



Report September/October/November 2009

December 10, 2009

Dear Family, Friends and Supporters!

As you must have noticed by now, we always have plenty of news. First, the experiment of sending our children to public school for half the day has failed: not only do they squeeze 80 children in the first grade classroom; not only do their teaching materials consist of a blackboard and 4 textbooks each; but the teachers, guards and director 'discipline' the children with beatings and more beatings. The children came home daily with new complaints, in the second week of school they even tried to run away! In the end the teacher, Mr. Jemal, and I decided to teach the children at our project full time.

Of course, this means yet more work: I applied for a license as a state recognized school – the process is not finished yet, because the inspectors did come, but then asked for a bribe that I am not willing to pay –, devised an annual plan and created more teaching materials; school books unfortunately cannot simply be bought in a book shop here, but have to be searched for amongst the second hand street vendors; and since the teacher is now very busy teaching and supervising the children from 8 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, much of the preparation work also ends up on my desk. Still I am happy that we have chosen this – admittedly more work intensive – option, for our children are happy once more, doing a double period of Montessori child-centered learning and 3 periods of subject teaching according to the government curriculum a day (this is mostly to calm the authorities for whom Montessori in primary school is a

completely unheard-of thing), which works beautifully in our small group of 14 students to one teacher.

As you know, our project is not only a school but designed to support the children in their entire development. A few weeks after starting grade 1, Sara came to me crying: Haymanot had teased her for not having a father. She cried for her father, whom she had barely known, and I comforted her as best I could; but the following week she came crying again. When I asked Haymanot about it, she replied that the other children were teasing her in the same way. I decided to call all the grade 1 students; we sat down in a circle on the grass in the yard and I explained to them that some of them had lost their mothers or fathers; that that was a sad thing and nothing to tease others about; that those children who still had both parents should be glad and grateful; and that we all should pray for the mothers and fathers who had passed away, as well as for Abdu's father, who has been quarantined for tuberculosis for 8 months. Before I was done talking all 14 children started crying, especially Bethlehem, whose mother has died not too long ago of AIDS, and Ingocha, whose mother divorced her father and then disappeared completely. Once the tears started flowing there was no end to them, and I was feeling sorry for these children who have gone through a lot in their short lives. The following week, taking up an idea they got from a children's story, 5 children wrote letters to Heaven to their dead parents; Bethlehem cried all the way through it. I gave them envelopes and told them their letters would surely reach by God's post, and that they would get answers from their parents when they prayed at night. I am glad that in our school we do have time for attending our children's personal troubles.

In the last three months we took in a number of new children, too: in the kindergarten class, where we have got space after the big children 'moved out', Dagm, Gizeworq, Fikr and Helen, and in grade 1 Bruk. Bruk's story is especially sad: his mother has not only lost her husband to AIDS and is not well herself, she has got two HIV positive children. Little Dagm, 3 years old and on anti-retrovirals, joined us in September; he is very cute, always smiles happily and refuses to do anything the teachers offer to him. Bruk spent the last year in a private school, but in October he was suddenly expelled; the school used his skin conditions, caused by allergic reactions and scabies, as an excuse to claim that he was contagious and a danger to the other children. The boy is 8 years old and understands exactly that he has been thrown out of his school because of his looks and his HIV infection, and although we reported this clear case of discrimination to the authorities, his return to the former school is out of the question for psychological reasons. With us, Bruk is happy; he should have gone

to grade 2, which unfortunately we are not able to offer, but in the Montessori periods at least he can study according to his own abilities.

Another sad story: our pretty girl Helen had been sent to a different school by her mother; I guess she thought if she has to pay tuition, her daughter would receive a better education. A month had barely passed and the mother called me, Helen was sick. I told her that she had taken the child out of our project of her own free will and without even informing us, what was I supposed to do now? But the following week she called again, cried, Helen was in hospital, very sick, please, please. I went there; the girl had lost a lot of weight, had pneumonia and such a severe case of candida infection in her mouth that she could not eat at all for a whole week and had to be fed through the drip. She also said all the time that she wanted to return to us; so in the end we paid her bills, and after spending another two weeks at home in bed, she came back. After the long illness she found grade 1 too taxing, and at her own request she is once again in the kindergarten group. She has started eating properly again, and now she is as pretty and cheerful as before.

Ms. Kouassi, one of our sponsors, with a generous donation enabled us to take the Yawenta children to the hot springs in Wondo Genet. The little ones were first in the pool, and while they splashed about and laughed, the big ones went some way up the volcano with their teacher and got to see the springs with their steaming water and sulphur smells; they also had practical education in geography (landforms: mountain, valley, spring, river – our children are flatland children who barely know these things). Then change of guard in the pool, the big ones made a racket but then that was to be expected. After washing all the children and putting their clothes back on, we got them back on the bus, which returned them, singing and (in spite of contrary instructions) dancing in the aisle, to the Yawenta Children's Center. I am sure that you can tell from the pictures how happy they were.

Financial Report:

Our faithful supporters and sponsors have once again enabled us to take care of our children as good as possible. In the months July to October we received a total of **44.477,21 birr (about 2.616 €)** from:

Ms. Kra Kouassi, a group of tourist from Belgium, Ras Hapte Wold, Ms. Louisa Heckett and anonymous donors from the U.S.A. We would like to thank you all heartically for these donations, the many e-mails that cheer me up when I am tired and frustrated, and Ms. Kouassi and Mrs. Schwebler for the personal letters and presents that have given the children they sponsor so much joy.

In the same four months, during which our project has grown dramatically, we spent a total of **119,355.41 birr (about 7,020 €)** for the following purposes:

1	Rent	31,050.00
2	Classroom furniture	13,132.00
3	Playground equipment	3,535.00
4	Kitchen equipment	1,328.01
5	Teaching aids	2,983.49
6	Hygiene articles	3,421.00
7	Foodstuff (including gas)	19,212.21
8	Medical treatment (including transportation)	4,488.70
9	Administration	2,049.00
10	Salaries	28,795.00
11	Transportation for the children	7,420.00
12	Clothes	945.00
13	Field Trip	996.00
	Total	119,355.41

As you can see, in spite of the donations we received, our savings are diminishing. We would therefore like to ask again for your support; maybe you can spare some money for our project or donate something in kind (especially wanted: Montessori teaching materials!). In any case, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from far-away Ethiopia, where Christmas is still some weeks off and New Year is celebrated in September!

With heartical greetings,

Isheba Tafari