

EXETER - ETHIOPIA LINK

June 2005 Newsletter

in association with Devon Aid

Linking Exeter in England with Wellega in Ethiopia

An Eye Project in Nekemte?

It all began with a chance meeting....
Development of a part of Alemu's 'Help and Hope Community Project' in Nekemte has moved apace. An eye health project began over a cup of coffee when Alex met an ophthalmologist in Nekemte, Dr Dawit Merdassa, who has a private clinic in the town. He said he could do very little without an operating microscope. If he had one he would collaborate with the Link to provide cataract surgery for poor people.



A young boy leads his blind father....a familiar sight in many parts of Africa today.

Then there was a meeting at the House of Commons in London....

Peter attended an Ethiopian evening to represent us and he met Marcia Zondervan the Vision 2020 Links Programme Manager at the International Centre for Eye Health in London (ICEH).

Then there was a coincidence....

Following a visit to (ICEH) in London last November, and whilst working as a volunteer on a project in Andhra Pradesh, Alex followed up the link provided by ICEH. She visited the International Centre for the Advancement of Rural Eye Care (ICARE) in Hyderabad. This renowned centre trains people to deliver quality eye care to people living in the poorest and most remote communities in the world where blindness is ten times more common than in the developed world. They are keen to help having learned that in Nekemte there is one ophthalmic nurse based in the hospital serving 1.6 million people. A special programme will be tailored to the needs of the Ethiopian learners, so that they work as an integrated team of clinicians, technicians, nurses, and managers to deliver 80 cataract repairs each month.

We raise our sights!

So, the project became more ambitious, not just equipment for Dr Merdassa but an Eye Care Centre which will follow the criteria set by Vision 2020: The Right to Sight. This global programme aims to eliminate avoidable blindness world-wide by 2020.



Selam, a five year old Ethiopian girl, 8 weeks after her successful cataracts operation.

It gets even better....

After Alex returned to the UK emails flew back and forth and an interdisciplinary team of four was formed, led by Dr Merdassa. Bureaucracy and finance permitting they will go for 3 months training in India later on this year.

The Zonal Health Department comes up trumps....

Nekemte hospital has agreed to give 2000 sq. metres of land for the Centre.

We have the commitment and the enthusiasm - now we need the money....

This is an ambitious project calling for collaborative working across three continents and around \$400,000 over 5 years. Clearly the Link must look for major donors. A great deal of team-building has been achieved even in these early days because the opportunity to make a bid for money came across our desks with just 7 days to a deadline.

Thank You....

We may not be fortunate this time in obtaining a grant, but thanks are due to Alemu Nega and Dawit Merdassa (Ethiopia);

Praveen Nirmalan and Brahm Shamanna (India); and Marcia Zondervan and Allen Foster (London) for getting us off to a good start, and the bid in on time.

Alex Taylor

Remember:

- every minute of every day a child goes blind
- 9 out of 10 of the world's blind live in the developing world
- 75% of blindness is preventable or treatable

WANTED

for Prevention of Blindness Project

YOUR OLD SPECTACLES, SPECTACLE CASES, SUNGLASSES & MAGNIFYING GLASSES

Please contact me for collection Alex Taylor
07720163308 or 01393874285 or
alexis@sagainternet.co.uk.

By post to: 62C Countess Wear Road,
Exeter, EX2 6LR.

Brief Notes:

- Richard and Martha King are going to Ethiopia for 2/3 weeks in October. If you're interested in joining them ring Richard on 01392-669238

Recent funding of projects has included:

- a classroom for Didessa Valley School
- a water pump for Derge School
- plumbing maintenance work at Nekemte Hospital
- water tanks for Hareto High School and Hareto Clinic
- spring capping in Nekemte
- spring capping for Bekumsa Biya School.
- **THANK YOU** to GP Dr Susanna Timmins who found us via the website and has donated some drugs for the hospital.

Hospital Aid Ethiopia in Somerset

Hospital Aid-Ethiopia was finally registered - first as a Company limited by Guarantee (NGO) in November 2003 and with the Charity Commission in February last year. We currently have six Trustees, with a vacancy for a seventh, and signed a Memorandum of agreement with the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, to equip (or re-equip) their five Teaching Hospitals, three months ago.

We are planning an official Launch in May (ed. not sure if this happened). In any event, we are working with THET to send supplies to their Link hospitals (all of which, currently, are Teaching Hospitals) as we have been granted clearance to import medical equipment into Ethiopia for the Ministry of Education, without Import Duty or (most) administrative formalities.

We will need a great deal of equipment (or the money to buy it) over the next 2-3 years. We anticipate obtaining an appreciable proportion of the items we need, through the NHS and any offers of advice, assistance or support in this area, would be greatly appreciated.

The shortage of medical services throughout Ethiopia is greater even than the shortage of food and improving the Health Service is an integral part of raising the standard of living throughout the country.

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Maybe we'll find opportunities to collaborate together on projects in the future?

Snippets from Ethiopian News – the monthly publication of the Ethiopian Embassy in London, March 2005

- The Oromia Coffee Growers Cooperatives' Union was to exhibit 7 varieties of Ethiopian coffee at a meeting of the Speciality Coffee Association of America in Seattle in April. One of the varieties of coffee it was to promote is the Nekemte. The Union has been involved with the setting up of 2 new Progresso coffee shops in London in association with Oxfam.
- A new HIV/AIDS helpline has been launched in Ethiopia to provide accurate information, counselling and free referrals to callers from across the country. The talkline is now receiving on average 1800 calls per day. A radio and television campaign is promoting the helpline which provides information on the location of testing centres, ways to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the virus and treatment options. According to government figures around 1.5 million people in the country are HIV positive.
- Construction has begun on a new university in Robe town, Bale zone of the Oromia state. The Education Minister speaking in Robe town said higher learning institutions should be "centres of excellence that produce responsible citizens and contribute to national development and democratisation". Nekemte is one of 13 new universities to be built in the next 5 years.

Jill Grainger

Ethiopia is a vast and beautiful country. At 60 million inhabitants, its population is only slightly larger than that of the UK. The health statistics are very different, however:

- Life expectancy in Ethiopia is 49 years and falling
- Infant mortality is 100 out of every 1000 live births
- 18 out of 100 children will not live to see their fifth birthday

These statistics are not dissimilar to those recorded for the UK in 1900.

Exeter - Ethiopia Link

Officers for 2005

Chair *Peter Grainger*

Vice-Chairs *Alex Taylor*
Adrian Thomas

Treasurer *Mark Howells*

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Membership *Pauline Bennett*

General *Richard King*

Newsletter editor *Bruce Hebbard*

Co-ordinators:

Health *Alex Taylor*

Education *Pauline Bennett*

Water/Env *Peter Grainger*

Women (JGMF) *Fran Hamilton*

(more group members always needed please, but especially for Health at the moment)

Exeter-Ethiopia Link

The Exeter-Ethiopia Link was set up in 1987 to promote a Community Link between Exeter in Devon, England and Hareto in Wellega, Ethiopia. In 1994 the Link included Nekemte, the principal town in Wellega.

The Link supports:

Health, Agricultural and Educational projects in Hareto and Nekemte and encourages links between schools in Exeter and the communities in Ethiopia.

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www. exeter-ethiopia-devon-aid.eclipse.co.uk

Any copy for future newsletters can be sent to the editor, Bruce Hebbard, at Cedar House, Pincus Road, Exeter EX2 9EN (Tel: 01392-437479) or by e-mail to b.hebbard@ talk21.com

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