

CAMPAIGNING SINGER AND MUM
MELANIE CHISHOLM
TELLS HOW
DAUGHTER
SCARLET IS HER
INSPIRATION



'You become a lot more emotional about children's issues when you become a mum'

Thanks to her days in the Spice Girls, Melanie Chisholm is used to being mobbed by adoring fans. But today, standing in a remote village in north Ghana, surrounded by women and children, it is the singer who is in awe as she meets this vibrant African community and learns of their daily struggle to find clean drinking water.

Melanie is in Gbrumani in the Tolon district of Tamale to raise awareness of a campaign to provide little sachets that can purify dirty water full of life-threatening parasites. Provided by P&G and Asda, the sachets have transformed the lives of these villagers. Mum of one Melanie is encouraging us to help get more to other developing countries by buying P&G products from the supermarket chain.

"You become a lot more sensitive and emotional about children's issues when you become a mum," says Melanie, who lives in North London with daughter Scarlet, five. "There are so many things that impact on children – they're the most at risk and so vulnerable. Being in Africa for Comic Relief last year opened my eyes; it was the first time I really experienced such poverty first hand.

"Then I found out that more than 2,000 children die every day simply because they don't have access to clean drinking water. I was so shocked, especially as we take water for granted in the UK. Seeing how these water purification sachets work here in Ghana, I want to make sure more people have access to them, as they're saving lives."

WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Melanie joined three schoolgirls to collect water from the nearest source and was moved by how different their lives are compared to hers as a teenager in Cheshire.

"These young girls are in school by 7am but before that they've been down to collect the water up to three times for their families, which takes an hour and a half," says the pop star. "If I think back to when I was a teenager, my main concerns were my hair and boys. But these girls have much more important things to worry about. The mums do too, and it's so incredible to hear from them how much the sachets have transformed their lives. Once they've treated the water there's no risk that the water can kill their children, which was a huge concern before."

Melanie says that Scarlet, whose father is the singer's ex-partner Thomas Starr, will benefit from these experiences too.

"It's really important, so that I have more knowledge to pass on to my little girl," she says. "She's in such a privileged position – her environment is nothing like mine



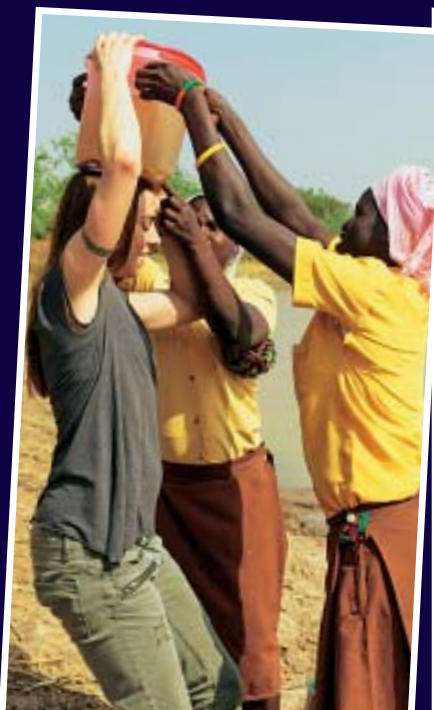
Melanie has been inspired to help after her trip to northern Ghana, where she meets villagers in Gbrumani (above) and experiences their struggles first hand, joining schoolgirls as they make the early morning trek to collect water to bring back to the village (below). "When I was a teenager, my main concerns were my hair and boys. These girls have much more important things to worry about," says the former Spice Girl

was, so I'm quite mindful of that. I want her to appreciate money and respect people.

"Scarlet's definitely made me happier. Your priorities change when you become a parent and when the focus is taken away from you it's liberating. Especially working in the job that I do, it's very much all about you, so you can really get caught up in your own nonsense. Scarlet's the light of my life – very challenging at times and so she should be. She never fails to make me smile."

What Melanie has also found challenging is adjusting to life as a single mum. She and Thomas split up 18 months ago, but they've managed to keep things amicable.

"At first it was hard because obviously when a relationship comes to an end there are many reasons for that," she says. "Initially I was just quite relieved that we'd taken that step and changed the environment. It's tricky because kids are so perceptive and, even though you're not expressing feeling down, they still pick up on it. Some of the things Scarlet said to me around that time, it





'I'd love to have more kids. Scarlet just wants to play all the time and adults are sooo boring!'

Cardle and DJ Greg Burns, Melanie says she's resolutely single, but ready to date again.

"I've had some fun times being single, but it would be nice to meet someone now," she says. "It's really hard to meet someone though and being a single mum complicates things. I don't want to introduce Scarlet to someone I don't think is appropriate or I'm not sure about. I'd really like to meet somebody that has a similar lifestyle and balance to me – who likes having fun, but who's quite into exercise and nutrition.

"I'd love to have more kids too, especially now that Scarlet is a bit older, because I kind of feel like I'm doing her a whole disservice not providing a sibling for her. She just wants to play all the time and adults are sooo boring. It would be wonderful but obviously I'm 40, so we'll see what happens."


MUMS UNITED

In the meantime Scarlet has an extended family, with ex-bandmates Victoria, Emma, Geri Halliwell and Melanie Brown all mums too. They all try to meet whenever they're in the same country.

"All the kids really vary in ages, which is nice, because if we get the opportunity to all be together the big ones look after the little ones and it's really cute. Scarlet and Bluebell [Geri's seven-year-old daughter] get on really well and Emma's little boys we see quite a lot of. Harper [Victoria's daughter] is two now and I did wonder whether Scarlet would be unhappy about the fact she's not the youngest any more but she's taken it well."

Victoria has said she won't perform with the Spice Girls again after their turn at the London 2012 closing ceremony, but that doesn't mean the other four won't reform without her – it just won't happen any time soon.

"I think it would be really difficult to top the Olympics," says Melanie. "But if the right opportunity came up then I would love to get on stage with the girls again. I've had such a busy two years that I just want to spend a bit more time at home with Scarlet and maybe look at putting a solo album together.

"I just want to carry on performing because it's all I've ever wanted to do. I've had so many different opportunities come my way that I just can't wait to see what the future holds." 

INTERVIEW: RACHEL CORCORAN
PHOTOS: RICHARD WADEY-JAMES

From 27 February, buy any P&G product in Asda or on Asda.com and P&G will donate one day of clean drinking water. Visit your asda.com/cleanwater to find out more.

was like she had a sixth sense – she was so comforting. But as time goes on, there are times when it's tough, whether it's night time or disciplining – certain things when you're on your own no matter how much help you've got, it can feel quite lonely."

Melanie once suffered from depression and an eating disorder, but says she gained new respect for her body after she had Scarlet.

She has taken part in triathlons and now looks toned and radiant – so it's hard to believe she recently turned 40. Getting older doesn't seem to faze

her, however, and the singer celebrated her big birthday in style with a "Sporty's 40" concert at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire last month – with support from her former bandmates and their families.

"You can't stop getting older and if you look after yourself you can kind of keep some things at bay," she smiles. "Of course, we all wish we had lovely young skin and less wrinkles, but I'm happier in myself so if that keeps continuing – which older people keep telling me it does – then I'm happy about that.

"Sporty's 40 was my favourite personal gig ever," she says. "It was such a special night; I had some great mates join me on stage and could see a lot of my friends up on the balcony. Emma [Bunton] and her mum were there, Victoria [Beckham]'s mum and dad were there and my mum was there. Then for some reason I decided that tequila was a good idea at the after-show party. I don't even drink tequila and never have, so my memory is a bit hazy later on!"

Despite being linked to a number of men, including *The X Factor's* Matt

The difference is clear: Having helped collect the water, Melanie sees for herself the effects of the sachets that make it safe to drink (below) before the delighted star hands it to the villagers (above). "More than 2,000 children die every day because they don't have access to clean water. The sachets are saving lives," she says

