



Report July-September 2010

December 6, 2010

Dear Family, Friends and Supporters!

Another school year has begun, and since our children won't stop growing, we have to grow with them. But let me start from the beginning:

In July I went on my yearly leave, visiting my family, and took the opportunity to attend the World AIDS Conference which was held in Vienna, Austria, from July 18-23. I wasn't quite sure what to expect, as I had never before been at such a large conference (there were about 25,000 delegates from all over the world), but after the first day I got used to the system and managed to zoom in on what would be most beneficial for our children: counselling for children living with HIV/AIDS. Through the workshops I attended, I became more aware of the challenge children living with the virus face, and that they need support in the process of accepting their status and living positive lives. In particular, I learnt about different approaches to the process of disclosure – telling the child that he/she is HIV positive, and what that means – as practised in different countries of the world. I also was given excellent materials and instructions on how to train staff to counsel children. Hopefully, our little project will become a pilot project with regards to patient support for children living with HIV/AIDS. Our admittedly ambitious program, which would need cooperation from large international NGOs to really be effective, includes:

- ❖ Training of medical and non-medical staff at hospitals and health-centers that provide HIV treatment;
- ❖ Making hospitals and health-centers more child-friendly by providing children's rooms equipped with toys and books;

- ❖ Rearranging monthly check-up dates so that children of the same age group come to hospital on the same day, which allows for educational and counselling programs for both children and care-takers to be scheduled;
- ❖ Individually disclosing children, in cooperation with the care-givers, between the ages of 6 and 12 years, using counselling cards and other counselling tools;
- ❖ Providing pre-disclosure education for very young children in the form of stories and plays;
- ❖ Providing follow-up counselling for children and adolescents concerning adherence and prevention of HIV transmission.

This will take some time to implement, but we've already started talking with the responsible persons at Shashamane Referral Hospital, who are very open to such programs and glad to receive any support in counselling children.

On returning from Europe, I jumped right back into work, in order to prepare for the new school year and grade 2. We ordered and finally received classroom furniture for the new grade 1 class, had 2 new toilets built outside, and rearranged the lunchrooms so that the grade students would not disturb the kindergarten children when they are having their meals. It was quite challenging to do so with the existing space, but since there are only 12 students in grade 1, we managed. We also hired two new teachers, Mr. Tullu for grade 1 and Mrs. Aynalem for grade 2 respectively, trying our best to train them in the Montessori teaching method and our approach to teaching in the limited time available. After consultation with the teachers, we decided to make Natnael Shewa repeat grade 1 – his reading and writing in particular are still very poor – and keep Tewodros Melese in the kindergarten for one more year. But Dagmawit Tahir, Mihiret Daniel, Genet Adunya, Mintesenot Teklu, Mihiret Abrarew, Riste Kinde, Aschalew Dejene, Cheri Shaba, Hermela Yemamenew, Helen Atinkut and Alazar Umer graduated to grade 1 and are doing fine. In particular, I am very happy with the progress of Genet, who has been one of our problem children for a long time, but is now picking up nicely, learning the Amharic alphabet.

There is a new boy in grade 2, as well: Haileleul is already 11 years old, but has been sick a lot and couldn't even read the simplest word when he came to our school. With the help of the Montessori materials, he is now slowly catching up with the other children, most of who read quite fluently by now. However, he will need extra attention and help with his work for quite some time to come; luckily, given the small class size of only 14 students, we are able to really give him that individual support. My main disappointment this year is that Kidist has

left our school, once again without any notice or reason from her aunt. We tried to encourage her to keep the child in the class and school that she was well integrated in, but to no avail. We pray that she will be well wherever she may be now.

Since so many children left the kindergarten to join grade 1, we had to add yet more children to Ms. Hiywot's class. Once more, we accepted a mixture of HIV infected and non-infected children on basis of need. New in kindergarten are: Abdissa Godana, Yohannis Haile, Tariku Tibebu, Aragew Tefera, Hamid Hayru, Tseganesh Kedir, Mintesenot Minda, Yosef Zeybe, Hiywot Ammanuel, Samrawit Teshome, Rosa Abebe, Ammanuel Solomon, Kaleab Mebratu, Abel Neguse, and Freamboni Shambel. Each of those children has his or her story, but for today I'd like to mention little Yohannis, who is only 3 years old and a very cute boy. His mother and father are both HIV infected; the father, who was a soldier, had to go on early retirement due to his illness, the mother works as a cleaner. Since they are financially and physically not well off, one of their children lives with relatives, while they struggle to bring up Yohannis. The boy is also infected and suffers from a weakness of the anal muscles, causing his rectum to come out most times he uses the toilet. This in turn leads to bleeding and can be painful if not handled properly. At first even we were scared when we saw it, but thankfully Misa knew what to do, protected her hands with gloves and shoved the rectum back inside. I doubt that any other school would be able to deal with this situation and am very glad that Yohannis is with us. His health is also very delicate, since he has not been started on anti-retroviral therapy yet.

Financial Report:

This quarter, we **spent** a total of **110,130.98 birr** (ca. **5,125 Euro** or **6,675 USD**) on the following items:

1. Transportation for Children: 7,200 birr
2. Field Trip to Wondo Genet: 1,180 birr
3. Teaching Aids: 2,507.50 birr
4. Transportation to and from Hospital/Clinic: 817 birr
5. Medical Treatment: 3,304.50 birr
6. Hygiene Articles: 2,542.20 birr
7. Clothes: 237 birr
8. Food Stuff: 14,239.57 birr
9. Cooking Fuel: 1,788.53 birr
10. Parents' Income-Generating Activities (Gardening): 1,223.50 birr

11. Kitchen Equipment (including gas stove with oven and pressure cooker):
6,554 birr
12. Classroom Furniture (not yet including the grade 1 furniture): 350 birr
13. Salaries: 28,284 birr
14. Bills (including a large electricity bill that had accumulated over a year):
2,639.44 birr
15. Transportation Costs Office: 694 birr
16. Rent for the project site for 1 year: 34,800 birr
17. Office Stationery: 1,769.74 birr

Total **income** this quarter amounted to **103,446.16 birr** (ca. **4,810 Euro** or **6,270 USD**); we once again would like to sincerely thank our faithful and generous supporters and sponsors for their great help, without which we would not be able to keep this work going.

We hope that this report gives you some idea of the work we've committed ourselves to, and are always happy to get any comments or suggestions you may have. I would also like to send out a call for volunteers to help with our project; in particular, we would be very grateful and happy to have a Montessori elementary school teacher or teachers' trainer come, even if it is only for a month or so, to help train our teachers. As I've mentioned before, our school is the first Montessori school in Ethiopia, and no trained teachers exist in the country at all. We've been trying to the best of our abilities to follow the methodology and spirit of the teaching method, but would urgently need more professional advice. For volunteers, whether in teaching or other fields, we could provide free accommodation and food, as well as local transport and a small sightseeing program with me as a volunteer guide. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to pay for airfares. I believe that volunteering at our project in the small town of Shashamane may give ones a unique insight into real life in Ethiopia, outside the tourist tracks. Please contact me for any further information.

A blessed Christmas celebration and a happy New Year to you all,

With heartical greetings,

Isheba Tafari