



mary's  
meals

a simple solution  
to world hunger

Mary's Meals Ireland (A company limited by guarantee)

For the year ended 31 December 2022

# Mary's Meals Ireland Trustees' annual report

Company number: 420286 RCN: 20061920 CHY: 16897

## Chairperson's Update – Bert Main



In 2022, we celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mary's Meals – two decades of working in partnership with communities to provide much-needed meals for vulnerable children in a place of education every school day.

I'm delighted to say that during 2022 we welcomed an additional 258,977 children to our global feeding programme and by the end of the year, Mary's Meals was reaching 2,538,918 children across 18 countries. This work is only possible because of the many thousands of loyal volunteers and donors both here in Ireland and around the world.

Our founder Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow often reminds us that he didn't set out to establish a global charity. However, the support and commitment of ordinary people and their willingness to respond ensured that this was exactly what happened!

The overwhelming goodness and generosity in response to the first small appeal made three decades ago is what created the beginnings of this beautiful movement we now know as Mary's Meals. It's amazing what can happen when many people from different backgrounds pull together to do seemingly small things with love in their heart. I have seen this myself in Ireland, with people stepping out to walk for days on end as well as crafting, baking and even raffling cars! Along the way, they tell others about the work of Mary's Meals and as a result the movement continues to grow.

In 2022, we also celebrated the 10th anniversary of our largest fundraising event on the island of Ireland, with the annual *Step by Step to Feed the Next Child* walk in August. Volunteers departed from seven starting points across the country and walked for nine days, covering a combined distance of over 1,500 kilometres, as they made their way towards the Marian Shrine at Knock in County Mayo. Their efforts were rewarded well, raising a fantastic total of more than €121,000. This walk is a great way to increase awareness of Mary's Meals across the country as well as raising much-needed funds to help us to keep our promise to the children who rely on Mary's Meals. Good stewardship and governance were at the forefront of the Mary's Meals Ireland Board's agenda during 2022. Working closely with our Executive Director, our procedures were reviewed to ensure full compliance with the Charities Regulator Governance Code.

Operationally, the staff team welcomed a new colleague with the specific remit to help us further grow the movement in the south of Ireland.

Overall, we saw another strong year of growth in the Mary's Meals movement. As always, Irish people gave their time, talents, money and resources so generously. I would like to pay tribute to all of our volunteers who do so much on behalf of Mary's Meals, to our donors, many of whom give on a recurring basis, and to everyone who supports our work in so many different ways, all united in the belief that, one day, every child will have access to a daily meal in their place of education.

Bert Main

Chairperson, Mary's Meals Ireland



## Executive Director's Update – Patricia Friel

I feel like 2022 was a year of getting back to normal, but you may ask “what’s normal for Mary’s Meals Ireland?” As this report will showcase, normal for us is working with wonderful volunteers, fundraisers and supporters across the country to ensure we can keep bringing joy and hope to the children and communities that we serve through daily meals in a place of learning.

The year got off to a strong start with the Mary’s Meals Longford “Mega Raffle”, offering a top prize of a brand-new Volkswagen Golf. All prizes were sponsored, and so all proceeds went to Mary’s Meals. The volunteers in Longford went far and wide to sell as many tickets as possible, and many of our other volunteer groups got involved in selling tickets too. The raffle caused a stir with many around the country, all dreaming of driving away in a brand-new car! Our volunteers had dreams too – of selling as many tickets as possible so that the money raised could help to provide meals for children with their own big dreams. The tireless efforts of these volunteers paid off and the car raffle raised over €111,000 - enough to provide much-needed meals to 6,065 children while they learn over a whole school year.

Later in the year, another very generous supporter donated a 2007 Convertible Mercedes to the Mary’s Meals Offaly group. The Offaly volunteers set to work selling tickets and raised over €50,000, which is enough to provide a daily meal to 2,732 children in their place of education for an entire school year.

As our founder often says, it’s not about the big numbers in Mary’s Meals, it’s about the next child waiting. The same goes for our fundraisers – every event is important and helps to bring measurable change. I often say to volunteers if we raise enough to feed just one child for a whole school year then our event has been a success and I believe this from my heart. I have seen the difference that one meal a day can make to a child and their family.

Our Mary’s Meals volunteers are a talented lot, and we see many gifted bakers and crafters using their talents to raise funds and awareness of our work. They really showed their creativity when the pandemic caused big changes and some of the activities that started as a result have lasted the test of time. The Wexford group still has a monthly quiz running online, which has become a firm Friday night favourite and a great way of raising regular funds. Our text-to-donate number is also bringing in steady funds and we’ve found lots of ways to get the number out there – on social media, on car stickers, at events, and I’m always keen to mention it when I have a radio interview!

The Mary’s Meals West Cavan group had their first churchgate collection this year, taking inspiration from the great success of similar activity by the Donegal group. This is an area of focus for us, along with encouraging dedicated volunteers to establish new supporter groups in areas that don’t yet have one.

August was a busy month for us, with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ‘Step by Step to Feed the Next Child’ walk and commencing the process to launch our new website. We appointed a new team member, based in Roscrea, and tasked her with spreading awareness of Mary’s Meals in the Midlands and into the South of Ireland. Her time in the team has already brought great rewards and we look forward to what we can achieve together in the coming months and years.

We have seen steady and promising growth in the number of supporters giving recurring donations. This commitment is one of the best ways to help us to keep our promise to the children we serve and contribute confidently to Mary’s Meals’ global growth plans for the future.

We are very grateful for our loyal supporters and the many ways they help us. So many people give of their own resources whether that be time, skills, money or remembering our work in their prayers. Several support groups, families and individuals take part in our ‘Sponsor A School’ initiative by committing to raising funds to provide a daily meal for every child in a particular school each year. Every contribution is appreciated and valued and helps us work towards the achievement of our vision.

I am also very grateful to the Board and my teammates in Mary's Meals Ireland. We are a very small team who work together closely, doing all that we can to help and support each other.

This year has humbled me in so many ways. I am honoured to be part of this unique Irish family, all bonded together with one aim in mind; that every child should have access to food and a chance to learn.

To everyone who contributed to Mary's Meals in any way in 2022, I thank you for helping us to keep that all important promise to the children that we serve.

Patricia Friel

Executive Director, Mary's Meals Ireland



## Trustees Annual Report

### 1. Mary's Meals Strategic Plan 2021-2023

Throughout 2022, the focus of Mary's Meals Ireland has been contributing to the delivery of the global 2021-2023 Strategic Plan entitled "The Next Child", and continuing to work towards the strategic aims that it contains.

The plan sets out our strategic objectives and high-level milestones as we work towards being capable of reaching three million children with a daily meal in their place of education by the end of 2023. The three key strategic aims (Feeding More Children; Growing the Global Movement; Strengthening the Organisation) will continue to guide our work throughout the remainder of that period.

In line with those strategic objectives and because of the ongoing generosity of our global supporters, we have been able to achieve the following key highlights:

- Fed over 2.5 million children every school day.
- Welcomed 258,977 additional children to our global school feeding programmes.
- Conducted feeding programme expansions in ten countries.
- Began serving a daily school meal in primary schools in the Turkana region of Kenya.
- Welcomed two new feeding programme partners in Zimbabwe and in Madagascar.
- Launched multiple successful campaigns, including 'Global Hunger Crisis' and 'Big Family Christmas'.
- Continued to grow the global movement through our network of National Affiliates utilising various fundraising activities.
- Strengthened the organisation through the introduction of new policies and the revision of existing policies.

The sections that follow illustrate the progress we have made against each of our overarching strategic aims and highlight the impact that we believe these achievements have delivered for the children we serve and for the global movement we seek to inspire.

### 2. Feeding more children



Our school feeding programme grew by a net 258,977 children in 2022, representing an 11% growth rate year on year. This was achieved through a combination of three main factors. Firstly, feeding programme expansions in 10 programme countries, secondly a specific case of large enrolment growth within Zambia due to a "no school fees" policy introduced by the national government, and finally natural enrolment growth within existing schools which added a total of 317,109 children to our programme. These were partly offset by three planned transitions and exits of schools out of our feeding programme that totalled 58,132 children.

This is an amazing achievement and is testament to the efficiency of the Mary's Meals School Feeding Model and the hard work of our Programme Affiliates and Programme Partners who deliver it. Thanks to this growth, we are now reaching 2,538,918 children across 18 countries comprising 1,787,534 children across four Programme Affiliates, and 751,384 children across 22 Partner Programmes. This total number of children is higher than our public number of 2,429,182 which was released in January 2023 (based on verified figures from September 2022), prior to a number of programme expansions late in the year.

Some of the highlights and key changes related to our school feeding programme in 2022 are listed below:

## Kenya

Mary's Meals has been reaching children in the Turkana region in Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs) since 2005 with our trusted partner, the Diocese of Lodwar, and since 2018 with Mary's Meals Kenya. Over the past few years, the need in this region has been particularly dire, with severe drought after consecutive failed rainy seasons, resulting in crop failure and low yield harvests. We were acutely aware of the need within primary schools, which are often located adjacent to or nearby the ECDs where we feed. Working with the national government, local communities and schools, Mary's Meals Kenya began feeding in primary schools in October 2022, adding more than 70,000 primary children to our school feeding programme.



Boaz's story is illustrative of the impact that Mary's Meals has had on primary children in the region. Before the arrival of Mary's Meals, Boaz and his classmates often went for long periods without eating. They struggled to focus and perform to the best of their abilities in class and during exams because of the hunger they felt.



Boaz noted: ***"To me, hunger is the biggest problem. You cannot even participate in playing since you keep thinking of where you will get your next meal. The one thing that hinders productivity at school is hunger since we do not even have breakfast. We sat our exams, and I did not perform well. Even engaging our teachers during class discussions was a problem because of hunger."***

After just one day of receiving Mary's Meals nutritious food, Boaz saw an immediate effect. ***"The first day we received Mary's Meals I managed to read till late as I was contented and motivated to study."***

Boaz outlined various ways in which the meal has had a positive impact ***"I feel free. I have no concerns about learning. Previously, I was anxious about going to school because of hunger, but right now I am happy and ready to learn. My level of understanding has increased. I am not worried, and I am grateful to Mary's Meals because these meals have benefited us and we can now achieve our dreams in the future."***

## Madagascar

Mary's Meals worked with our partner Feedback Madagascar to respond to the impact of Tropical Cyclone Batsirai, which caused significant damage to some of the schools we reach in the Fitovinany and Vatovavy regions. We worked in partnership to keep our promise to the children we normally serve by providing emergency food distributions to around 15,000 households, ensuring children would continue to receive meals while their school buildings were under repair.

In response to the escalating food insecurity situation and amidst the incredible challenges posed by climatic shocks, Mary's Meals took action to forge a new partnership with Money for Madagascar. As a result of this new partnership, Mary's Meals is now reaching 3,922 children in 37 places of education in the north-west Itasy region and in the capital city Antananarivo.



Additionally, through our existing partner in the country, Feedback Madagascar, Mary's Meals has been able to expand our feeding programme significantly to reach more children in remote rural areas. In 2022, Mary's Meals expanded multiple times to reach a further 22,863 children in 139 places of education. This allowed our programme to grow and reach 98,027 children through Feedback Madagascar, a testament to our strong partnership and shared values.

## Zimbabwe

Mary's Meals has prioritised reaching additional children to the extent possible in Zimbabwe as it has been an extremely challenging time, with soaring inflation having a disproportionate impact on the poorest and most vulnerable populations. In April 2022, Mary's Meals started working with a new partner in Zimbabwe, Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), to deliver Mary's Meals to children in the Umguza district of Zimbabwe. This new programme is now serving school meals to 20,507 children in 69 schools.

Through our other trusted partner, Mavambo Orphan Care, who work near Harare, we are feeding 120,128 children across 126 places of education in Zimbabwe. Agnes' experience is typical of the students being served Mary's Meals in Zimbabwe. Money and food are scarce for Agnes' family, and it is not unusual for Agnes, on the left of this picture, to be hungry at home and to attend school on an empty stomach. Mary's Meals has made a remarkable difference in her life since we began feeding at her school.



Agnes told us her feelings about the promise of a daily meal, ***"I felt so happy and my hope for exciting learning has rekindled when our teacher announced that we will be having meals at school. I have been waiting patiently for a day like this. Today I am witnessing the promise coming to reality. I'm really grateful for the people who have made this food a reality."***

By supporting children like Agnes at school, Mary's Meals is helping to build a bright future for children in Zimbabwe.

## Liberia

In 2022, we were able to expand our reach in the county of Bong, where we are the sole provider of school meals. Based on an identified need, we expanded our feeding programme to 71 new schools and were able to reach an additional 12,681 children. We were also able to track the impact of our



programme expansions, with pre-feeding baseline surveys and post-feeding surveys conducted. Post-feeding, the percentage of children reporting that they can concentrate "well" or "very well" at school increased by 46%. In addition, the percentage of children reporting that they leave school early in the day because they are hungry dropped by 32% after we started school feeding.

### Impact of our feeding programmes

In 2022 we streamlined the collection of key child-focused indicators across our four Programme Affiliates (Malawi, Zambia, Liberia and Kenya) using surveys that incorporated child-friendly language and images. This was used to track our programme implementation and learn for everyday programme excellence, as well as longer term programme innovation and decision-making.

- 83% of children reported that they feel 'hungry' or 'very hungry' before the meal. This dropped to 3% after the meal
- 96% of children reported that they were able to concentrate 'well' or 'very well' after the meal
- 26% of children reported that the daily school meal is the only food they eat

This year we also completed research from Early Childhood Education (ECE) classes in both Kenya and Zambia, interviewing a total of 386 pre-school children, 389 household members, and 23 teachers.

- Hunger and food insecurity were high within households, particularly in Kenya
  - 89% of householders in Kenya said their children eat breakfast no more than 2 school days a week with 45% of householders in Kenya reporting their children 'never' eat breakfast at home before going to school.
  - When householders were asked why their children do not eat breakfast at home before ECE, 90% of respondents in Kenya stated that there is no food to eat at home.
  - 67% of the children we spoke to in Kenya said that the school meal was the only meal they would eat that day.
- Households in Kenya expressed benefits beyond a reduction in hunger
  - 37% of households worried about their children eating enough to stay healthy 'most days' or 'always' before the introduction of Mary's Meals. After children started receiving a daily meal in school, that figure reduced to only 7% of households being worried.
  - Following the implementation of school feeding in Kenya, 68% of householders reported a positive change in their child's health including increased weight, happiness, energy, fewer illnesses, and improved general health.

### 3. Growing the global movement

This year has seen worldwide financial strain, with rising costs of living and multiple crises sweeping the globe. Mary's Meals reviewed its structure to provide a clear focus on delivering inspiring campaigns, building global partnerships and ensuring our National Affiliates have the capability to grow the grassroots movement. This new way of working showed good progress and has allowed for enhanced planning for the future.

With global economic conditions impacting our activities through higher prices of food and fuel, this also has an impact on our supporters' ability to donate and this in turn has an impact on our ability to continue growing and to reach the next child. As a result, it has become clear that we need to consider deriving alternative sources of future income.

Mary's Meals is, and will always be, a predominantly grassroots movement, however plans were developed to seek additional support from donors who may be in a position to do so. This work has allowed us to plan more effectively for the future as we navigate through this economic situation and



return our grassroots income to the levels of growth required to allow us to keep our promise to the children we serve.

Despite these ongoing challenges, Mary's Meals has initiated inspiring campaigns and our National Affiliates have continued to find innovative ways to raise awareness of our life-changing work. Through this deep resolve to continue to reach the poorest and most vulnerable children, we have successfully grown the global movement throughout 2022.

### Food Changes the Story

Throughout 2022, Mary's Meals has continued to utilise our creative platform, "Food Changes the Story", as a tool to help us achieve our ambitious aims laid out in our current three-year strategic plan. The platform has three main characteristics and themes - hope, storytelling and simplicity. This messaging has been adopted by our National Affiliate network and has been consistently interwoven into our global campaigns and messaging. Additionally, there are core visuals that convey the simplicity and storytelling aspects of the tool. This has been an impactful creative device that enables our global network to instantly communicate everything that we want audiences to know about Mary's Meals in a single distinctive, cohesive asset. With its success thus far, Mary's Meals will continue to use 'Food Changes the Story' as we enter the final year of our current strategic plan.

### Global hunger crisis

In August 2022, Mary's Meals launched a 'Global Hunger Crisis' appeal to raise funds for the world's most vulnerable children who are suffering immensely under the increased strain from the perfect storm of conflict, climate change, Covid-19 and the soaring cost of living. The six-week-long appeal addressed a different theme each week, including Mary's Meals' school feeding model, the voice of the child, our commitment and legacy and existing challenges in the countries where we feed.



## 4. Strengthening the organisation

Mary's Meals Ireland continued to strengthen the organisation throughout 2022 by taking specific steps to enhance our structure, policies, communication and system infrastructure. These activities all contribute to ensure our growth is scalable and sustainable, allowing us to deliver on our strategic aims as part of the wider global strategic plan.

### Developing our people

An international gathering took place in October 2022 in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, with representation from 26 countries across the Mary's Meals network in attendance. This included all four programme affiliate countries and seven programme partners, whose insight as part of 'The Next Child' strategic plan was extremely valuable and inspiring. The gathering provided a great opportunity for our

global family to come together to build relationships and to discuss key ideas, strategies and learnings as well as promoting cohesion across our movement.

## 5. Report on funding received this year

The total income raised through Mary's Meals Ireland in 2022 was €2,071,914, an increase of 10% compared to 2021.

## 6. Thank you

As an amazing year full of incredible milestones, feeding programme expansions and growth closes, the ongoing contribution of everyone involved in the work of Mary's Meals Ireland to our global movement has been significant. During this extremely challenging time for the poorest and most vulnerable communities worldwide in the face of Covid-19, rising food insecurity, and climate change, the steadfast support, encouragement and hard work required to raise awareness of Mary's Meals continues to have a tremendous impact on the children we serve. By working together to provide a daily meal, we are ensuring that the immediate hunger needs of the children are met and they can concentrate and learn in class, giving them the opportunity to gain an all-important education.



Mary's Meals could not do any of its amazing work without the contribution of Mary's Meals Ireland and the network of National Affiliates across the world. As we go into 2023, we look forward to making a profound difference to the children supported by Mary's Meals.

On behalf of all the children guaranteed a daily meal because of the dedication of everyone who supports us - **thank you**