



Project Update: The Wall

We have now funded and built about three quarters of the wall around the Mekelle Blind School, including one bridge over the stream which runs through the campus. This proved a little complicated as, in the wet season, the stream can flow quite strongly and needs to be able to have free passage if it is not to flood the neighbourhood. This section of the wall was more expensive because of the extra work needed, and still has to have metal bars put across the stream mouth to keep the hyenas from entering along the stream bed, but to allow the water through. The final section of wall will include a similar bridge at the opposite end of the campus where the stream exits. Progress slowed a little during the summer, a) because of the rain which filled the foundation trenches some days and then had to be removed with buckets before work could resume, and b) because the Construction Bureau, the local Woreda (area) Education office and the City Planning Council are now also involved in regular checks of the standard of building, and, inevitably, it is sometimes difficult for Zewdi to get them all together at the same time.

Having said all that, however, we are confident that we can fund the remainder of the wall fairly soon so that the new term will not be too far in before we can say the children are much safer. Everyone is tremendously appreciative of the work, and Zewdi has contracted an excellent construction manager who doesn't overcharge us and who is rightly proud of the standard of his work. Heartfelt thanks go to everyone who has helped us with this project so far.

For news of the current status, and to donate using Paypal, go to www.sene.org.uk.

BRIEFING: About us and our Mission

SENethiopia is a registered charity created by concerned individuals with the aim of supporting children in northern Ethiopia who are classified as having special educational needs (SEN).

In Ethiopia, children with SEN do not have access to specialised education and are often disregarded by society. SENethiopia seeks to change this mentality and advocate for these students who have little or no voice of their own, and who, without support, have little chance to show their ability.

This organization firmly believes that every child deserves to receive a primary and secondary education. It should be the inalienable right of every child to obtain an education to the maximum of his or her ability, despite any physical or mental handicap.

Visit by Brian and Sarah, Spring 2014

Sarah Connell and Brian Woods are old friends of Jan and Ian. Since their retirement from education related jobs they have chosen to donate their time and expertise to a variety of overseas charities. This year we were lucky enough to be offered six weeks of their time working with Zewdi and SENTigray.

Brian was keen to be involved in a construction project, and initially we hoped he could help with the wall construction. However, high costs for materials meant a delay on the start of this project. The playground was in desperate need of renovation, mainly because termites had been eating away at some of the wooden structures and rendered the equipment increasingly unsafe for the children. Brian did his research, established local contacts, planned, cleared the site and supervised construction, even moving the swings from where they had always been. It's a bright happy result and the children love it.



Sarah spent her time working with Zewdi helping her develop projects, build local links and pursue local funding for the security wall we are so desperate to complete. Zewdi has valued this support immensely. It is a lonely and challenging task she has taken on for us, and Sarah's calm and measured support was tremendous. Sarah would say herself she is Zewdi's strongest advocate!!

As a charity, we owe Brian and Sarah an enormous vote of thanks. Their unfailing good humour and ability to compromise and adapt mean that their time in Mekelle will have lasting and sustainable outcomes. Many, many thanks to you both from all of us at SENEthiopia and SENTigray.

Our Supporters

Calling all Bookworms and Bakers

Friends Ben, Charlotte and Lu recently had a grand book and cake sale. Groaning tables of scrumptious cakes: lemon and poppyseed, chocolate, Victoria sponge, ginger cake, lemon tart, fruit cake to name but a few, and LOADS of books. They managed to raise a whopping £283 for SENEthiopia. Thanks guys. Anyone else fancy a go to raise some money for us – inspiration from a certain baking show on TV???



Practical support

Paula McClumpha who works for Travel Counsellors, and who is always on hand to organize us the best deals on our Ethiopia flights, recently contacted us to ask if we could use some school uniform from her daughter's primary school in Ryde, IoW. Paula runs the second hand uniform shop and, with the agreement of the Head Teacher, wanted to have a clear out before the new term began. We collected two large bags of very good quality tops and trousers for the children at the Mekelle Blind School. The fact that some of the items were in very small sizes was helpful as many of the new intake in Mekelle will be tiny and will arrive at the school with only the clothes on their backs. Many, many thanks to St Mary's RC Primary School and to Paula. Some of the children left at the Blind School over the summer holidays were very pleased to model the tops, especially when they got to keep them afterwards.



Thank you, also, to **Jan Moule and her class at Padstow School** and their fundraising for the new wall. They raised £173.04. A really great effort as part of their "Send my Friend to School" campaign which this year focuses on children denied an education due to disability.

And a big thank you to all of our other loyal supporters over the years! Without your donations and support, all of the work that we have accomplished would not have been possible.

Stories of students at Mekelle School for the Blind



Hagos Hadwu is a serious 13 year old boy, whose first name means “happiness”.

He became blind, he told me, at 6 months. His family live at Wukro, 50 km north of Mekele, so I asked him why he was still at the Blind School in the summer holidays.

There was a new syllabus, he explained, firmly. He had chosen to stay and help prepare a biology textbook (in Braille) with the help of the proctor and other sighted students from Elala, the mainstream school he attends, although Geography is actually his favourite subject. Hagos should go far: last year, he was 1st out of his class of 41 students at Elala, all but two of whom are normally sighted.

And, entered into an academic competition for blind students on the strength of this, he came second against children from all over Ethiopia. He has the determination and ability to go to University; we hope he will get the support to do that.



Degef Alemayoh, like Hagos, is a quietly-spoken 13 year old, who has been at Mekele Blind School for 6 years. Her family lives almost 200 km away, in a small village in the far south of Tigray province called Wemberta. Her mother is blind, and the blindness seems to be hereditary, because Degef’s sister is also blind.

She attends a different local mainstream school: Lekatit, where she enjoys all subjects, but especially Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia. In spite of her shy demeanour, Degef too is a smart student, coming 2nd overall in her mainstream class. She wants to become a teacher at University; she can clearly do it with the right support, and we wish her well in her ambition.



Solomon Araya has taught at the Mekelle Blind School for 17 years, and been its Director for the last seven. He is a native of Adwa, in the north of Tigray and studied at Mekelle University gaining first a BA in Management and then diplomas in Geography and Sociology.

After qualifying, Solomon was successful in the competition to obtain a place on training courses in Special Educational Needs (SEN) being held during the summer break in Nazret (now called Adama), just south of Addis Ababa. He spent 3 months each summer for 3 years (9 months in all) learning such skills as mobility instruction, Braille and teaching blind students. Solomon spent some time teaching sighted students at a mainstream school in Hintalo, a country town in south Tigray, and joined the Mekelle Blind School when it was first formed. At that time the school had 25 students and 5 teachers, but over its 20 years the numbers have grown to almost one hundred. Sadly, however, the number of teaching staff has not increased with the growing student numbers, although only grades one to four are taught at the school, with the remainder attending local mainstream schools.

Solomon sees his work as far from finished at the Blind School; the school is not limited by space (it has a large campus) but by shortage of accommodation and staff, although there is a dedicated college in Tigray, training teachers for SEN. Solomon is aware that Tigray has many blind children who don’t get access to his facilities: he has to turn many away at the start of each school year. His ambition is to expand the school accommodation and resources so all blind children in Tigray can get access to education.



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