



**20th
ANNIVERSARY**



Origins

Penny Fleming experienced the lightbulb moment that led to the formation of the Garden Route Children's Trust back in around 2004.

During a holiday visit to the coastal town of Knysna, South Africa, her old friend Shelley Godsell told her of a little project she had set up using a special porridge to feed malnourished preschool children.

The children were left by parents for the day in informal crèches and preschools near their homes in the impoverished townships around Knysna, mostly located in shacks.

Knysna is one of the lovely towns along South Africa's Garden Route, a well-trodden tourist destination that stretches along a large chunk of the route between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. But beyond the route's beautiful surfing beaches and nature reserves lie very many such townships, often lacking proper sanitation and blighted by unemployment and the social consequences of poverty.



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Shelley, who was helping train those running the crèches and preschools, realised that many of the children, mostly aged two to six, were often sick.

Many of them were dropped off with no breakfast, hungry, tearful, and miserable. Visible signs of poor nutrition such as sores and hives, runny noses, and low energy were very common. Hardly surprisingly, the children really struggled to concentrate and learn.

Shelley had started giving some of them a special South African-made soya maize-based porridge that had recently been developed for AIDS and HIV patients, called e'Pap. It is a highly nutritious mixture, enriched with around 24 essential macro- and micro-nutrients, including vitamins and minerals, which was developed by a South African scientist and is available in various flavours. Shelley got the idea because the e'Pap, made by a Johannesburg-based company, was being used at a cancer and AIDS hospice which her husband Peter chaired.

"The results were dramatic," Shelley told Penny. "Within a couple of months, the kids looked healthier and the sores went away. They got sick less often, they had more energy, they concentrated better, they smiled more often," Shelley said.



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Founding steps

Soon after her catch-up with Shelley, Penny and her husband Patrick, both native South Africans, had to fly back home to the UK from their coastal holiday house in Knysna, their vacation over.

But Penny's holiday meeting with Shelley had, quite literally, given her food for thought. She knew she had to help her friend's project and discussed her feelings about it regularly with Patrick.

"Jesus told us: feed my sheep," she said to Patrick, recalling Jesus's command to his disciple Peter on the shores of Lake Galilee. Shelley was feeding a couple of hundred children every school day with money she had raised from various sources.

The e'Pap, which is mixed with water and requires no cooking, wasn't that expensive: around £20 can buy enough e'Pap to feed a child for a year. But there were a lot of hungry mouths to feed. In Knysna alone there were thousands of children in such crèches and preschools. Across South Africa there are 4.5 million children of preschool age, according to the Global Child Nutrition Foundation.

At the time, Penny, a school English teacher, was working full time. But she came up with a plan to raise money to buy more e'Pap for the kids. She suggested to Patrick that she would do extra tuition and send the money to Shelley.



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Patrick, who had a long career as a finance director at a senior corporate level, was impressed with the concept, but not necessarily the financial efficiency behind it.

“That’s just going to increase our tax bill,” he said.

Instead, he suggested setting up a UK-based charity that could carry out the fundraising.

When Penny finally finished full-time work in 2006 at the age of 60, the couple gradually pieced together a business plan for what became the Garden Route Children’s Trust, established in July of that year. It proved to be a solid document: a registration submission to the UK’s Charity Commission was approved within three months, with Lesley Flaxman joining as a third trustee alongside Penny and Patrick.

“The very first thing we did,” Patrick said, “was to have a big dinner in Ashtead, at the Peace Memorial Hall. And we made quite a bit of money from that. And then Penny being Penny, she gave talks about it, and we got more trustees involved.”

Other fundraising plans included forming links with schools, with the hope that they might choose to sponsor GRCT for a period, as well as an annual dinner and garden party. There were also a number of sponsored events, such as Patrick cycling from Land’s End to John O’Groats, and Penny and Patrick walking Coast to Coast with two good friends, Andrew and Jenny.

Growth story

The trust's early ambitions were modest. The first business plan in 2006 stated: "GRCT aims to send £200 per month with effect from October 2006. To help with planning the purchase of food it is important that the amount does not vary and GRCT will therefore aim to have sufficient cash reserves to meet this commitment. In the second year the target is £225 per month and in the third year £250 per month."

But it didn't take long to far exceed those early targets.

In the following year, 2007, the charity was able to send £15,400 to Shelley's e'Pap Children's Feeding Project in Knysna.

Twenty years later, a total of more than £1.1 million has been dispatched. It has gone not just to Shelley's project but to more than 15 other similar projects to feed preschool youngsters across various parts of the Western Cape, from Port Elizabeth (now known as Gqeberha) to Cape Town and beyond.

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October 2006**



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Funds raised annually have more than quadrupled from £27,000 in 2007 to £113,000 in 2025. That is pretty good for a charity that is run entirely by volunteers. All of the funds raised apart from sundry expenses, representing about 1-2 per cent of the total, are used to buy e'Pap for children. It is a level of efficiency that few charities can match.

The initial trustees, Patrick and Penny, together with Lesley, were soon reinforced by the addition of Leah Bates and Dudley Soggett. A year later, Catherine Michell joined the team, and then in 2009, so did Ruth Burns.

Several others have also been on the trustees list at various times, such as Jonathan Bates, Jenny Jennings and Charl Cronje, as well as Penny and Patrick's daughters, Kathy and Ali, the latter still being involved.





Other trustees include Mark Chapman, Cathy Williamson, Nicki Galazka, Sophie Burns, and Paul Hurrell. There are currently nine trustees, all volunteers, and the charity employs no staff.

The trustees have a diverse range of skills and experience, including finance, marketing, education, IT, law, and management. Each has a clearly defined role, and the charity is committed to maintaining high standards of governance, despite its small size.

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Penny's vision

All the trustees have played an important part at various times. Apart from fundraising, regular tasks include producing a newsletter, handling social media, maintaining the website, liaising with the Charity Commission, and organising events.

However, Penny was very much the driving force behind the charity's initial growth. She went into schools and kids church groups, gave talks, mixed e'Pap to show the children what it actually was, and got them engaged.

An example of how Penny operated is given by Ruth, who first came across her when Penny came to the Sunday school she ran. "She was brilliant with the children," Ruth said. "She inspired the children and they would bring their pennies on a Sunday, and we also did a Scottish dancing night with soup, and by the end of that academic year we had raised over £1,000 with the children and Penny came in and said thank you. A few months later, Penny invited me round to her house for scones. I now know that Penny inviting people for scones is really dangerous, she was so strategic! Not quite by the end of the scones, but soon after, she asked me to be a trustee. I'm glad I said yes."

Catherine has a similar story about her appointment as a trustee in 2007. "I had met Penny that year at a women's breakfast at my church



where she was the guest speaker,” Catherine said. “Penny and I made contact after that breakfast and I visited her at her home in Oxshott. We became friends - sharing a love of literature and a South African background, and a heart for making a difference. That year she invited me to become a trustee and I was very pleased to accept.” Catherine has remained a trustee ever since.

New partners

Patrick, given his financial background, kept a tight grip on the accounts, while Penny took charge of fundraising, spreading the word, persuading and cajoling others to help. Most of this work was done through personal connections, rather than a formal outreach program.

The most marked sign of progress over the ensuing years was the addition of multiple new partners in South Africa through whom to supply e’Pap to children.

“We work with our partners on the ground, and only do so with people we know and trust, some not-for-profit organisations, charities, churches, Rotary clubs, a real mixture.”

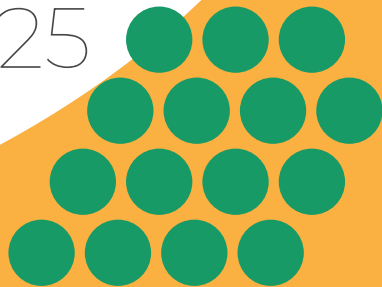
By 2015 there were five partners who received funding from the GRCT, and 15 by 2025. Every year, one of the trustees visits some of the partners on site at their own expense to check that their operations are going to plan and that the charity’s funds are being deployed in the most efficient way possible.



2015



2025





We work with our partners on the ground, and only do so with people we know and trust

Apart from the original partner, the e'Pap Children's Feeding Project in Knysna, other current partners include the Hout Bay Rotary Club near Cape Town, the GRCT Project Association in Port Elizabeth, and the Missionvale Care Centre. No money is transferred to schools, but rather directly to the partners.

"We have a number of partners around Port Elizabeth," Patrick says. "For example, the Missionvale Care Centre, which grew from just one nun working under a tree in a township in the 1970s to what is now a really big centre with medical care and a primary school."

The GRCT only works with partners it trusts, with the key criteria including:

- They need to have a personal commitment to execute the project
- It must be possible to build meaningful relationships with those involved with the project on the ground in South Africa.
- The partners are accountable to the GRCT and are able to provide an audit of outlay and identify the impact of the support given.
- The partner has to be prepared to commit for the long-term
- There has to be a capability and willingness in most cases to part-fund the project, building shared commitment and accountability, and giving them a stake in its success.



The partners have been identified and relationships built almost exclusively through organic means, via personal connections and recommendations rather than a formal outreach program.

Occasionally, it may be necessary to end support for a partner organisation if it becomes clear, for whatever reason, that the project is no longer viable, either for them or for the charity. This happens very seldom.

Importance of nutrition

How important is the work that the GRCT and its partners in South Africa are doing? Extremely so, in the context of most statistics concerning preschool children. For example, the World Nutrition Journal reported in December 2025 that in South Africa, “the persistently high level of underweight and stunting (29%) among children under-five is indicative of chronic malnutrition.” It adds: “Stunted children aged 50-59 months lag five to six months behind their peers in development.”

In 2019, a report from UNICEF (the United Nations Children’s Fund), stated that in South Africa, 27% of children under the age of five were too short for their age, around 2.5% were wasted, 61% suffered from anaemia, and 13% were overweight.

In that context, the use of e’Pap has been a game changer for the children cared for by the GRCT’s partner organisations.

“The great thing about e’Pap is that it’s better than a cooked breakfast,” Patrick says. “A lot of the crèches don’t have good facilities. All you need to make the e’Pap is a plastic bucket and some clean, cold water. Then they can serve it in a little plastic mug or bowl. People sometimes struggle to visualise the fact that these places are often just shacks without kitchens.”



Why we choose to fund e'Pap in particular

e'Pap is made from wholegrain maize and soya beans and contains 22 vitamins, minerals, sorghum, 8 amino acids and chelates tailored for absorption. It has high “bio-efficacy” which means that e'Pap will be absorbed into the body more effectively. e'Pap addresses the issue of “hidden hunger” and micronutrient deficiencies, which can compromise the immune system and interfere with focus and concentration at school.

Preparing e'Pap is straightforward — it just needs to be mixed with clean water. This is an invaluable feature in the areas in which the feeding projects are based, as it can therefore be prepared in even the most basic of settings.





Penny's legacy

By 2016, Penny was aged 70 and was ready to start handing over some of the responsibility for the charity to others. Indeed, in that year she presented both Ruth and Catherine with actual batons, which she handed over in a symbolic ceremony to reflect the fact that she wanted them to pick up the reins.

But then, tragically, in 2017 came an accident, completely out of the blue, that eventually took Penny's life. She fell down her stairs at home, became paralysed from the neck down, and a few months later this eventually led to her contracting a fatal dose of pneumonia.

Penny's unexpected death at a time when she had previously been in good health came as a huge blow, not just to Patrick and their children, but to the charity and its trustees and partners too.

But out of the tragedy came some good. Donations to the GRCT in Penny's memory led to a huge uplift in funding between 2017, when the total was £60,580 and 2018, when income was £117,436.



The need in the townships and other informal settlements across South Africa is huge and growing

This facilitated a significant growth in the numbers of children that could be helped to the degree that in 2025 around 8,400 children were given breakfasts each day, compared with the 200 or so fed in the early days.

Of these, more than 5,000 are within the original e'Pap Children's Feeding Project that Shelley started in Knysna. Another 900 are at the Hout Bay PreSchools project, near Cape Town, operated by the Hout Bay Rotary Club. Around 750 children are catered for in preschools in Isivuno, part of Port Elizabeth, and almost 200 more at Missionvale Care Centre in Missionvale, also in Port Elizabeth. The Rotary Club of St Francis Bay oversees feeding projects for another 380 children in the St Francis Bay, Storm River, Blouleliesbos, Coldstream and Jeffreys Bay areas.

And then there are the projects in Kleinmond, Wellington, Cape Town, Addo and Despatch.

Penny's desire for the charity was that it should always be relational, in terms of its links with its partners, with very good communication and connections on both sides.

"Being relational means you have to take time to build those relationships," Patrick said. "And we need to keep reminding ourselves about the importance of that, especially with the distance. We're raising funds in the UK for organisations 6,000 miles away, and it does require a bit of communication effort. Penny felt that we should try and make sure that one of the trustees visited at least some of the projects every year at our own expense, so it's not a charity expense."





He added: “We work with partners who do the work on the ground, so to speak, and we always said we would only work with people we know and trust. And some of those have come to us serendipitously. Perhaps a friend of a friend knows a group that has a need, and then suddenly we’ve hooked up with them and it’s been amazing.”

The need among the townships and other informal settlements across South Africa is huge and growing, but there is very little organised support from the government for children in the preschool age groups, if any.

In 2025 around 8,400 children were given breakfasts each day, compared with just 200 in the early days

“The informal housing areas are getting bigger and bigger,” Patrick said. “This is because you’ve got people coming from the rural areas into the towns and cities to find work, but there isn’t any work. So there’s more unemployment, more poverty, and as a result of that, more crime, more alcohol and drug abuse, and then the social consequences of that with a lot of domestic violence and rape, for example. These are complex problems. It goes far beyond feeding kids, but we just focus on what we can do, which is the feeding element.”

Once children start school, at age seven, they are supposed to receive lunches, so the GRCT is focused primarily on pre-school age groups.





Fundraising and support

An important event in our calendar each year is the November prayer meeting, where trustees and supporters gather both in person and online.

“We give thanks for the resources we have got and pray for more,” Ruth said. “More than once it’s looked like Patrick’s cooked the books, because in the middle of November we’ve asked ourselves where the money’s going to come from that we need, and then just the right amount of money has come in to let us meet our commitments.”

Remarkably, on one occasion in the early years after the charity had grown somewhat, the trustees had committed to send £10,000 to its partners.

“It was by far the largest amount we’d sent out at that time,” Patrick said. “And it was going to take our bank balance down to very little, and Penny was very nervous about it for that reason. She kept asking if we should do it, and then decided that we must. So she went off to the bank to do the transfer.”

“Meanwhile, I was walking down Oxshott High Street and I bumped into someone I knew, though not that well, whom I had previously told about the charity. During our conversation, he remarked that he’d just arranged for a £10,000 contribution to be paid into our bank account.”

“It makes me tearful now just speaking about it. I phoned Penny and told her — she was amazed, and said how incredible it was.”

Currently, the charity has around 50 regular donors, with the remaining contributions from more ad-hoc donations.

“Interestingly, very few donors drop off, partly because a small amount of money given goes a very long way,” Patrick said. “The fact that £20 feeds a child for a year is a significant testament – that’s five coffees – and it really resonates. Also, with 98 per cent of our funds going directly to the end product, the e’Pap. People are attracted to that and we are keen to protect that.

Building community in the UK while raising funds to help children in South Africa, is core to our ethos

The fact that we visit the crèches and preschools means we can look people in the eye and tell them that we know, and have seen, where the money goes and what it does.”

There have been a huge variety of fundraising events, one of our favourites, and ever-popular is the “**Breakfast for Breakfasts**” gatherings, often at trustees’ or other volunteers’ homes. They typically put on a spread of pastries and coffee and ask for a voluntary donation. It’s a wonderful opportunity to introduce the charity and its work to newcomers, and aligns with our desire for relationship-building.

Alongside the many breakfasts, dinners, half-marathons, marathons, golf days, cycle rides, and other





events to generate funds for the GRCT, there have also been quite a few unusual and imaginative approaches.

One innovative idea was the so-called ‘GRCT Trek’, an event staged during the Covid period. It was designed to echo the Great Trek in South Africa during the 1830s and 1840s when the Dutch-speaking, Boer settlers – the Voortrekkers – used ox-drawn wagons to trek away from the British-run colony around Cape Town, heading north into the interior of the country.

The event meant participants in the UK had to cycle, walk, row or swim the equivalent distance between certain towns in South Africa where our children enjoy the funded e’Pap meals. Participants sent photos and records of their performances and progress.

Building community here in the UK, while raising funds to help children in need in South Africa, was always uppermost in Penny’s mind; it remains a key part of the GRCT’s ethos and is an important consideration whenever the trustees plan events.

There is no better example of this than trustee **Nicki Galazka’s annual Coffee Morning and Christmas Sale** – now a hugely popular event in the Oxshott village calendar.

Looking forward

Progress has not always been linear, but the GRCT's direction of travel has been generally positive, and the aim remains clear and focused. There have been occasional mistakes along the way, but the trustees have learned from those.

"We did make some mistakes," said Patrick, now aged 78. "Like, we decided to fund swings for children's playgrounds. But the swings just got stolen and we realised we've got to stick to our core thing of feeding children."

Now the charity is 20 years old, the objectives remain the same, but the scale has grown. And the aim of the trustees is to try and continue to increase funds so more children can be helped.

Ideally, the GRCT would like to increase the number of regular donors and contributors that give predictable monthly or annual amounts. But whatever happens, one thing is for sure. After 20 years in existence, the Garden Route Children's Trust is more than living up to the vision of its inspirational founder, the late Penny Fleming.



CASE STUDIES

Azariah's Return



Ten-year-old Azariah Pietersen's life changed irrevocably when she was hit by a taxi in September 2025. What should have been an ordinary afternoon became a fight for survival. She suffered a broken leg, head trauma, a collapsed lung, and serious injury to her eye. Painful weeks in hospital

followed, and then, the interminable wait for healing, not just of her bones and body, but of her confidence.

Now, Azariah is finally back at school — a moment her family longed for through months of uncertainty. She carries a slight limp, and the scars on her leg tell a story she is still learning to live with. She understandably prefers long trousers now to hide her injuries. There is a shyness that wasn't there before, but also a newly found resilience.

At Missionvale, where Azariah returns each morning, something simple is waiting for her — a daily serving of e'Pap. After trauma, the body needs rebuilding. Muscles must regain strength and bones must continue to heal. Proper nutrition is essential for this recovery.

The e'Pap offers more than just a warm meal at the start of the day. This daily routine brings some much-needed comfort and

stability in a life that was suddenly turned upside down. It says: you are safe here. You are cared for. You can begin again. With each day, Azariah is not only regaining her strength – she is reclaiming her place in the classroom and among her friends.

She walks a little differently now and moves a little more carefully, but she is moving forward. To those who know her, she remains what she has always been – a miracle child. And like so many children at Missionvale, her future is being rebuilt not only through courage and care, but through something as simple, and as powerful, as a nutritious bowl of e’Pap every day.

Basil’s Big Dream

Basil Witbooi arrived at Normoyle Primary School at just four years old – small, watchful, and full of quiet determination. Like many children growing up in Missionvale, his mornings did not always begin with enough food. But at school, there was something he could count on: a warm bowl of e’Pap each day.

As Springbok rugby captain Siya Kolisi has shared from his own childhood, trying to compete in either the classroom or on the rugby field, while hungry, is a battle already half lost. Energy fades and concentration slips.

Basil quickly found that the e’Pap made a difference, not



just physically, but mentally. He could concentrate in class as well as run harder.

Now aged 13, Basil has grown into a polite, focused young man with a remarkable talent for rugby. He has become one of Normoyle Primary's standout athletes, balancing his sporting commitments with dedication in the classroom.

Basil has been awarded a full scholarship to a prestigious high school, where he will continue to pursue both his education and his rugby journey. He is the third pupil from Normoyle Primary to earn a rugby scholarship, and the staff believe that the next great South African rugby story could very well have begun in their classrooms. He has also been selected to play rugby in Italy – something that seemed impossible a few years ago.



Sometimes, all it takes to
change the outcome of a
life... is breakfast.



Hearty congratulations on your 20 year celebration

Being the first recipient of your donor funds, made all the difference to our e'Pap Children's Feeding Project in Knysna which was still in its infancy. Over two decades we have been able to nourish so many more thousands of children because of your generosity.

We are now at the stage of having the daughters of the original Principals who themselves ate e'Pap for breakfast, taking over from their mothers. We frequently bump into adults who when e'Pap is mentioned enthusiastically exclaim that they remember eating it and what a difference it made to their lives.

Thank you for your regular and essential funding over 20 years which has made all the difference to the health and wellbeing of thousands of children in the Garden Route.

May God continue to bless and guide you all as you continue to nourish thousands of children in South Africa.

With much love

Shelley and Peter Godsell



Where do we
fund work?

Wellington
Cape Town
Kleinmond



SOUTH
AFRICA

JOHANNESBURG

DURBAN

Port Elizabeth



Knysna St Francis Bay





The Garden Route Children's Trust

Helping to educate and feed
South African children in need

www.grct.org.uk

Registered charity no. 1116278