



Nigerian children with shoes gifted by M&S via Sal's Shoes

# Happy Feet!

One small boy's outgrown shoes sparked an idea that has grown into a worldwide charity

Camilla sighed, noticing that her little boy Sal had outgrown another pair of shoes. "They're too small for him now but still as good as new." She mulled over the thought that the ideal solution would be to give them to needy children. She gave them to a friend who was doing voluntary work in Africa and who subsequently passed them on to an oncology ward at a children's hospital.

Some time later, she got a photo from her friend showing a child wearing Sal's very first pair of shoes. Pleased as punch, Camilla posted the photo on Facebook and before long the initiative grew, and she was swamped with messages from people offering

her their own kids' footwear to pass on. She realised this was something that could benefit many needy children, and an idea was born...

In 2013, 42-year-old Camilla Jane Bowry, usually referred to simply as CJ, founded the children's charity, Sal's Shoes. Five years later, the charity delivered its one millionth pair of shoes to South Africa, where they began a new life on the feet of three-year-old Tumelo. The little boy had been wearing shoes with holes in both soles, leaving him open to infection and disease from parasites.

Now, more than two and a half million pairs of shoes have been distributed round the world with the charity finding

new feet in need of them in more than 45 countries.

CJ recalls five Nicaraguan boys aged between 9 and 12 who had never been able to go to school and had spent their young lives picking coffee in the fields. Now, thanks to Sal's Shoes, they all have footwear and are allowed to attend school.

Sal's Shoes were also met with delight by children in a Ukrainian orphanage as well as those living in a Sri Lankan children's home. Footwear was shipped to Albania too, where they were handed out to children from impoverished families who attend The Little Angel Centre, a unit where they are given a basic

Camilla, known as CJ



education, two meals a day and medical support.

However, not all of the shoes travel so far afield to help underprivileged children. During lockdown, the charity helped many families affected by poverty here in the U.K.

CJ told me, "Low earners were hit badly by lockdown, and our School Shoes Fund was set up as a way for monetary donations to





**Bags of shoes on their way to needy children**



**CJ and Sal giving their millionth pair of shoes to Tumelo**



**Sal with his sister Clemmie**



**From barefoot to shod, thanks to Sal's Shoes**


be spent buying new shoes and PE trainers for UK kids.” Donna Parry, Acting Headteacher at Ysgol y Bedol primary school in Carmarthen, Wales, explained, “Since 2014, our area has had one in five kids living in poverty with 62% of these under the age of ten. The pandemic exacerbated financial instability to which low-income families are most

required footwear for school. We had used Sal’s Shoes successfully before and so decided to ask them again. They were so helpful and arranged quick delivery of shoes in all the sizes that we needed. It was all handled discreetly and the pupils remain anonymous. Inclusivity is so important to us as a school and we are

currently working with the British Red Cross, community organisations and charities to ensure that Afghan children and women have access to at least one pair of shoes. Many fled their homeland with only

*know that when you walk in my shoes, I’m with you every step of the way. Every pair of donated shoes which have contact details inside can be tracked with the former owner receiving details of where their footwear has gone.*

Although Sal’s Shoes mainly finds new owners for pre-worn shoes, nowadays the charity sometimes also receives donations of end of season or excess stock from manufacturers and retailers.

It is quite incredible to think that an idea which stemmed from one small boy’s outgrown shoes could provide so many pairs of happy feet around the world. 

## “Just five years after founding Sal’s Shoes, we’d given out a million pairs!”

vulnerable, leaving them struggling with poverty, hunger and hardship. The footwear that Sal’s Shoes provides is such a big help to our families. The shoes are excellent quality and these donations have helped so many during the very difficult times we have been through. In the past year, we have had 15 pupils from ten families who were unable to afford the

grateful that we are able to support our families during periods of financial worry, as we are all part of a community”.

Some larger sized shoes have been passed to women who were rescued from human trafficking and housed in safe accommodation in the UK. Shoes have also found grateful new owners among displaced Afghan refugees.

CJ told me, “We’re

the clothes on their back and flip flops on their feet.”

As word spreads about Sal’s Shoes charity, CJ finds that they are increasingly contacted by other charities, organisations or communities in need who are able to request a donation.

In Nigeria, the new owner of a pair of shoes found a note inside. It read: *You do not know me, but I want you to*

### Get Involved



◆ Sal’s Shoes has donated shoes to over 45 countries, but there are still as many as an estimated 300 million barefoot children around the world.

◆ If you’d like to donate shoes or raise money for Sal’s Shoes then head to [www.salsshoes.com](http://www.salsshoes.com) for all the information you need.