

# My Weekly

# Helping Hand

## MAKE IT A MILLION!



## How It Works

Mary's Meals' plan involves making contact with each village community and ensuring there are volunteers to support the project, then they build and equip a kitchen attached to each school. The charity supplies the local staple food and the volunteers cook it in large vats in the kitchen.

Every child who comes to school will receive a hot meal. The benefit is two-fold – a hungry child has been helped that day, but the education he or she will receive is an investment in the future as it is key to breaking their cycle of poverty.

## Mary's Meals

In 2007, with Romania entering the EU, we felt the time was right to change the focus of the Helping Hand Appeal a little, so we joined forces with our friends from Iona House to work on their new project, Mary's Meals.

It had come about when charity head Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow was on a visit to Malawi in 2002 and met a family where the father had died of Aids a year previously. The mother, Emma, also had the disease and did not have long to live. She had six children and was desperately worried about what would happen to them.

"I talked to her eldest son, who was 14, and asked him what his ambitions were in life," Magnus told us. "He replied that he'd like to have enough to eat and he'd like to go to school." It didn't seem like too much to ask.

### A Series Of Little Acts Of Love

Because of one man's determination to make the world a better place to live in, there is now new hope for the children of Malawi...

**T**he founder of Scottish International Relief, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, is an inspiration. He told us how he first became involved in relief work.

In 1992 I was working as a fish farmer when I saw the images on television of Bosnian refugees. I'd been to Bosnia as a homemaker, met ordinary people and been welcomed into their homes. Seeing them in trouble moved me deeply so my brother and I decided to launch a local appeal for food and clothing. The idea was that we'd fill up an old Land Rover with supplies and drive it out to Bosnia.

A week later, we came back, thinking our task was complete, but we found to our amazement that people had kept on donating, and our garage was overflowing. It became clear our work had only just begun.

"I decided to sell my house and buy a small ferry so I could continue the work. Initially SIR simply provided relief, but over the next 10 years we also began funding other projects and in 2002 our work began in Malawi where the people were suffering from a terrible famine. It was around that time that I met a family in Malawi who had a profound effect on me.

The mother, Emma, was dying of Aids - her husband had died of the disease a year earlier. Emma said on a bare mud floor surrounded by six children. She told me there was nothing left for her and she had an elder brother, Daniel, who was very small and Daniel just 13, their mother died. No one realised until Daniel started arriving at school every day, which was not in character.

When teachers questioned him they discovered that Paul was ill due to lack of food and proper care and Daniel was carrying his sick younger brother to a nursery school, which had one of our feeding projects running. It was in the opposite direction to his school, but Daniel wouldn't leave until he knew his brother would be cared for and fed for the day. Undoubtedly, this action saved his brother's life.

"It's incidents like these that bring home to me the value of projects like Mary's Meals.

"I would also like to say that our work depends so much on volunteers in Malawi. There is a misconception in the West that we give and the Africans take, but it isn't so simple as this.

"I was Mary's Meals as a whole series of little acts of love, from the people like the generous My Weekly readers who give us money and backpacks, to the amazing volunteers who get up at 4am to find the wood to light the fires to cook the food that we deliver. It's a collaborative project where everyone works together, and although it might sound surprising, despite the huge poverty in Malawi, there is also a huge amount of joy there."

**WHAT CAN WE DO?**

We spoke to Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow of Scottish International Relief, a friend from our work in Romania. He and his team have come up with a great solution to the hunger problem.

"We build a kitchen at the school, managed by local volunteers, and feed every schoolchild," he explains. "The projects support the scheme because their children will feel that attendance goes up, concentration levels improve and the whole village benefits from the children's improved education."

It costs £5,000 to build and equip a kitchen, and £5.20 to feed each child for a year. That's right. What we would pay for lunch in a canteen would feed Edward or Daniel for a whole year!

If you would like to help the children of Malawi, cheques or postal orders (please don't send cash) can be sent to: My Weekly Helping Hand Appeal, c/o Kingsway East, Dunfermline, DD8 5SL. Credit or debit card holders can make a donation on Freephone 0800 338446.

**WHAT TO PUT IN: Backpacks/schoolbags, Jitters/note pads, exercise books/Pencils, Pens, Crayons, Erasers, Rulers, Sharpener, Pencil case, Towel, Shorts, Shirt/dress, T-shirt, Flip-flops/sandals, Small ball, Toothbrush, Toothpaste, Soap, Spoon.**

**Send A Schoolbag**

Help a schoolchild in Malawi by providing everything they need to take to school each day. Many children lack the basic equipment needed for effective learning such as jotters, pens and pencils. Some don't even have a toothbrush and soap to get ready for the day ahead.

Consequently, this means many are unable to attend school and receive the education they so desperately need in order to stand a chance of escaping the poverty-stricken life they will ultimately face without an education.

Here's where you can help - by sending a backpack filled with basic school equipment you will be helping a child in Malawi take important steps to achieving an education.

**THE ADDRESS TO SEND IT TO IS: Backpacks for Malawi, 144 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow G4 0HZ. Closing date December 31, 2008.**

If you have any extras from the list, they can be boxed and marked Spare Backpack Items.

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## Help In Haiti

In 2010, we turned our eyes towards Haiti. In January of that year, the country had been hit by a devastating earthquake. With buildings reduced to rubble, around 250,000 lost their lives and 300,000 were injured. More than 1.5 million people were made homeless. Mary's Meals were already running a school feeding programme, mostly in the poverty-stricken area of Cité Soleil, and when Magnus arrived soon after the earthquake he was upset to discover that most of the schools and their kitchens had been flattened. However, thanks to the efforts of the local team, the scheme was running again within a few weeks in three temporary schools and 4000 children were being fed every day. We were more than happy to be supporting such a worthy cause.

### Haiti's Forgotten Children

The earthquake-hit island has taken a back seat in newspapers and TV - but its thousands of homeless children, many orphaned, need our help more than ever

**E**ight months have passed since the earthquake which devastated Haiti. The media spotlight may be waning, but according to Scottish International Relief (SIR) founder, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, the islanders are still in desperate need of help - particularly the thousands of children left homeless and, in many cases, orphaned following the disaster.

Magnus visited Haiti soon after the earthquake and was upset to discover that several of the schools and kitchens from which SIR runs its Mary's Meals project, an education and feeding project for children set up in deprived areas throughout the world, had been reduced to rubble.

Much of SIR's charity work in Haiti is focused on one of the poorest areas of the Caribbean island, Cité Soleil. The slum, home to 300,000 residents, is known for its lawlessness, violence and extreme poverty. "One of the saddest things for me was walking around Cité Soleil and visiting the schools where we'd been providing Mary's Meals, only to find they'd been destroyed or badly damaged. The schools had brought hope to the community

It was really hard to meet the children outside in the rubble." However, thanks to the huge efforts of a local team, in just a few weeks Mary's Meals was partially running again in three temporary schools. Workers are currently feeding 4000 children every day - but there's much still to be done.

"When I visited recently I was disappointed to see how little progress has been made generally over the last eight months. There are still piles of rubble everywhere and most people are still living in tents, which is a huge worry as we approach the hurricane season. There are clusters of tents everywhere - between buildings, in the central reservations on roads and underneath petrol station canopies. It has been raining heavily, too, so in between the tents there is mud and seepage."

"In a way, the recovery has only just begun. Even before the earthquake, the needs of the people of Cité Soleil and Haiti were enormous. It's important we don't forget that."

However even in the desperate situation, however, Magnus found something to give him hope for the future of Haiti. "I met a boy called Jimmy, head boy at one of our schools.

Jimmy remains head boy for the future

One thing that amazed me was how perfect his English was; he was very articulate. "He'd grown up, and still lives, in one of the very worst parts of Cité Soleil. His family's home collapsed during the earthquake and he and his family are still living in a tent next to the pile of rubble that used to be their home.

"What amazed me most was the fact that during the couple of hours I spent with Jimmy, he never once complained about his situation or made one self-pitying comment. Instead he spoke about his joy and gratitude for having had the opportunity to go to school and how Mary's Meals had enabled him to do that. He's done well in his exams and wants to work in agriculture - teach Haitian people how to become better farmers, how to grow more food.

"He is an incredible young man, and meeting someone like him really fills me with hope for the future of Haiti."

To donate to Mary's Meals please call Freephone 0800 098 1232. For further information log on to [www.marysmeals.org](http://www.marysmeals.org)

**LIBERIA UPDATE**

Last year's Helping Hand Appeal for Liberia raised over £30,000 and, thanks to My Weekly readers' kind donations, Mary's Meals has been able to feed an additional 8000 school children, bringing the total up to an incredible 24,000.

Three primary schools are now supported by My Weekly in the north-west - one of Liberia's poorest areas. Each school child will now receive a daily meal at school. For many, it will be their only meal that day, so well done!