

CHARITY PLEA FOR VITAL CASH

A hot T can give kids warm meal



By
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Chief Features Writer

CHARITY boss SallyAnn Kelly thought she'd seen it all after 20 years battling child poverty — until one kid reduced her to tears when all he wanted from Santa was a MICROWAVE.

The Aberlour chief executive has seen a 1,400 per cent increase in applications for the organisation's emergency assistance fund since the Covid pandemic hit.

But one request from a seven-year-old stopped her in her tracks when the only thing he wished for was an oven to cook the family a hot meal.

SallyAnn says: "This wee boy said it would be his dream come true if we could get his family a microwave.

"This was because they would then be able to 'cook hot dinners'. When I read that I cried. He's just seeing the stress his mum is under because she can't cook them a hot meal.

"Then I thought, 'It can't be right that in Scotland there's a wee boy who thinks that the best thing that could possibly happen to him this Christmas is for his family to get a microwave'."

That one letter made SallyAnn more determined than ever not to just help feed children living in poverty this festive season, but to also give them an unforgettable Christmas.

She adds: "It was then I said 'Let's get this wee boy some toys' because, along with everything else we do, we want to give children a Christmas they can remember and enjoy."

Aberlour is now launching its One Shirt One Month campaign where the charity is challenging people to wear a single T-shirt every day for the whole month of November to help raise vital funds for vulnerable children across Scotland.

It's being backed by beauty queen Rashmi Rai, left — a former Mrs Scotland Universe — who has vowed to see the challenge through.

The 37-year-old, who was born in India but has lived in Scotland for the last five years, says: "Coming from a beauty pageant perspective I know there's a lot of stuff that people buy — and it's not because they need it, but because they feel there's a demand to see them in different attires.

"But this campaign brings it home that you can just wear one T-shirt every day for a month then people will see there is nothing wrong with wearing repeat clothes.

"So I am definitely going to do the one T-shirt challenge and be washing and rinsing it out every night and hanging it on the radiator like so many people need to do."

SallyAnn, 55, above right, adds: "For a lot of families this is their reality. They don't have a big selection of clothes to choose from. Many kids are going to school with the same shirt on. But these families take pride in what their children look like and how clean they are. So they are under constant pressure



to get that uniform in the washing machine and dried for the morning for the wee one going back out to school."

Founded in 1875, Aberlour continues to work with vulnerable children and young people across Scotland every day.

And the charity has been busier than ever, with the global pandemic meaning even greater hardship for the one in four children in the country who were already living in poverty.

SallyAnn explains: "Since March 16 we've paid out £530,000 to families who are really struggling.

"To put that into perspective, we've been running this emergency fund for five years and we normally pay out between £50,000 to £70,000 a year.

"We've raised £796,000 for the fund, but with £530,000 gone we have £266,000 left — and we're anticipating an upturn in requests after the furlough scheme ends and in the run-up to Christmas."

She adds: "When we look at what they are needing, it's really basic stuff. Food is the biggest thing, then clothing and footwear for children and electric and gas bills.

"Many families with parents made redundant or who didn't qualify for the furlough scheme also have weeks to wait for their Universal Credit, but their bills still need to be paid during that time."

She adds: "Working families have really struggled. Bear in mind that for children living in poverty around 70 per cent of them have parents in jobs, so they are the working poor.

"They were struggling before the pandemic. This has brought to the surface what poverty is really like for those who face it long term. They live hand-to-mouth. There is no wiggle room there.

"Some of the essential workers we've relied on during the pandemic are on the minimum wage, or low-paid."

Manchester Utd star Marcus Rashford has been campaigning for the Westminster government to give free meals to kids living in poverty during the school holidays. But the 22-year-old has been met by opposition from politicians.

SallyAnn says: "If a child's hungry you have to feed them. It pains me to think children in the UK go to bed at night with a hungry belly. There is no justifiable reason."

Now with Christmas less than two months away and the future still unclear, SallyAnn aims to at least spread some festive cheer.

The mum of two says: "We've had requests from families saying they literally don't know if they're going to be able to keep the lights on and can we help them with presents for their children.

"They are scared that for the first time their children are going to go without on Christmas day.

"So our whole organisation will want to make sure that their children have something a wee bit special at the end of this long, stressful year — and taking part in our One Shirt One Month campaign will help do just that."

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“People who live hand to mouth”



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