



2023 SUMMER NEWSLETTER

It's time once again for a brief summer update of the Vegan Compassion Group's recent activities. As has been the case in recent years, we have combined short-term emergency food aid – currently helping those displaced by Putin's invasion of Ukraine – with longer-term projects in Ethiopia and Nepal.

Feeding refugees in Ukraine

We've been sending monthly donations to feed refugees in Ukraine throughout 2023. In the first two months of the year we provided food parcels for the heavily bombed city of Kherson and almost 1000 meals for those housed at a refugee centre in the city of Kolky.

More recently, our donations have provided roughly 1500 nutritious meals for those fleeing to Dnipro. Ukraine's fourth largest city has taken in a huge influx of refugees fleeing the worst of the war, including many former residents of the destroyed city of Bakhmut.

Dnipro itself has suffered severe bomb attacks including one of the war's deadliest so far, resulting in at least 46 deaths, many more injuries and damage to the energy infrastructure.



Feeding refugees in Kolky

Vegan Festival in Ukraine

When our vegan colleagues in Ukraine told us of their plans to organise a festival in April, we felt full of admiration for the spirit and courage behind the initiative but rejected the idea of becoming involved. It didn't seem like the sort of direct humanitarian aid we prioritise and we don't want to be an organisation that only supports initiatives almost exclusively for the vegan community.

We changed our minds and agreed to become part-sponsors only when it became clear that the festival was principally to be a fundraiser, with our sponsorship likely to provide considerably more funds than we could afford to provide with our original investment.

Vegan Weekend eventually took place in Kyiv on April 22 and exceeded all expectations. 650 visitors attended the festival, well in excess of the 500 anticipated. There was a food court with four caterers, a coffee bar and 13 stalls with vegan food, clothing, desserts, and gifts.

The festival also featured comedy and music.

Most importantly, the event raised more than four times the amount it cost to organise. The majority has been used to supply food parcels and clothing for women serving in the military, with the remainder helping to fund other humanitarian work.

The festival achieved another bonus. A survey of visitors showed that roughly 32% were non-vegans, while 43% of that group stated that their experience had made them think about switching to veganism.

We are really delighted to have helped to achieve this outcome, funding much needed provisions for both refugees and those defending their country, while at the same time bringing a little joy to war-ravaged Ukraine.



A positive message from the Ukrainian Vegan Festival

School meals in Ethiopia

Whilst our recent donations have been concentrated upon Ukraine, our longer-term programmes also continue to make a positive impact. In our flagship project in Ethiopia we are still supporting 124 vulnerable school children at a rural Primary School in Jihur with take-home rations of multigrain flour. Each monthly parcel consists primarily of nutritionally beneficial

grains and pulses. Parents are also provided with information on how to prepare plant-based meals from the supplies, especially for breakfast.

The food support continues to help families faced with extreme economic hardship and struggling to provide adequate food. In addition to achieving improved health amongst children otherwise at acute risk of malnutrition, it has also resulted in improved school attendance. And academic performance has benefitted too because without outside input students would have been arriving at school hungry and unable to concentrate.

Food is purchased locally, ensuring a regular income for local farmers.

Our current donation covers the whole of this academic year.



Queuing for monthly food parcels at Jihur School

Polytunnels in Nepal

Roughly 12 months ago, we began a pilot scheme in the Dang district of Nepal, providing poly-tunnels for five families with no income so they could grow a decent crop of fresh vegetables. Previously, they had been dependent on monthly food parcels, which we had also sponsored.

There were teething problems that meant that three of the tunnels were not constructed until November 2022.

The latest reports are promising, however. Our partners, Grassroots Movement in Nepal, believe that the tunnels are definitely making a difference to the families' lives, allowing them to increase the amount they are able to grow and add variety to their diet. As well as eating their own fresh vegetables, the families can exchange produce with growers in neighbouring villages and even sell some food at markets to create a small income.

They no longer have to rely on food parcels to survive.



One of the Nepali families and their new polytunnel

Special thanks to Vegfest UK

Our friends at Vegfest UK have given us great support this year. In addition to inviting us to speak at Brighton Vegfest in April, they sent a mailing about our work to their list of more than 10000 people and sponsored the design and printing of our first leaflet. This was made available to all those who visited the

Brighton festival and will also feature at upcoming Vegfest events in Bristol (September 2-3) and London Olympia National (November 18-19).

Future plans

In the second half of 2023, we plan to help with a second fundraising vegan festival in Ukraine. The main goal is for the event to at least double our initial investment and provide many nutritious meals for victims of the Russian invasion.

We're also looking to fund a new long-term project and are currently discussing various possibilities. A lot of effort goes into selecting where we can best help, doing all we can to establish the credentials and efficiency of potential partners and ensuring that our values are met. It is also vital that we can fulfil any financial commitments we make, sometimes over a prolonged period.

Finally ... a bit about us!

A couple of supporters have requested a little more background about the charity and the people involved.

So here goes ... Vegan Compassion Group (VCG) was founded by me, Mark Gold, in 2017, primarily as a retirement project. I am quite old! It was initially called the Living Without Cruelty Trust and changed its name in 2019, having obtained charitable status.

Before the VCG there had been two UK charities – Vegfam and HIPPO – with comparable agendas (though there are differences). Both provided food aid to those in need, but for differing reasons ceased to operate at roughly the same time. I felt it was important to fill that gap.

I had previously spent most of my working life as a campaigner, initially for Compassion In World Farming but principally for Animal Aid, where I was Director for 11 years and part of the staff for more than 30 years.

I wrote a book in the 1980s called *Living Without Cruelty* that benefited from the first 'green boom' of that time and was quite

successful in publicising the vegan cause. This was followed by an annual Living Without Cruelty Exhibition in London for six years. I'm pretty sure these were the first vegan festivals in the UK, though we rarely dared mention the word 'vegan' in our publicity! Vegetarianism was still considered fairly wacky.

I also wrote three other books on animal rights themes.

I'm responsible for the day-to-day running of the charity, with valuable support from two other trustees, Cath Sleigh and Sharon Howe, and several others who offer their expertise. Both Sharon and Cath are long-term vegans and experienced campaigners. Sharon is also my partner.

As always, we're touched and grateful for all the support we receive, particularly to those who have donated funds but also to supporters who have publicised our work or offered words of encouragement.

We'll be sending a fuller report on our activities in our annual report at the end of the year. Meanwhile do get in touch if you have any questions.

While I hope you will remain interested in our work, please do let me know if you wish to be removed from our mailing list.

Thanks again for your support. It is much appreciated.

With all good wishes,

Mark Gold
Founder

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