

Don't give up the fight for life

.....*every microcosm contributes to the macrocosm*

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www.moteclife.co.uk June 2013

On 1st May 2013, a small group of Motec's dear friends and supporters gathered at the House of Lords, for a summit to address malnutrition in children in Ghana, and discuss our NUWLIFE project (nutrition working for life).

MOTEC, as a charity, has always been incredibly adaptable and responsive to need. We have never turned our back when we have heard a cry for help. When the charity started, we worked in the relatively well-developed South of Ghana, but soon realized that the cry for help came loudest from the North, and so sent a team to investigate. We found run-down, understaffed and ill-equipped hospitals, and a poor, starving population especially children in very poor state of nutrition.

Many of the children with malnutrition tragically succumb to their disease, despite the hospital's best efforts. However, in addition to this, our team soon heard reports that the children who were nursed back to health would repeatedly fall foul of the same fate, because although the child had been temporarily healed, the causative problem of poverty and lack of nutritious food remained. Many of these children would eventually die from this affliction. The current strategy of simply providing nutrition for a short period in hospital, simply wasn't working. The United Nations Development Programme has stated new effective nutritional programmes must be developed, and that is exactly what we aim to do with NUWLIFE.

In 2009, we launched the NUWLIFE Project in order to address the plight of malnourished children in some of the country's poorest areas. Since then, the project has grown slowly, but surely, and now we are proud to celebrate what we have achieved, learn from our experiences and push the project forwards. Firstly, we hope to regenerate the children's ward and medical services to care for the chronically malnourished and acutely unwell. Secondly, and most importantly, we are in the process of setting up a Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre, where the parents are supported to lift themselves out of poverty. Mums and Dads are taught a skill or trade, and provided with materials to set up their own business. They are given farmland and taught how to grow nutritional crops for their families and cash crops to generate income. The whole family is thereby given a safe and secure future, protected from poverty and the dangers of malnutrition.

Four years after the launch of the project, we gathered together in the noble surroundings of the House of Lords, to bring our message to parliament. Our host, Sir Lord David Alton started the evening with a welcome speech.

Lord Alton is our UK patron and has always been an inspiration and mentor.

As ever, his words were thought-provoking, deeply moving, and inspiring. He talked about the global plight of malnutrition and commended the work we were doing as a viable and carefully constructed solution. As a man of so many achievements, and such high esteem, we felt honored to be welcomed into the House of Lords by him, and even more so to receive his praise. Whenever I know an encounter with Lord Alton is imminent, I make sure I have a pen and paper ready, to scribble down his wise words, but alas this time I was too busy calming my nerves and preparing for my own presentation. However, he said one thing that really struck a chord with me and that I will never forget. He said that “just because you can’t solve the problems of the entire world, it’s not a reason for refusing to solve any of them”, which is fundamentally the reason behind MOTECs success. We refused to let our small size or a paucity of funds hold us back, always felt like we could and should do *something*. What started as a tiny charity, with a handful of volunteers, determined to save the life of one patient, has now grown to a huge and wonderful, international, multi-disciplinary project, changing and saving hundreds of lives every year.

Next up, our esteemed president, Mr Paul Ofori-Ata took to the stage. Mr Ofori-Ata talked about the venue, describing the House of Lords as the “institution of fairness, where important international changes are made, ratified and implemented”. He then drew our attention to the magnitude of the problem of malnutrition in children in Ghana, with 60% of deaths in children under the age of five attributable to malnutrition. In addition, 30% of *all* children in Ghana are stunted, indicating an incredibly high prevalence of chronic and severe malnutrition. Mr Ofori-Ata said that in coming to the House of Lords, he wanted to highlight the need for governments to play a major role and to provide support for non-governmental organisations in the prevention of, and the fight against malnutrition in children. He described malnutrition as the “cruellest preventable disease of the modern World: deprivation in the midst of plenty”.

As I moved on to make my own presentation, I could see that the audience looking back at me was a slightly different one to that I have addressed dozens of times before. They had obviously been moved by Lord Alton and Mr Ofori-Ata’s words, moved by the magnificent and imposing surroundings; they had realized the gravity and severity of situation. We had grown from a tiny charity into a large and multifaceted organization, and with that we had taken on bigger challenges, and must now accept greater responsibilities.

As I talked through my presentation, relaying facts and figures, showing photos of the children and the hospital, again, I saw a different audience looking back at me. At MOTEC, we have always tackled new challenges with vigour, positivity, good humour and a smile. But now we realized the horror of what we were dealing with. As pictures of malnourished children flashed on and off the screen, I saw tears in the eyes of our distinguished guests, tears in the eyes of friends and family I had brought along for support, and most poignantly, tears in the eyes of the MOTEC volunteers who had set up the project, as they recalled what they had seen on their first visits to northern Ghana. It felt like we had all woken up to the severity of what we were dealing with, and would now pull together, even stronger, to fight for our cause.

We chatted, and debated, mingled and made new friends, made new plans. Offers of support flooded in. People pledged their money and their time. And for all the seriousness of the evening, we also had a wonderful and magical time. As the evening drew to a close, we took the opportunity to step onto the terrace and take in the view. After a freezing winter and a dreary spring, we finally had a glimpse of beautiful sunshine to light up our evening. It cast a pink glow over the warm summer sky and the Thames sparkled as it lapped against the terrace. We felt blessed, humble, and grateful. A perfect evening.

The night was finished by comments and messages of support from our distinguished guests, all of whom were keen to commend MOTEC for its hard work and achievements, and offered their support for the future. Lord Alton finished with a statement that alluded to Nelson Mandela's famous quote "a good head and a good heart are a formidable combination." He said that, in his many years working with charities, NGOs and humanitarian projects, he had rarely seen many organisations that operated with a good head and a good heart, but that in MOTEC he had seen both and he had confidence that we would succeed in our project.

As we see the first "NUWLIFE kids" thriving, developing, going to school, learning and growing up, we hope that the project too will continue to grow and flourish. Under the watchful eye of MOTEC volunteers, and with the financial support of our generous benefactors, we hope to reach out to more children, more families, and into the wider communities in the poorest parts of Ghana, to protect the needy and poor from the grips of malnutrition. With a good head and a good heart, we look forward to a bright future.

With our sincere thanks to Sir Lord David Alton, our friends, family and all our supporters, for a fantastic and memorable night.