and the local farmers at every opportunity. In Malawi there was an extremely popular porridge for children called Likuni Phala ('Likuni' being the name of the place where the dish had been carefully formulated for growing children by some pioneering nuns several years earlier, while 'Phala' simply means porridge). It consists of maize, soya and sugar, and is fortified with **vitamins** and minerals. It has become the dish of choice for Malawian children and their families. Gay knew a company who manufactured Likuni Phala, by buying the raw ingredients from smallholder farmers all over Malawi and processing them into a ready-mix that simply required cooking in boiling water before serving. The choice of this, as the food we could buy and serve, was a very straightforward one. The ingredients – aside from some of the added **vitamins**, which came from South Africa – were all grown within Malawi and the product was readily available, easy to transport and simple to cook. It was also wonderfully inexpensive!

During January 2003, the first Mary's Meals were cooked and served at Chilomoni. That same week exactly the same thing was happening for the first time in those remote and hungry villages in Chipini. There, the impressive Medical Missionaries of Mary sisters had organized the school feeding programme, based on exactly the same model of local volunteers cooking Likuni Phala, for seven small primary schools. The rates of child malnutrition were particularly high there, and many children did not attend school because of hunger and poverty. And so it was that Mary's Meals began in an urban and rural setting simultaneously.

My first visit to Chipini after the start of Mary's Meals was, sadly, during another famine, for in 2003 food shortages here were more acute than ever. At Chinyazi primary school, skinny children queued quietly for their Mary's Meals. Far too quietly. Many of the children walked past me, the white man with the camera, as if I wasn't there: none of the usual laughing and **jostling** to get in the picture. It was already noon and they were more interested in eating for the first time that day. Little groups of children sat down in the dust and silently ate their porridge. For most of them this would be their only meal of the day. Near the school, outside a mud hut, I saw a 'gogo' (grandmother) sitting with her youngest grandchildren and I paid her a visit. She explained that her daughter, the children's mother, had died and that she was the children's sole carer. She told me in despairing tones that there was now no maize she could



afford to buy in this whole area. Later on, her two older grandchildren, Allieta and Kondwande, arrived back from school carrying their grubby jotters and empty mugs (in which they had been served their Mary's Meals). They had more energy now. They laughed when they saw me at their home and proudly showed Granny their schoolwork. They explained that the daily porridge was enabling them to attend school for the first time.

Within a few months of serving Mary's Meals a few things became obvious. First of all it was plain to see that this was not just a nice idea. It was something that would actually work. The schools began to report that, after the introduction of the daily meals, children whose attendance rates had previously been very poor, because of illness and hunger, were now attending every day. They also began to see significant increases in [enrolment](#). Children who had never been to school were coming for the first time, sent by parents who were assured their children would now eat every day and were therefore happy to give up the help they might have been providing in the fields and at home.





# School + Food = Hope

Mary's Meals sets up school feeding programmes in some of the world's poorest communities to attract chronically hungry children into the classroom, where they can gain an education that provides an escape from poverty.

Our 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 of things.

**It costs just €22 to feed a child for a whole school year with Mary's Meals.**

Our work to feed hungry children won't stop. Even when the Covid-19 pandemic caused schools around the world to close, we worked closely with governments and community leaders to identify safe ways to reach hungry children with take-home rations so they could still enjoy daily meals.

To find out more about how we're keeping our promise to the children who rely on Mary's Meals and how you can help, visit [marysmeals.ie](https://marysmeals.ie) or follow us on social media.



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