



# VEGAN COMPASSION GROUP

## ANNUAL NEWSLETTER NO. 4

December 2022 - December 2023

To date we have raised more than £60,000 for our selected causes – peanuts in the great scheme of human and nonhuman suffering, but enough to save a few lives and substantially improve a few thousand others. While our achievements are more modest than we would ideally like them to be, they are real and tangible and wouldn't have been possible without the heartwarming generosity of those who support us. Thank you.

That support is one of a number of things that greatly lift the spirits in a world where there is so much to depress them. The inspiring efforts of our partner organisations in faraway countries, who work tirelessly and selflessly against all the odds to help those most in need, offer a further emotional boost. Sometimes these activists even put their own safety in danger – I think of the young people feeding those displaced by war in Ukraine, and others who defied lockdown and the risk of Covid in Nepal to feed starving street dogs. Just occasionally, there is also the joy of receiving an individual message of appreciation. 13-year-old Emebet, for example, a beneficiary of our Ethiopian school feeding sponsorship, wrote:

'I benefited from the various types of food which provided me with energy, and which was supportive for my education. I feel bad when I see other children who come to school with empty stomachs. In the future I want to help such children and other helpless persons.'

Emebet's gratitude and her desire to help others illustrate how one small act of kindness can create another. At a time when it is impossible to ignore high-profile wars and the horrors we witness daily (let alone countless other vicious conflicts and cruelties that we rarely if ever hear about), such compassionate actions and beliefs are particularly precious. It is salutary to keep in mind that they are many.

While kindness is far from unique to the vegan way of life, it is a quality essential to it. Beyond the compelling practical reasons for following a meat and dairy-free diet lies a simple faith in compassion and empathy towards all living things\*. This is the belief that informs the little bit of good that we try to achieve with the Vegan Compassion Group.

As in previous years, our 2023 projects have combined long-term commitments – currently to feeding school children in Ethiopia and Uganda and thereby improving educational opportunities – with emergency assistance. For the second year running, feeding people fleeing from war in Ukraine has been our priority.

Thanks again for helping us to help them.

Mark Gold  
Founder

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\* I imagine that most readers of this report will be well aware of those practical benefits of veganism, so I won't elaborate here. To briefly summarise some of the most important: It is the best way to feed a growing human population, since you can feed far more people on a plant-based diet and need less land and other scarce resources – especially water - to do so. Furthermore, all major studies confirm animal farming to be one of the most potent sources of greenhouse gases and water pollution. Evidence also suggests that well-balanced vegan diets have health advantages, lowering the risk of heart disease and probably some cancers.

# VEGAN SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME IN ETHIOPIA

Providing funds for a school feeding programme in Ethiopia was our first project, dating way back to 2016 when we operated as the Living Without Cruelty Trust. For the first few years we sponsored breakfasts and lunches cooked on the premises at a school in Addis Ababa.

But everything changed during the Covid pandemic. Schools were closed, so the only way to ensure that hungry children received food was to supply take-home parcels.



Our partner International Fund for Africa (IFA) also requested that we switch our support to Jihur Primary School in the rural Amhara region in the north of the country. This was largely because the authorities stepped in to guarantee some provisions for the children in Addis.

September 2023 marked the fourth year that we have sponsored food for more than 100 students at Jihur. Pupils receive a monthly 10kg parcel containing a combination of pulses and grains carefully formulated to provide a variety of essential nutrients – carbohydrates, protein, fibre and a wide range of vitamins and minerals.

The impact of the programme has been considerable:

- Alleviation of immediate hunger
- A reduction in nutritional deficiencies and greater diversity in the diet
- Sufficient quantities to ensure some assistance for entire vulnerable families. In countries like Ethiopia, malnutrition and stunting are not confined to school students
- Improved attendance, as parents are incentivised to send their children to school
- Improved academic achievement

Additional benefits include:

- Employment for two cooks who prepare and distribute the multigrain parcels
- All food is produced and purchased locally, thus aiding smallholder farmers by creating a stable and predictable demand for their crops
- Parents are also provided with recipes for preparing plant-based meals from the supplies, especially for breakfast

*'We want to express our sincere appreciation for your continued partnership with IFA and the generous support of the Vegan Compassion Group for the schoolchildren of Jihur. Your support has enabled us to continue providing critical services and support to those who need it most.'*

Dr Tsedaye Bezabeh, Programme Director



## VEGAN SCHOOL MEAL PROJECT IN UGANDA

In the autumn, we launched a new school meal programme, providing funds to feed 50 children at Kasikombe and Nampewo primary schools, situated roughly 70 miles west of Kampala in Uganda.

Our donation will cover the cost of meals throughout the school year (253 days).

As with the Ethiopian project above, the aim is not only to provide hungry children with nutritious plant-based meals but also to help improve school attendance and academic achievement. Hungry bellies are the enemy of learning.

In this case, however, meals are prepared and consumed on the school premises. A typical meal is a local dish called Posha, consisting of steamed cornmeal, kidney beans and mixed greens – all purchased locally and contributing to the economy.

Our input is part of an ambitious initiative by fellow vegan organisation Magic Marble Foundation to feed all 400 children at the two schools and provide support to economically deprived families and their wider communities.

The school feeding programme is backed up with efforts to understand the problems faced by the community as a whole, such as the threats from malaria and lack of clean water. Parents are offered information on public health, nutrition, and humane, environmentally sustainable living. Fundamental issues such as the importance of hand washing, basic first aid and hygiene in disease prevention are addressed.

**‘Thank you so much for helping us, it means so much to our small organization.’**

Jennifer George, Magic Marble Foundation



# UKRAINE: MEALS FOR REFUGEES AND FOOD PARCELS FOR VEGANS SERVING IN THE MILITARY

In the past 15 months, we have donated funds for roughly 3,000 meals for refugees and displaced people in the Ukrainian cities of Dnipro, Kherson and Lviv – plus food for temporary residents at a home for those fleeing west to the small city of Kolky. The meals were prepared and delivered by a brave group of young vegans from the organisations Lviv Vegan Kitchen and, in particular, Every Animal. A translated video sent to us by the latter shows the deeply felt gratitude of recipients.



'Your contribution has truly made a difference in the lives of those we serve, and we couldn't have done it without you.  
Thank you again for your support and generosity.'  
Tamara Human, Every Animal, Ukraine



## VEGAN FESTIVAL TIME

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In April, we were approached about the possibility of part-sponsoring a vegan festival scheduled to take place in Kyiv later in the month. Our initial reaction was to say 'no' because as much as we were inspired by the idea of a vegan celebration at such a difficult time for Ukraine, it fell outside our priorities.

What persuaded us otherwise was when it became clear that the event was to be primarily a fundraiser for humanitarian work. 650 visitors attended, well in excess of the 500 anticipated, and the festival raised more than four times the amount it cost to organise.

In July, we became the sole sponsors of a second vegan festival. Once again, it raised more than four times as much as our original donation could have achieved.

We were confronted with another dilemma, however, because profits from both events were earmarked to supply food parcels for vegans serving in the Ukraine military. Not for the first time in our involvement in Ukraine, we had to consider whether we should be supporting any kind of military action.

In the end, we decided to do so, reasoning that life must be particularly difficult for those young vegans living in Ukraine. They have had to choose between their desire to live a life that involves no harm to any living creature and what they see as their duty to resist the threat to freedom created by Putin's invasion. Moreover, they have chosen to defend their country despite there being no dietary provision for them from the Ukrainian authorities. Without food parcels provided by friends, family or charities like ours, their diet is restricted to porridge made with water.

Ultimately, we were delighted with the outcome of these two events - supplying provisions where they are needed while at the same time bringing a vegan message and a little joy to this war-ravaged nation.

And one extra bonus! A survey of festival guests at the April gathering showed that roughly 32% were non-vegans; 43% of those attendees stated that the festival had prompted them to think about switching to a meat and dairy free diet.

## POLYTUNNELS IN NEPAL

A project completed earlier this year was the purchase and construction of polytunnels for five struggling families in Nepal for whom we had previously been providing emergency food rations.

Although getting the scheme up and running proved a little more difficult than anticipated – mainly because of water supply problems – the one-year pilot project is now completed and, according to our partners, has had a positive impact. In addition to nutritional benefits from growing more and a greater range of vegetables, the scheme has enabled the families to earn a small income where they previously had none. Market stalls and swaps with neighbours have been organised, and one of the growers has even sold some of their vegetables to a local restaurant.

The polytunnels make it possible to grow a range of vegetables throughout the year, alleviating the limitations normally imposed by cold winters and increasingly violent monsoons. At least two harvests become possible each year.

For the moment, our partners on the ground are unable to commit to extending the scheme to other families, but we will continue to monitor progress.

*'It's definitely making a difference in their lives. They make some extra income and they get to eat fresh veggies and also exchange for other veggies that other villagers are growing. So it helps nutrition wise ... and (earns) some pocket money.'*

Lobsang Sangbo, Grassroots Movement in Nepal



Even though it is not strictly relevant to this 2023 report, our funding of the planting of 100 olive trees on public land in Gaza in 2022 has been much in mind of late.

At the time of publication we have no idea if the trees have survived the Israeli bombing. In many ways it may even seem trivial to ask when massive numbers of people are suffering and dying, not to mention the almost entirely ignored non-human animals who have been traumatised, injured or killed.

Yet our trees do have a symbolic significance. Faced with the sadistic brutality of the Hamas attack on Israeli citizens and the systematic mass terror inflicted upon the Gaza population in response, the sentiments expressed by our partners in the venture seem well worth repeating -

'we plan to make this planting a celebration of planting the seeds of peace, solidarity, indigenous land reclamation, and kindness to all living beings - all of which are messages the world needs right now more than ever.'

Laura Schiffer, Plant the Land Gaza

## OLIVES TREES AND A MESSAGE OF PEACE FOR GAZA



## VEGAN COMPASSION GROUP AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

- The Vegan Compassion Group was registered as a charity (Charity Commission number 327281) in 2019, though it had supported one or two projects as the Living Without Cruelty Trust prior to this. It is run by a board of three trustees who include its founder.
- We aim to demonstrate compassion in action by applying our vegan beliefs to small-scale humanitarian projects. Donations are made for specific schemes, so that we know and can accurately assess exactly what our funds have achieved. We are able to eliminate expenses (apart from bank transfer costs). All our outside help for advertising, design and printing has been generously donated and our trustees take no expenses.
- The key to our initiatives lies in forging trusting and mutually respectful relationships with charitable organisations who work in the countries where we are active. Currently, these are fellow vegan organisations that share our vision.
- Our approach is inclusive, quietly emphasising our core values while encouraging other sympathetic souls who might support our individual projects without fully embracing the wider vegan vision.

## PROJECTS READY TO GO - CAN YOU HELP?

In addition to our long-term school feeding commitments in Ethiopia and Uganda, we already have three projects we would like to support in 2024 and which are ready to go as soon as we have funds available.

Please consider a donation if and when you can afford it in these hard times, via our website [vegancompassiongroup.co.uk](https://vegancompassiongroup.co.uk)

Please pass on this report and/or news of our work to anybody who you think might be interested. It will help enormously.

### 1.

Despite an official end to the civil war in Ethiopia, unrest continues and thousands are living in emergency camps for displaced people. Our colleagues on the ground say that 'the need is great' and have asked us if we can assist them by purchasing Famix – a flour mix that is locally prepared, palatable for very young children (under-tuos) and easy to prepare in shelters and camps. The mix is soy-based, with corn and some minerals, and helps to fight malnutrition and save lives. We will definitely donate in the near future but the more funds we can raise, the more children we can nourish.

### 2.

With another hard winter ahead in Ukraine and renewed Russian bombing likely, we would like to send more funds to our brave partners who will feed victims forced to flee their homes.

### 3.

We are conscious of our failure to assist non-human animals since 2021. Although there are countless projects worthy of support, we have chosen one in Nepal. Over the next year, we would like to enable the setting up of a small veterinary care centre in Kathmandu that will practice a state-of-the art CNVR (Catch, Neuter, Vaccinate, Release) programme. There are so many animals in a critical condition in Nepal and some of the well-meaning local vets who conduct sterilisation are not sufficiently trained, sometimes causing further health problems. Our trusted friends at Magic Marble Foundation – a charity with a track record of meeting its goals - are working on an initiative that will include training courses for local vets and will, we believe, have the potential to make a really positive impact, greatly reducing suffering in the street animal population and beyond.

New priorities will doubtless emerge as 2024 progresses.

# VEGAN COMPASSION GROUP

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## SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to our usual suspects!

Ruby and Vita Sleigh designed this report and Ned Buyukmihci has continued to update our website (though we have neglected it a bit of late). Ned also continues to run a valuable online website – Action for Primates – that encourages compassion and respect for primates worldwide: [actionforprimates.org](http://actionforprimates.org)

We're also particularly grateful for wonderful support from Vegfest UK this year.

And finally, thanks one more time to our generous supporters, without whose donations and solidarity we couldn't exist.