



# Stop hunger from ruining a child's life



## PLATE PLEDGE CASE STUDIES

These stories offer a disturbing insight into the suffering caused by lack of regular food and good nutrition. They also show how simple steps of providing food vouchers and regular meals help our children and their families take massive strides towards improving their lives.

### A TEENAGER STARVES AFTER FAMILY SPIRALS INTO POVERTY FOLLOWING MURDER.

When she was 19-years-old Kerry regularly suffered without food so her eight-year-old brother Jacob could eat.

Her sacrifice led to migraines, light-headedness, irritability and a distended stomach as her body cried out for sustenance.

And while his sister went without food, Jacob's diet mainly consisted of £1 chicken and chips, depriving him of the necessary nutrients to develop and grow.

Like many children who come to us, although he had food in his belly but was suffering from malnutrition.

He still has extensive problems with his teeth and gums due to lack of vitamins, minerals and iron in his earlier childhood.

It was the murder of the oldest son Steven, a diligent college student, that triggered this family's decline into shocking poverty.

As they struggled to cope with their grief, circumstances changed and they found themselves having to get back with very little money

Suddenly feeding the children and providing basic necessities became a huge challenge.

In the year-and-a-half that Kids Company has been working with this family, we have provided them with the practical and emotional support to help them survive and heal emotionally – from food vouchers to therapy.

Now the family are able to buy nutritious food and have regular meals, Kerry's mood has stabilised, she is physically healthier and she is planning her future.

Her younger brother is also doing well and forming positive friendships.

There are many children who suffer the effects of malnutrition, and what may seem like a small gesture, such as weekly food vouchers, can have a lasting positive impact.

### A FIVE-YEAR-OLD COMES TO KIDS COMPANY SUFFERING FROM RICKETS

Five-year-old Pam was suffering from rickets when she first came to Kids Company.

A common result of famine or starvation in developing world countries, rickets is a disease that has not been prevalent in this country since the 19th century.

It is caused by lack of vitamin D and the sunlight that converts it into an active state.

It leads to a softening of the bones and potentially fractures and deformity and it hindered Pam's ability to move and grow properly – and when she first came to us she couldn't walk.

### Extract from an interview with Camila Batmanghelidjh, Kids Company founder.

Feeding the children is a crucial part of what we do. It really is a statement about adult care for a child. We're not giving them something and expecting something back. For children who have been emotionally and physically maltreated human exchanges are very confusing. You can't see I'm caring for you, but you should know I'm caring about you. But when you start feeding them it's a symbolic and concrete connection to the act of care. For kids who have abandonment issues this is definitely a sign that you're giving them care. It's not debatable. It's not confusing. That's why it's such an important thing.

### Sara, 12, regularly takes part in cooking sessions at the Kids Company therapeutic centre, The Heart Yard. As well as giving them a chance to learn fun, practical skills, the sessions teach our children about the importance of good nutrition.

Sara said: "The cooking sessions here are really healthy. At Kids Company we have really balanced diets. They make sure we always finish our veg. They don't mind so much if we don't finish the other food, but if we don't finish the veg we can't get out of there! They persuaded me to try broccoli. I used to really hate it because it looked like little trees. But they said I couldn't go until I tried it. When I did I really liked it. Now I like eating little trees."

Sunlight helps convert vitamin D into an active state – and lack of sunlight can contribute to the severity of rickets.

The condition was diagnosed after her mother Sharon referred herself, Judy and her seventeen month old baby, Pam, to the Arches II Centre in 2008.

Sharon was relying on a family member for food and she would often skip meals so her older daughter could eat.

Pam was still being breastfed and had not yet been introduced to solid foods because her mother could not afford to buy it.

But Sharon was malnourished too, so there was little nutritional value in her milk.

Before Sharon came to Kids Company in 2008 she was battling to stay in the country and living off a tiny weekly budget, as she was not eligible to claim benefits.

The three of them were living with another family of three in a damp, cramped third floor flat in a tenement block .

The children and their mother lived in the small bedroom while the other family occupied the tiny sitting room – and rising tensions would erupt in arguments.

When the children's mother first came to Kids Company she was given very practical support in the form of food vouchers and a bus pass.

This meant she could take Judy on the eight mile journey to and from school with a packed lunch and there was food on the table for both children.

Judy soon won an award for 10 per cent attendance – testament to her mother's commitment to her daughter's education.

During the Christmas period in 2009 the children endured moving house three times in eight weeks, in freezing weather.

On Christmas day they were living in one room in a hostel – but spent the day at the Kids Company Christmas party where they had a proper meal, presents, entertainment and taxis to and from the venue.

Our therapists have helped Sharon introduce Pam to solid foods, they have encouraged Sharon to have her chronic eczema treated and helped Judy with her special educational needs.

Judy is attending a small art class at our therapy centre, the Heart Yard, where it is hoped she will start to process her life experiences.

Kids Company have helped the children's mother resolve her immigration and housing situations and she is now supporting her children through her work as a cleaner.

With our help, she has become confident in using the internet and phones and dealing with officials on her own, so she can bring more stability into her families lives.

The children having been getting more fresh air and exercise, since Sharon's key worker has been encouraging her to take walks in the park with other mothers.

Her key worker said it was a joy to see the smile on Sandra's face as she pushed Karen on the swing and encouraged Donna to use the climbing frame.

**Matthew, 20, was severely underweight and malnourished when he came to us for about 10 years ago.**

He said : "I got to have a full meal every day. Coming here made me so happy because I was a lot less stressed. I had stability for the first time. I was able to learn better. I was able to do a lot of things better because I wasn't tired and hungry all the time.

"It gave me the will just to get out of bed. I didn't have to sit around or sleep all day. The only time I was getting up was to hussle food.

"I never understood anything at school because I was so tired, but here, because of the food I was getting, my brain was like a sponge. Within about two days I knew every bone and muscle in the body. I know about blood circulation, lactic acid. I passed everything so quickly. I was shocked."

**Pauline is a volunteer cook at one of our centres.**

She said : "I know what it's like to be hungry. I feed people at home also. I used to be hungry in this country. I was homeless in London for two months in 1989. I used to walk the streets and ask for food, so I will always give people food if they ask for it. I do my best to help the kids because I don't want them to go through the experience I went through.



## A 10-YEAR-OLD CARER TO HIS DISABLED MOTHER

David is a 10-year-old boy who cooks and does housework for his disabled mother.

Her neurological condition means that she is wheelchair-bound and unable to hold a conversation.

He is small for his age and talks in a little, quiet voice. He wets and soils the bed and recently had a panic attack on a school trip.

His father is often absent, his 22-year-old sister recently moved out following conflict with his father and he is looked after by his grandmother.

But he has a Kids Company mentor now and eats regularly at one of our centres, experiencing a 'family meal' around a table with other children and supportive adults.

While he is with Kids Company he can relax, take part in fun activities and experience his childhood free of the responsibility of looking after his mother.

## AN OBESE AND MALNOURISHED CHILD WHO GREW UP FORAGING FOR FOOD AT HOME

For years Dominic would forage for food through cupboards at home, mainly living off crisps and chocolate.

His parents both had severe learning difficulties and would not actively feed him.

Of his packed lunch they once poured a cup of Coco Pops into his lunch box.

When he first came to Kids Company he was so obese he could not get onto his feet without help after story time on the school carpet.

This extreme neglect came to an end two years ago when he was taken into care.

He is now living a settled life with foster parents and no longer has weight issues.

## A FORMER 'DOMESTIC SLAVE' FORCED TO EXCHANGE SEX FOR FOOD

Kati came to Kids Company two-years-ago having suffered unimaginable abuse and neglect.

She was brought to the UK aged 11 and lived with an unknown 'auntie' who denied her schooling and kept her as a domestic slave to look after her five-year-old child.

Abused, and fed a bare minimum to survive, she only started going to school after a kindly neighbour noticed she was being kept at home and demanded that the auntie send her.

When Kati was 16-years-old her auntie disappeared, leaving her child and the teenager to fend for themselves.

With no means to live and no British status Kati was responsible for herself and a small child.

Later that year the auntie returned to reclaim the child and left Rebecca alone to sleep on friend's sofas, where she began exchanging sex for food.

She arrived at Kids Company aged 20 and was given food vouchers and intensive therapeutic support so she could begin studying again.

This exceptionally intelligent and talented young woman who now volunteers for Kids Company dreams of becoming a human rights lawyer and has applied for an access to law course.

## Rupert, a father of five, has been cooking for our children for more than a decade.

He said: "This is like my family here. It feels wonderful when you finish here, knowing that they have all been well fed. Some of the kids are tiny – we have 10 and 11-year-olds who look about seven because they're not getting enough food. But lots of them seem to grow faster when they come here. Yesterday I saw a kid who used to come here, who was so small, but now he's a tall man. "

"Most of the kids here come and talk to me. And they'll tell me if they're hungry. For many of them, what they get here is the only meal they get in the day. We have some kids here who are always hungry. They get fed at school, they get fed at Kids Company, but they are going whole weekends without a proper meal – only crisps and sweets.



## TRAUMATISED, OBESE AND SUFFERING FROM EARLY ONSET DIABETES

AT 22-years-old Lisa is obese and suffering from early onset type 2 diabetes.

Traumatized by high levels of childhood neglect and abuse she is ashamed of her body and her troubled past manifests itself in personal neglect.

She struggles to care for herself consistently and wears ill fitting clothes.

She was used to eating chocolate, fizzy drinks and crisps which she would stash under her bed.

Although she is obese she is likely to be malnourished – but she perceives a healthy diet as 'unaffordable'.

This time last year she could not eat a whole apple, but now she is managing to eat one a week.

One of 11 siblings she lives with her mother and two other siblings.

There is often no food in the house and one of her 16-year-old family members, who has no financial support, often steals money for food.

She is being given food and travel vouchers and Kids Company are working towards helping her structure her life.

Initially she would be up to four hours late for appointments but this has improved and we are working towards helping her obtain a birth certificate and national insurance number so she can claim job seekers allowance.

Our therapists are helping to make her aware of boundaries, to protect her from sexual exploitation and encourage her to think about herself.

## HOMELESS SINCE 13 AND FORCED TO RUMAGE IN SKIPS FOR FOOD

Since the age of 13 Amy had been sleeping on friend's sofas and in parks, in squats and on buses and trains.

She would often rummage around in skips to feed her and her cat as she used her benefits money to travel to college and pay for her lunch while she was there.

She is determined to go to university to study English and comes to a Kids Company centre every Wednesday and Friday.

She says the £20 weekly food vouchers we give her have made a huge difference to her life.

She has even started to cook, after we gave her pans.

Currently living in a squat she has decided to continue living there so she can save for a deposit and use her student loan to secure private accommodation.

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All names have been changed to protect our children's safety and dignity. The stories of their lives emerged within the context of long-standing trusted relationships with our staff. As such, we will not be putting any of our children or young people forward for interviews with journalists. Our in-house journalist has, however, conducted interviews with children and staff and full transcripts are available. Some staff said they would be happy to speak with the media to raise awareness of the Plate Pledge.

Below are extracts from interviews we have carried out with young people, parents, teachers staff and our founder Camila Batmanghelidjh about their experiences with food.

Full interviews are available on request.

**'Mama' Cheryl has worked for us for seven years, first in a centre kitchen and now co-ordinating a mother's support group called Women Aglow.**

She said: "I've seen starving kids here. Children who don't know when the next meal is coming. They come here and eat every single thing they can find and they always want more."

"Imagine living with three children between three houses, and you've missed meals for two days and you have to watch the children cry from hunger, knowing there is no food in the house. You are stressed, frustrated and angry every day. But they know and the children know that they won't go hungry if they come here."

To arrange interviews with staff, or request full versions of the interview transcripts we have carried out, contact [Lindsay.burns@kidsco.org.uk](mailto:Lindsay.burns@kidsco.org.uk) or [Laurence.guinness@kidsco.org.uk](mailto:Laurence.guinness@kidsco.org.uk) for more, or call 020 72022700.

