



Mercy in Action

Newsletter – January 2021

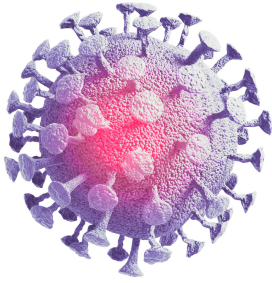
Update from Co-Founder Allison Todd

I am sure it will come as no surprise that 2020 has been one of the hardest years in Mercy in Action's history. There have been challenges to our projects in Cebu and the UK, as well as huge obstacles to our operations and fundraising throughout the UK, particularly with repeated shop closures. But thanks to our brilliant teams, in the Philippines and here at home, plus the encouragement of our loyal supporters, we have got through it. And while the start of 2021 doesn't seem much brighter, we know we have the strength and endurance to succeed, and see a better 2021 for us all.



With new words and phrases entering our everyday vocabulary; pandemic, lockdown and unprecedented to name but a few, we've certainly not 'been mute'! We have been working every bit as hard as ever only with greater challenges, fewer resources and less money. Our vision and resolve hasn't wavered though and despite, or maybe because of the challenges, we've reinvented much of what we do, simplified some things and taken on a lot more.

The following pages will give you a glimpse of what has happened and where we are directing our focus. I hope you'll be as inspired, challenged and encouraged as we are that not all news is bad news and that we still have so much to be thankful for. Thank you to everyone who has made it happen!



Covid-19 Response

Quarantine measures in the Philippines have been some of the toughest in the world. With a weak health care infrastructure the government knew it would collapse under the pressure of mass coronavirus outbreaks. The measures needed to keep people safe also impacts the lives of the poor negatively, as unemployment rises, poverty deepens. While restrictions are beginning to lift in some areas and for some age groups, the effects of months of lockdown will be felt for years to come.

Throughout 2020 and continuing into 2021, we have had to be creative and adapt to meet the changing needs of the communities we work in.

What have we been doing?



Our team has been working hard to make sure families are receiving the practical and emotional support they need. A lot of our feeding programmes take place in schools, which hasn't been possible while schools were closed. To make sure nobody goes hungry, each month we have made sure every family with a child on the schooling programme has received a sack of rice, dried lentils, vegetables, eggs and other essential goods. Additional food parcels have gone out each month to families in greater financial need, and we aim change this to weekly once restrictions ease enough to allow it.

Our telephone lines and online chat for parents and students are in use daily so we can give the extra support, advice and encouragement they need.

To keep everyone on track with learning while schools are closed, our team of teachers has been out and about in each community having weekly small group lessons in learning bubbles. We don't want any of our students to fall behind next year because of this long learning gap. And after months of isolation they were extremely excited to have fun activities and interaction with a teacher again!





Christmas In-A-Box

Thank you to everyone who donated towards our Christmas in a Box Appeal. In Cebu, 380 families received Christmas boxes, full of food, games, toys and gifts. That's around 1,500 children who had their Christmas utterly transformed thanks to your generosity. Our team in Cebu also organised a Filipino Christmas lantern craft, which was a lovely family activity for everyone to join in with.



While we weren't able to have our usual celebrations, there most definitely was a sense of fiesta as boxes were collected. Even the mandatory face masks couldn't disguise the beaming smiles as people carried their boxes away, excited to explore the contents. Christmas is such a special time in the Philippines, and we're so thankful that, despite everything that happened in 2020, thanks to your generosity we were still able to give our families a reason to celebrate. Thank you.



Christmas In-A-Box

Christmas in a Box was just as much of a hit here at home as it was in the Philippines! Through our Bath and Oxford Action Pantries, we distributed 138 boxes to vulnerable families who otherwise may not have been able to afford Christmas food and presents for their children. We were also able to give 86 fresh joints of meat, 134 care packages, 55 Christmas presents, 100 stocking fillers, 200 games and 10 Christmas trees! Phew. Our elves certainly were busy!



It cannot be underestimated how much these boxes meant to the families who received them. After the sudden change of rules around Christmas get-togethers, many families who had previously planned to spend Christmas with friends or family, were worried about the added burden of feeding their children for those extra 5 days. The promise of Christmas in a Box allowed them to relax, secure in the knowledge that they and their children would go to bed with full tummies, and have some additional luxuries to make the day special.



UK Projects Update: Petra

Our Petra Project continues to grow. We now have 4 homes in and around Bath with the capacity to house 18 mothers and their babies who would otherwise be facing homelessness. Our support workers are on hand every day to teach life skills such as money management, cooking and nutrition, to enable independence and self sufficiency.

So far, we have assisted 16 mothers to find their own permanent accommodation. It is so rewarding to see these family units becoming established, and for the young women to become independent. It's wonderful to see these women flourishing and becoming more confident as mums and individuals.

In 2019 we launched the first Oxford Petra House, which is specifically for NEET (not in education, employment or training) young men who are facing homelessness. This house has the capacity for 6 men, who receive life skills, education and employment training, with the aim that they will move on from Petra to live independent lives with rewarding careers.

From the Petra Houses

Petra Volunteer Esther:

I started volunteering at Petra in September 2020 and I have loved every minute of it! It has been wonderful to see how the houses run, work with the Petra team and get to know the mums and babies.

Each time I go there are different things to help with which has been lots of fun; - baking, playing with the children, chatting with the mums, playing games, cleaning, wrapping Christmas presents, moving a new mum in, moving another on to her new home - to name a few! I feel privileged to have the opportunity to be around such lovely mums and children and to play a small part in supporting them. Thank you Petra

The Mums:

"Petra makes me feel happier. I'm not lonely and I have been able to reduce my antidepressants. It's great to see the kids making friends."

"The staff are really helpful. I'm living with other mums who know what it's like to be in this situation. They understand. It's nice for the children to have each other."



UK Projects Update: Action Pantry

The hardships associated with Covid restrictions and lockdowns have made our Action Pantry projects busier than ever. Food insecurity is a regular term in our vocabulary now, and stories regarding free school meals, and often the woeful quality of them, have been common in the news and across social media over recent months.

After the success of our Bath Action Pantry, we opened a second Action Pantry in Oxford during 2020. Initially, the Oxford team were serving around 40 families a week. Since Lockdown 3.0 was announced in the New Year, that number has risen rapidly by over 50%, with 20 new households joining in the first two weeks of January alone.

The Pantry is more than just a food cupboard - it has a great sense of community. Some of our members have been asking what they can do to help. So we now have a couple of members helping to collect the food and put it all away on Thursdays, and a couple of others helping to deliver food parcels to those who can't get to us, which is amazing! It's been wonderful to grow the team with people who are so passionate to help others.



Our team in Oxford works closely with one of the local primary schools. While schools are closed, we are providing weekly food parcels to their families with children on free school meals. The parcels consist of lots of cupboard staples along with fresh meat, veg, and fruit, to keep their family well fed for the week. In terms of what has been in the media recently, it has highlighted how much charities like MiA are doing to plug the gaps, but sadly there is so much more need out there.

As lockdown continues, and food insecurity increases due to Covid restrictions and job losses, sadly we only expect demand to grow. Our Pantries are a vital resource to hundreds of vulnerable families living in some of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country.

Child Sponsorship

Child sponsorship is at the heart of what we do. For 60p a day, you can transform the life of a child in the Philippines through education, healthy food and the knowledge that someone is invested in them and wants them to succeed.

We know that things are tight for many people at the moment. However, if you're now working from home, could you use some of your saved petrol or bus money to sponsor a child? No longer picking up that daily coffee on your way to work? How about putting that money to good use in our sponsorship programme instead?

As a sponsor, you can be assured that your money is being spent wisely in Cebu. Children are provided with everything they need to progress at school - uniforms, textbooks and supplies. All children receive a hot meal every day at school to help their growth, development and concentration. They also have the care and knowledge of our team at their disposal, if they are either struggling in their studies or family life is difficult.



Some of our longterm sponsors are now seeing their sponsor children graduate University and start long term, rewarding careers. This is something the families of these children could never have dreamed of, without Mercy in Action's support. For many of these students, they are the first members of their family to attend University - this is how we break the cycle of poverty. The whole community can be transformed by the empowering nature of education.

So please, take a look at your budget. See if you have £18 a month, just 60p a day, spare to help transform the life of a child, and the future of a community. Thank you.

How you can help

- **Pray** - Please pray for our families in Cebu and here in the UK, who are struggling financially and mentally under these coronavirus restrictions. Please also pray for wisdom for our board of directors as they lead the charity through this challenging time.
- **Give** - We know times are hard right now. But if you are able to start or increase your regular giving, even for a short time frame, that would help us through these difficult times when our funding has been slashed due to shop closures.
- **Volunteer** - Our Action Pantries in Bath and Oxford are busier than ever. Please get in touch if you can spare a few hours to help out.
- **Donate** - Once our shops are open again, they will need your donations! It would be advisable to ring ahead of your donation to check they have the capacity to receive it.
- **Shop** - If you live close to a Mercy in Action charity shop, please consider visiting it once restrictions are eased. We're sure you'll find something you love!
- **Keep connected** - We post regular updates and news on social media. So make sure you're following us so you know what we're up to: facebook.com/MercyInActionUK
- **Share** - Please share what we're doing with friends, family, groups, church etc. Either through passing this newsletter on, sharing our Facebook posts or simply through word of mouth. Every new supporter is incredibly valued by us!

Email Addresses Please!

We plan to move a lot more of our communications to email. To ensure you stay connected with us, please contact us on enquiries@mercyinaction.org.uk to give us your current email address. Even if you think we already have it, please get in touch so we know we have permission to email you. And check your junk box for our regular updates!

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