



Mary's Meals Ireland (A company limited by guarantee)
For the year ended 31 December 2024

Mary's Meals Ireland Trustees' annual report

Company number: 420286 RCN: 20061920 CHY: 16897

mary's
meals



Directors and other information

Directors

Fr. Eamonn Kelly
Jimmy Murphy
Deirdre Kenny Rudden
Paul Galvin
Bert Main
Caoimhe McCabe
Arthur Coary
Patricia Brandon
Ruairí O'Connor
Michael Galvin July 2024

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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Auditor

Clive Curran
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Bankers

Bank of Ireland
Carrick On Shannon
Co. Leitrim



A Message from the Chair and Executive Director

It is with a profound sense of gratitude and hope for the future that we present the 2024 Annual Report for Mary's Meals Ireland.

As we navigated the challenges posed by conflict, food insecurity, and people still feeling the effects of the cost of living crisis, we are pleased to share that Mary's Meals remained steadfast in our commitment to the children we serve, who rely on us for support. This achievement would not have been possible without the unwavering dedication of those who share our vision.

In Ireland, we are pleased to report an income of €2.4m this year. With this support, alongside our global family, we are feeding approximately 2.5 million children across 16 countries.

In 2024, we were excited to share that the cost to feed a child with Mary's Meals for an entire school year remains steady at €22.00, just like in 2023.

We know that the cost-of-living crisis has affected many people across Ireland, and we are truly grateful for the kindness of our supporters. Your generosity during these challenging times has allowed us to raise over €2.4 million, making a significant difference in the lives of the children we serve.

We're continually inspired by the incredible outpouring of love from our Mary's Meals family—whether it's through donations, prayers, volunteering your time, or contributing goods. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts to everyone who supports our mission. We recognise that every donation we receive is precious, both for the children relying on us and for those who choose to support them. That's why we are committed to being good stewards of your generosity.

We promise that at least 93% of all our income will go directly to our charitable activities, and we're delighted to report that in 2024 we achieved a fantastic 95.5% globally. Your support makes this possible, and we couldn't be more grateful!

Our promise to keep running costs low is made possible by the countless volunteers who generously donate their time to Mary's Meals. In 2024, we were thrilled to have 180 active volunteers from all corners of Ireland join our mission, including wonderful new faces from Co. Louth, Co. Cavan, and Co. Clare!

Each Mary's Meals volunteer brings their own unique flair, but they all share the same goal: to feed the next child waiting for a nutritious meal. This past year was an exciting one for our volunteers in Ireland! We embarked on a wide variety of activities and fundraising events.



In 2024, we were excited to announce the launch of the Irish Youth Ambassadors programme! Young people have always been at the heart of Mary's Meals, playing a crucial role in raising awareness and supporting our mission to end world hunger. We believe these enthusiastic young individuals represent the next generation of leaders who can help us create a brighter future.

As the Mary's Meals family continues to grow globally, we've seen a wonderful surge of interest from our young supporters across the network who are eager to get more involved in our movement. We can't wait to see the incredible impact they will have! Together, we're building a community of passionate advocates who are committed to making a difference. We want to give a huge thank you to all of our Youth Ambassadors for stepping up to help Mary's Meals!

A special mention to Aoibhinn from Wexford, who is leading our youth efforts in Ireland, and to Emma from Kerry, who has completed an incredible challenge by walking 100km for Mary's Meals from Dubrovnik to Medjugorje. Your enthusiasm and dedication inspire us all! Thank you for being such an important part of our mission!

Yes, it's true Mary's Meals Ireland loves to walk! Once again, our "Step by Step to Feed the Next Child" Walk proved to be our largest fundraising event on the island of Ireland. This year, it was a tremendous success, raising more funds than ever before! This event not only helps us gather much needed funds, it helps us to raise awareness, and it also brings our volunteers together in solidarity with the little children we serve.

Thank you to each volunteer who makes this incredible walk possible! Your passion and dedication truly brighten our mission!



With the next hungry child in mind, Mary's Meals Ireland has been proud to contribute to the development of Mary's Meals International's global plan. This exciting initiative outlines our aspirations to provide life-changing meals to many more children in need as soon as possible. We extend our heartfelt thanks to our supporters, employees, volunteers, and trustees for their unwavering commitment to our mission. Together, we move forward with determination, hope, and ambition, fully dedicated to reaching the next hungry child waiting for Mary's Meals. Together, let's continue this important work and make a difference in the lives of children who need it most!



Arthur Coary

Arthur Coary
Chair, Mary's Meals Ireland



Patricia Friel

Patricia Friel
Executive Director



Trustees' annual report

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 2.5 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



Feeding more children

2024 was a period of remarkable growth for Mary's Meals. We successfully continued to consistently provide school meals to more than 2.5 million children in over 5,000 places of education, while expanding our reach to add hundreds of thousands more children to our school feeding programmes. We also launched a new school feeding programme in Mozambique.

Expansions

Our dedicated programme staff and partner colleagues spent time during 2024 meeting with communities in areas of great need who were ready to give their time, skills, commitment, and enthusiasm to deliver daily meals at their local school. Working alongside these communities has enabled us to ramp up our operations in Malawi, Zambia, South Sudan, Haiti, and Ethiopia, as well as launching our new country programme in Mozambique.



Crisis in Ethiopia

In early 2024, the escalating humanitarian situation in Ethiopia was of urgent concern. Our colleagues in Tigray were keeping us informed as best they could – despite ongoing communication challenges – about the dire hunger situation in the aftermath of the brutal regional conflict they had endured between 2020 and 2022. Despite already reinstating our small programme there, feeding around 30,000 schoolchildren, we felt compelled to do all that we could to reach more children in desperate need of school meals.



Expansion into Mozambique

In May 2024, we served for the first time in Mozambique thanks to our new partnership with a local organisation called Mozambique School Lunch Initiative (MSLI). Mozambique is one of the world's most vulnerable countries when it comes to the effects of climate change, and has been hit by 11 tropical cyclones since 2007. As a result of this and other issues, hunger and accessing adequate food are ongoing challenges for its people.

Our global need analysis team identified Mozambique's Mabalane District area in particular because of its high need relating to hunger, education and because very little school feeding was already happening in this area. We already have great experience and strong relationships in southern Africa, through our well-established work in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, where more than 1.5 million children receive Mary's Meals across the three countries.

Generous gifts

Mary's Meals was also blessed by several large gifts during 2024, including the highest single donation from an individual in our charity's history. As we continue to scale up our school feeding programmes according to need, these gifts have allowed us to reach more children with vital school meals.



Growing the Global Movement



Milestone in Zambia

Mary's Meals Zambia was in the spotlight in 2024 as it celebrated its 10-year anniversary. Under the leadership of Panji Kajani, Country Director, the programme has grown from serving a daily meal to around 18,000 children at its inception in 2014 to serving daily meals to 530,000 children in over 1,000 schools.

To commemorate the milestone, a feature film was created to highlight the stories of some of the individuals involved in the programme, including a community elder, a volunteer cook, the Mary's Meals Zambia's board chair, a Mary's Meals school feeding officer, and children who currently receive our meals at school.

A celebration event was held on 10 October, where an extended version of the film was shared with invited guests.

National Affiliates worth celebrating

Supporters and volunteers from all over the world continued to find wonderful ways to turn their talents, interests, and innovative ideas into meals for children in areas of great need throughout 2024. From sporting-based challenges to musical concerts and even monetising recycling, we saw people making great efforts in support of our work. Significant milestones were also celebrated within the National Affiliate fundraising network, with Mary's Meals Croatia and Mary's Meals USA both marking their 15-year anniversaries. As an organisation that champions and relies on grassroots support, it is so encouraging to see our affiliates thriving, growing, and continuing to inspire people from all walks of life.

Harnessing the power of The Shed That Fed 2 Million Children

Founder and CEO Magnus' bestselling book continues to be used as a key promotional tool throughout the global movement. Work began in 2024 to translate the updated version of the book into several languages, as well as MMI agreeing a deal with HarperCollins to print low-cost, promotional-only books for use in English-speaking markets.

New ambassador

In February, Mary's Meals expanded its ambassador portfolio by welcoming popular Malawian singer-songwriter, Lawi as a global representative. Lawi, who first supported the work of Mary's Meals in 2022 by contributing the song 'Hope for Tomorrow' to a campaign entitled Raise Your Voice, used his social media presence and influence to bolster Mary's Meals' fundraising efforts in Malawi and to help reach new audiences during 2024. He also took part in various fundraising events for both Mary's Meals Malawi and our National Affiliates.



Measuring our impact

In 2024, we published the findings from our 2023 annual impact research, demonstrating a direct correlation between our school feeding programmes and positive outcomes for children in their overall wellbeing and educational development.

The report spanned six African countries (Malawi, Liberia, Madagascar, Zambia, Kenya, and Zimbabwe) and drew on interviews with children, teachers, and parents and carers of children receiving school meals.

Key findings revealed that in four of our large country programmes (Kenya, Malawi, Liberia, and Zambia), 84% of children reported that they never left school early because of hunger, and 99% of teachers stated that meals reduced the number of children dropping out. In Madagascar, data showed that school feeding positively impacted children's wider families. Notable themes include resource re-allocation, where caregivers reported being able to redirect some of their limited resources towards other essential needs because their children would eat a filling meal at school.

The report was shared across our National Affiliate network alongside a press release to encourage media outlets across Europe and North America to publish our findings and celebrate the true impact of our school feeding programme.

Our teams continued our impact assessment work in 2024, and the findings will be shared in the upcoming annual report update.

A youth movement with momentum

The Mary's Meals Youth Ambassador programme has flourished since its launch, and 2024 was another remarkable year. The youth movement ran global campaigns and hosted impactful events, showcasing their unique talents and passions to generate awareness of our work.

A leadership committee was also established to empower young people from across existing Mary's Meals National Affiliates to represent and lead Youth Ambassador activities in their respective countries. Committee members play an important role in setting the strategic direction of the programme and building Youth Ambassador structures in their regions.

In June, four ambassadors travelled to Malawi to spend a week with the Mary's Meals Malawi team and local youth ambassadors. The visit provided them with an opportunity to witness first-hand the impact of our meals in places of education. Later, in October, Youth Ambassadors marked World Porridge Day with a campaign which encouraged people to create and share a porridge smile. Their efforts in running campaigns, hosting events, and engaging in impactful activities continue to play a vital role in raising awareness and support for Mary's Meals among a key demographic.





Strengthening the organisation

New partnership with Clarins

In February 2024, Mary's Meals announced a new partnership with global beauty and skincare brand Clarins. Clarins has committed to donating 3 million meals annually in support of our vital work to provide life-changing meals to children at their place of education. This partnership will not only enable us to reach more children but also help to grow our audience. Clarins customers around the world can learn about our partnership – and the importance of school meals in places where poverty and hunger hinder children's access to education – through point of sale and activities at Clarins counters and online



Organisational changes

Throughout 2024, Mary's Meals International (MMI) continued to strengthen the organisation by developing new policies, including the Mary's Meals Global Safeguarding Policy and the Informed Consent Policy. The Informed Consent Policy: We are privileged that the children we serve, their families, and members of their community share their stories with us. This policy protects those who we interview and photograph or record in countries where our school meals are served and ensures they are comfortable with how stories and images will be used by Mary's Meals.

The Global Safeguarding Policy: Replacing the previous Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy, this new policy extends protection to everyone involved with our work, including volunteers, employees, community members, parents, and teachers.

Efficiencies through technology

As a remote-first organisation, effective project management and communication tools are crucial. At the end of 2024, we migrated our Service Desks, Jira Software projects, and Confluence pages to the Atlassian Cloud platform. This transition enhances our efficiency, allows for greater automation and AI integration, provides a modern user interface, and ensures better system performance and data security.

Leadership changes

In August 2024, Cheryl McGeachie joined Mary's Meals International as Chief Growth Officer. Cheryl brings extensive strategic, influencing, and creative skills from various industries. She is responsible for developing and executing our ambitious and transformational growth strategy and works closely with leaders across Mary's Meals to expand our global supporter base and increase sustainable funding streams worldwide.

Additionally, the Mary's Meals International Executive Leadership Team (ELT) underwent a restructure in 2024. A new, smaller senior team was formed comprising three Chief Officers (COs) reporting to CEO Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow. This restructure aims to empower the next level of leaders, enhance cohesion between teams, and uphold good stewardship. A Global Leadership Council has also been created, made up of ELT, MMI Directors, and representation from Programme Affiliates and National Affiliates.



Thank you

As we reflect on an extraordinary year filled with remarkable milestones, achievements, and growth, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering commitment to our volunteers, donors and supporters. Your ongoing contributions continue to play a crucial role in our mission and are deeply appreciated. This year, communities across the countries in which we operate faced unprecedented challenges, exacerbated by the ongoing impacts of climate change, escalating conflicts, and increasing food insecurity. Your steadfast support, encouragement, and tireless efforts to raise awareness have made a profound difference in the lives of the children we serve.

By coming together to provide a daily meal, we are not only addressing children's immediate hunger needs but also empowering them to focus, learn, and thrive in the classroom. Each meal helps pave the way for a brighter future through education. On behalf of all the children who benefit from the daily meals made possible by your dedication, we extend our deepest thanks. Your commitment ensures that hope and opportunity remain within reach for those who need it most. Thank you for your support in 2024.







Mary's Meals Ireland

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