



HAMLIN
FISTULA
AUSTRALIA

Treatment, prevention and raising awareness of obstetric fistulas

WINTER 2024

Looking to a *bright* future

As the CEO of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia, I am filled with tremendous excitement and optimism as I look towards the future of Hamlin College of Midwives.

Thanks to the generosity and support of our donors from Australia, we have embarked on an ambitious expansion project that will allow us to train more skilled midwives to serve the rural women in Ethiopia. When the Hamlin College of Midwives first opened in 2007, our goal was to provide high-quality midwifery education to young females, empowering them to bring safe, compassionate care to mothers and newborns in most remote regions of our country. Over the past sixteen years, over 250 midwives have graduated, each of whom has made an immeasurable difference in their communities. This allows us to achieve one of the visions of Dr. Catherine Hamlin—access to quality healthcare across Ethiopia.

However, as the demand for our services grew, especially in postgraduate programs, it became clear that the existing facilities were no longer adequate to meet the need. The drive to achieve this need raised the planning of the college's expansion project with the construction of new buildings in the college compound.

The new buildings will provide our students with hands-on training in a safe and controlled environment, allowing students to practise essential skills like assisted delivery, neonatal resuscitation, and managing obstetric emergencies before ever setting foot in a clinical setting. By the

time our students graduate, they will be so much more confident and capable, ready to hit the ground running in their roles as midwives. This is going to have a profound impact on the quality of care that women and newborns receive, potentially saving countless lives in the years to come.

The new building will also allow to double the annual enrolment of students. This is exciting, as it means we will train more midwives to serve rural communities across Ethiopia. There is an immense need for skilled maternal healthcare providers, especially in rural and remote areas, and this expansion will help us meet this need.



The accommodation block, when it is finished, will hold students who will help change the face of fistula surgery and rehabilitation in Africa.



As I look around our beautiful campus and imagine the future of the Hamlin College of Midwives, I am filled with a profound sense of optimism. With these new facilities in place, we are poised to train an even greater number of skilled, compassionate midwives who will go on to transform the lives of countless women in every corner of our country.

This is an exciting new chapter for our organization, and I have no doubt that with the continued support of our donors especially from Australia, we will be able to achieve even greater heights in the years to come. The future is bright, and

I am honoured to be a part of this incredible journey. I am deeply grateful to our donors in Australia, whose generosity has made this project possible. Their persistent support has been instrumental in our ability to grow and evolve as an institution, constantly striving to better serve the women and families who rely on us.

Tesfaye Mamo

Chief Executive

Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia



The road from Desta Menda

There are many roads and pathways that lead into the buildings of Desta Menda. And of course, these roads also lead out of Desta Menda. For women who are sufficiently healed of their fistulas to become part of the training and rehabilitation services which Desta Menda offers, it's hard to know whether they are more excited to walk in... or to walk out.

Biruk and **Hafiza** are just two of the women who have taken that walk over the past few months.



Biruk with her husband at their village.

My name is Biruk Mulugeta. At the age of 15, I got married and soon after gave birth to a daughter. Later, the birth of my son was a harrowing experience. Since there was no health center nearby, I had to deliver at home with the help of experienced midwives in the camp. Little did

I know that this would lead to a life-altering injury.

Just nine days after giving birth, I started experiencing symptoms of fistula—a hole that had developed between my

birth canal and bladder, causing constant and uncontrollable leakage of urine. For an entire year, I suffered in silence, afraid to even tell my husband.

When I finally mustered the courage to confide in him, he took me to the medical centre where we were referred to the Yirgalem Hamlin Fistula Centre.

At the hospital, my recovery journey began. The staff first focused on training me in essential self-care practices like hygiene, bathing, and dressing. But the hospital's commitment to my well-being did not stop there. After my successful treatment, they invited me to Addis Ababa for further training. There, I learned valuable skills like embroidery and basic literacy. The organization gave me the knowledge and tools not only to improve my own life, but also to go back to my community and share these lessons with others in need. With the financial support provided, I was able to start my own small business—raising chickens.

Today, I am a changed woman. I no longer live in isolation and shame. Instead, I have found peace, purpose, and financial independence. I am no longer the same Biruk who once suffered in silence. Now, I am an advocate, a mentor, and a beacon of hope for others affected by fistula. The blessings I have received have not only uplifted me, but my entire community. I am forever grateful to the Hamlin organization for their unwavering commitment to restoring the lives of women like me. This is my story of resilience, rebirth, and the power of compassion to change lives.



I am Hafiza, and I am 20 years old. At a young age, I got married and soon had three children. But my joy was short-lived. My first child survived, but the two that followed did not. They passed away before they could be born. The last one was the cause of my greatest suffering. During a long and difficult labour, my child died inside me. For two agonizing days, I laboured at home without medical care. When I finally made it to the doctor, they told me the devastating news—my baby had perished in my womb.

I had to have an operation to deliver the stillborn child. And that is when the real nightmare began. I developed fistula.

My husband and family wanted nothing to do with me... they shunned me. I hated myself and the life I was living. I felt so alone and ashamed. But then, a ray of hope emerged. The doctors referred me to the Harar Hamlin Fistula Centre, where I could receive the specialized care I needed.

The staff at the hospital embraced me with compassion. They washed my soiled clothes, fed me, and tended to my every need. Most importantly, they operated on me and healed my fistula. After years of humiliation and isolation, I was finally whole again.

As I prepared to leave the hospital, the staff encouraged me to take part in their training program. They wanted to empower me to go back to my community and be an advocate for other women suffering from fistula.

I eagerly accepted this opportunity. No longer would I feel alone or ashamed. I was reborn, ready to share my story and be a beacon of hope for others. Now, I am excited to return home and reunite with my family. I know the road ahead will not be easy, but I am filled with a renewed sense of purpose. I am Hafiza, and I am reborn.



Building continues

Building work at the College of Midwives has been slow. Problems with funding and builders left the worksite sitting quietly for several months.

But in April Doug Marr representing Hamlin Fistula Australia, visited in the hope he could see the work re-energised and the building re-commence. It worked. "I was there in January and it was very disappointing," Doug said. "So I organised some extra funding and things changed dramatically. There were only two or three people on site in January, but by the time I returned in April, a workforce of around 50 people was busy. The two big pressure points are the dining room and accommodation facilities. As the College is now training post-graduate midwives, some of whom are men, we are in desperate need of the new accommodation wings. And we need to get them done before the rain arrives in the middle of the year. We are building a new library and lecture hall as well."

We hope that, by the time this newsletter goes out, some of these projects will be finished. In the meantime, we wait and pray for the good news that everyone has a place to sleep and eat and study so that the dream to eradicate fistula injuries forever might be one step closer.



A hole in the ground...a few foundations... but soon a buzzing hive of learning. This library building will help nurture and educate future midwives.



Soon, this will be a coffee shop, where students can go to catch up with friends, relax, and caffeinate for coming exams.

Partners in Mercy

The work of seeing fistula totally eradicated in Africa – Catherine Hamlin’s greatest wish – cannot go on in a vacuum. Many, many people, and like-minded organisations are involved to see the work progress and improve.



Gillian Slinger Head of the Fistula Surgery Training Initiative; Lilli Trautvetter, Project Manager – Fistula Surgery Training Initiative and Technical Specialist Obstetric Fistula; Frances Longley CEO; Mr Doug Marr Executive Officer Hamlin Fistula Australia and Dr Andrew Browning meeting in London this year

There are three groups of these partners which are constantly active, and for whom everyone associated with Hamlin Fistula are grateful.

The Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital was opened by Reg and Catherine Hamlin in 1974. Following the death of Reg in 1993, Catherine refused to leave but stayed on to develop a complete treatment for women suffering with a fistula. Hamlin Fistula Australia Limited (HFA) was established in 1996 by friends and family of Catherine with a view to raising funds to support Catherine and her vital work. Since the establishment of HFA, the company has raised over \$30 million from many supporters in Australia and this money has provided essential funds so Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia (HFE) could open five regional hospitals, a rehabilitation and reintegration centre (Desta Mender) as well as the Hamlin College of Midwives to prevent fistula injuries occurring in the first place.

Catherine was Australian so it is fitting that so much financial support should come from Australia but knowledge of the work of extends well beyond Ethiopia and Australia. Reg and Catherine had medical and personal contacts in the UK, so much support has also been provided by Hamlin Fistula UK. Reg was born in New Zealand so funds are also raised by Hamlin Fistula NZ. Over the years organisations were set up in multiple countries in Europe and other parts of the world. It became a practice for representatives of the various Hamlin Partners to travel to Ethiopia once a year for a meeting called the Partners International Meeting (PIM).

The 2024 PIM was held in the Catherine Hamlin Hall of the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital on Friday 31 May and Saturday 1 June 2024. The PIM involved partners from Australia, New Zealand, the UK and several European countries. HFA was represented by Denis Pontin (Deputy

Chair of Directors) and Doug Marr (Executive Officer).

Members of the HFE Board of Trustees were actively involved in the PIM and there were presentations by medical and other staff of HFE. All who attended considered the PIM to be a valuable opportunity for consultation between stakeholders and agreement about the future for HFE.

Another organisation which partners with HFE is the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), which is the main accrediting body for fistula treatment in countries all around the world. Doug Marr was able to meet with three FIGO executives as well as Dr Andrew Browning, who chairs their training committee for fistula surgeons, in London earlier this year.

“A couple of years ago, FIGO came to Hamlin Australia and asked if we could fund some training at Hamlin, Ethiopia,” he said. “We agreed to give them USD 122,000 each year for three years to run training classes at the hospital in Addis Ababa. Usually, five or six surgeons from different parts of the world come and stay for about six weeks and do lots of surgery and get lots of training. It was great for me to meet face to face with the people I have really only spoken with virtually. We were able to re-negotiate the contract so that fistula research and training can be ongoing at Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia for the next few years.

The third partnering organization isn’t an organization at all! It is, of course, the donors who continue to support the work started by Reg and Catherine Hamlin all those years ago. In our last newsletter, we specifically asked for donations for the building work currently taking place and, as usual, our friends came through!

As a Christmas gift last year, the College of Midwives building project received from its friends (that’s you!):



Bedding sets x 18



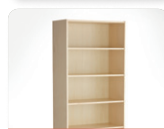
Library books x 15



Bed frames x 29



Mattresses x 31



Bookshelves x 14



Desks x 19



Bathrooms x 2



Computers x 4

As well as donations for furnishings, just over \$4000 was donated to help the College in general. Thank you for this outstanding response. If you have not yet been able to donate, but feel that now is the time, please see the donation slip included here. You can continue to add to the specific items needed, or simply make a general donation.