



VEGAN COMPASSION GROUP

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER NO 1

October 2019 - October 2020



School Feeding Programme in Nepal, 2019

PRE-PANDEMIC

Ethiopia School Feeding Programme

Welcome to this first Annual Newsletter from the Vegan Compassion Group. Like almost everybody else, our plans and schedules have been thrown into disarray by COVID-19, forcing us to drop some of our activities and take up others to meet crises that the virus has created. Perhaps the best way of summarising it all is to deal with our work over the last 12 months in three stages – pre-pandemic, pandemic and plans for the immediate future.

So here goes!

This time last year, we sent funds to fulfil our biggest commitment, sponsoring vegan school meals throughout the academic year (8 months) for roughly 100 of the poorest children at Hana Primary School in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This was the fourth year of our partnership with our trusted and much-admired partners on the ground, International Fund for Africa. Rather than providing only lunches, the project has evolved to include breakfast because it was found that children's learning capacity increases considerably when they are not hungry in the morning.



Early days of School Feeding Programme in Ethiopia

The IFA School Feeding programme is a shining example of the sort of project we are anxious to support. Its aims and achievements are numerous, but here are just a few of them.

HEALTH

- Reduced hunger and nutritional deficiency
- Improved energy levels of beneficiaries
- Improved hand washing practices
- Decreased incidence of parasitic infections

EDUCATION

- Improved learning and attentiveness in class observed by teachers among beneficiaries receiving school meals
- Improved school attendance of students

LOCAL COMMUNITY

- Local families helped with their overall food budget
- Food provided by local farmers (emphasis of project is on local produce)
- Four local women employed as cooks
- Mushroom farm established at school to boost funds and move towards long-term sustainability, free from food aid

HELPING IN THE UK

WELCOME REFUGEE MEALS

In addition to funding efforts to alleviate hunger overseas, this time last year we were also continuing with our (roughly) bimonthly meals for refugees in Exeter. Although it could be argued that our (mostly young) guests were in less urgent need of help than some of their compatriots in their countries of origin, many had endured hazardous journeys and some had been rescued from exploitative trafficking gangs. As well as providing a delicious vegan meal, it gave the refugees an opportunity to mix socially in a safe and friendly environment. And it was rewarding for us to meet young people from different nations and from different religious backgrounds, and to get to know them a little. All our volunteers were struck by their gratitude and good grace.



Vegan dishes and volunteers at one of our *Welcome to Refugees* evenings



Feeding homeless people in Exeter

HOMELESS MEALS

In February 2020, we began a similar venture, providing a meal for the homeless, also in Exeter. This was to be a three-month trial, but after our first meal – attended by 35 homeless people at St Petrock's day centre in Exeter – COVID-19 struck, forcing us to suspend both this project and our *Welcome to Refugees* evenings.

We would like to express our gratitude to vegan caterers [Fairfoods of Devon](#), who provided fantastic vegan food for all our UK events at a remarkably cheap rate. Also to Rolanda and Chris at [Rabbit Cafe](#) (sadly now closed down) for allowing us to use its premises.

PANDEMIC FOOD AID

Since COVID-19 restrictions, we have been looking to support some of the courageous emergency food aid schemes that have helped those in desperate need during the lockdown period. While there has been great economic hardship in the UK, losing livelihoods is so much worse in poorer regions of the world where both health and welfare systems are very basic or non-existent. Our small contribution has helped as follows.

We provided funds to feed **30 Nepali families for a ten-day period**, supporting our trusted friends, Grassroots Movement in Nepal (see photo below of the food being distributed) with whom we had previously worked to supply school meals for a rural school in 2018-2019.



Food for hungry dogs during COVID lockdown in Nepal

While researching the dire situation in Nepal, we also learnt about the perilous fate of **street dogs in Katmandu** and other cities. Usually they are fed by restaurants and tourists, but a strict lockdown literally left them starving. A brave group of local vegans cooked up a daily dish of rice, dal, pumpkin, soy chunks and arrowroot biscuits and took to the deserted streets to save hungry animals. We were able to help by sending funds for at least **500 meals**.

Food for hungry people during COVID lockdown in Nepal



Nearer home, we donated funds for nearly **1000 meals** for **vulnerable people in Greater London**. These included nutritious lunches for children from struggling families at a school holiday club.



Worker from Akshaya Patra Foundation UK preparing dal to feed hungry people in London, April 2020

We also sent a small donation to Nigeria, feeding **30 children for one week** at a children's village (orphanage) in Nigeria. The meals were based on a locally produced, high-protein, 100% plant-based meat substitute called VegChunks.



School Feeding Programme for younger children in Ethiopia, 2019

CURRENT PLANS

Sadly, while the pandemic is still looming large over everybody's lives, it is very hard to make hard and fast plans for the future. Ideally, all of our funds would go towards projects that also improve lives in the long-term and help to create educational opportunities for young people. But emergency funds are still needed in many, many countries – alas, infinitely more than a small charity like ours can possibly help.

So far, we have committed to three projects in the next few months.

ETHIOPIA

We have sent our annual donation for school meals at Hana Primary School for a fifth year. Since lockdown, IFA has been supplying **vegan food parcels** to help the families of children for whom we normally provide school meals. There now seems a good chance that school life will resume in Ethiopia, but if that proves impossible, our contribution will continue to meet the need for crisis food parcels.

UGANDA

Our most recent donation has gone to a scheme to provide emergency COVID measures in Uganda. We were attracted to this initiative because it is operated by Devon Development Education (DDE), a local organisation with whom we have personal contacts and who in turn have personal links with those operating the project on the ground.

The programme began in August and we made our first donation in early October, sending funds to feed 10 households for at least 28 days, probably considerably longer. Each family received

25 kg of maize flour (to make posho - a semi-hard cornmeal porridge that is the traditional basic dish in Uganda)

7 kg of beans

1 litre of cooking oil

2 packets of salt

Four pieces of soap (we checked with Uganda Vegan Society that the product was vegetable in origin)

DDE has informed us that the food is making a difference and is even saving lives in some instances. Funds allowing, we'll continue to support this effort as best we can, for the rest of the year at least.

By October 28th, we had received some background on our first ten recipients of food parcels, purchased on our behalf by Devon Development Education's worker in Uganda, Godfrey Kisakye. He distributed as follows to people associated with Katoma Primary School in Mubende District.

1. Ssajjabi Charles 89 years. This elderly man stays with two grandchildren. His wife died two years back. All of the maize crop in his garden failed due to dry season, so the family had no food.

2. Namukwaya Ruth 83 years. Ruth lives with her 87 year-old sister. During March her sister was sick and admitted to hospital for two months, so she planted very few beans and these failed to produce. They had no food when they received the food parcel.

3. Nsubuga Benedict. 84 years. He stays alone in

his house and cannot dig. Neighbours used to provide food, but now they don't have anything to eat either. I found him when he had been two days without food. He cried.

4. Kyeyune Christopher. 79 years. This man is blind and he lives alone. He had no food and was very grateful when he received the supplies.

5. Nakatte Firista 83 years. She lives alone. She is sick, suffering from ulcers and diabetes. She has a neighbour who is Muslim, who provides some food for her. They were both grateful for the support.

6. Nanyonga Rose. 80 years. She is partially blind and lives with her little grandson. Although neighbours help her because she cannot dig, they were short of food.

7. Namakula Resty. 72 years. This lady stays alone in her house. She had two children but both died 10 years ago. She had an accident and has a problem with her back. A church priest nearby used to help her by providing food, but it is now scarce.

8. Anna Nasanga. 83 years. She lives with her two grandchildren, who are orphans. She doesn't have any land, so the children go to work for others and get some food that way. They were very happy to have the extra supplies.

9. Nsubuga Patrick 59 years. He is living with his two children. His wife had an accident and spent six months in hospital, but didn't survive. Land was sold while she was in hospital. Patrick started renting land for digging, but the crops failed.

10. Nakanwagi Maria 87 years. She is staying with her three grand children. Their father had a mental health illness (and 'ran mad'). The children planted crops last season but they failed to come up.

The photo shows nine of the ten households,



UK WILDLIFE EDUCATION

Working with Folly Wildlife Rescue, a dynamic Kent-based wildlife hospital and rescue centre, we have sponsored an education booklet for school students that will promote kindness and care for the wild. It will be used primarily in conjunction with Folly's voluntary school speaker network.

The project has been delayed a little by COVID but is expected to be ready for the January 2021 school term. While voluntary speakers cannot really operate in schools for the moment, there is nothing time-sensitive in the new resource and we are hopeful that it will provide a good influence for many young people over the years. This project has been undertaken in memory of Ann Harriman, an indefatigable defender of animals and a long-time vegan. We thought it fitting to use Ann's financial legacy to this end, since she was a passionate supporter both of Folly Animal Rescue and of educational work for animals in general.



Rescued owls at Folly Wildlife Hospital



CAN YOU HELP?

Please **forward this report** to anybody who you think might be interested, including non-vegans. While our core message – that vegan compassion is about **respect both for people and for non-human animals**, and that **a plant-based diet is the only rational way to feed a growing human population**, particularly in an era of global warming – is fundamental to everything we do, our hope is that some of those who don't fully subscribe to our views will still find some of our efforts worthy of support.

This is a desperate time for huge numbers of people and other animals and there are hundreds of campaigns in many countries needing support, but any donations to enable us to increase our contributions are welcome.

Apart from bank transfer fees and website maintenance, every penny we receive goes directly to our chosen projects.

Final thanks ...

Our thanks to everybody who has donated to the VCG in the last year or volunteered or helped to spread news of our work in other ways.

A special mention for two volunteers: illustrator Vita Sleigh designed this newsletter and our logo. She also looks after our Instagram page. Vita has her own website and blogs on vegan issues. See her website for more details at www.vitasleigh.com or find her on social media as [@vitasleigh](https://www.instagram.com/vitasleigh).

Ned Buyukmihci designed and keeps our website updated. Ned also helps to run an important online website that encourages compassion and respect for primates everywhere. See Action for Primates website: www.actionforprimates.org

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