



Photo: Dr Catherine Hamlin with Tesfaye Mamo at her last birthday party in 2020.

## Winter 2025 News

### Changes here and there

#### Big changes are underway at both Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia and Hamlin Fistula Australia.

**R**ecently Ato Tesfaye Mamo, the Chief Executive Officer of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia, sent an email to the various Hamlin International Partners advising he would be leaving HFE after seven years of committed service to Dr Catherine Hamlin, Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia and the women of Ethiopia. He wrote -

*Dear Partners,*

*The past seven years in Hamlin, first as a Deputy CEO and then as a CEO, have been some of the most rewarding experiences of my entire career as a healthcare manager. A lot of progress has been made in driving performance in treatment, rehabilitation and prevention related to obstetric fistula and other birth related injuries. You were part of all the progress made and successes achieved. Thank you, indeed.*

*We have also navigated difficult challenges such as the advent of COVID-19, the passing of the beloved Dr Catherine Hamlin, and conflicts in various parts of my country. I recall you were supporting us during all the difficult times and stepped up your financial support at all times. I cannot thank you enough for all the friendship and support you have provided to me during the past seven years.*

*After a lot of soul searching and quiet introspection, I have now decided to step aside and give way for a new era in Hamlin. This is a moment of bittersweet for me as I love Hamlin deeply but have had to make the difficult decision of separation. I am entangled in cherished moments,*

*good friendships, and extraordinary progresses we have made together. I am optimistic the future will be bright and safe for Ethiopian women with the elimination of obstetric fistula being imminent with your continued support.*

*Finally, I will be staying around for a couple of months to ensure smooth transition, handover, and continuity of the work. Also, even if I make my next career move, I will still be an ambassador for the amazing work pioneered by our founders and commit to promote Hamlin wherever I may go.*

*Hamlin Fistula Australia thanks Tesfaye for his hard work and unceasing commitment to the women of Ethiopia. We wish him well in his future endeavours.*

#### Hamlin Fistula Australia Sydney Office

For almost 15 years the HFA office has operated out of premises in a warehouse complex in Cecil Road Hornsby, provided at no charge by arrangement with the 'San' (the Sydney Adventist Hospital). The warehouse area has been used by the San for storage and the attached office space has been made available to HFA with the only cost incurred by HFA being for electricity and water charges. The warehouse is in the process of being vacated so HFA needs to move. We thank the San for the helpful and generous support given in this way to our fundraising efforts to support Dr Catherine Hamlin and Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia.

Our new office is located at Suite 715, 1c Burdett Street, Hornsby NSW 2077. Our postal and other contact details remain the same:

**Mail:** PO Box 965 Wahroonga NSW 2076

**Email:** [emailus@hamlinsistula.org.au](mailto:emailus@hamlinsistula.org.au)

**Phone:** 02 8007 7434

#### Hamlin Fistula Australia Limited

Administering the Hamlin Fistula Relief and Aid Fund | ABN 58 076 840 250 | CFN 16100 | DGR 900 484 487  
PO Box 965 Wahroonga NSW 2076 **E** [emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au](mailto:emailus@hamlinfistula.org.au) **P** 02 8007 7435

**W** [www.hamlinfistula.org.au](http://www.hamlinfistula.org.au) | Special thanks to everyone who provided photographs for this newsletter.



EMAYE LIVES ON

# Yeshi's Journey from Patient to Entrepreneur

**In the heart of Desta Mender, Yeshi owned a café. It was a cozy space filled with the rich aromas of tea and coffee, and the warm scents of meals prepared with love. It was also a haven for the hardworking staff of Desta Mender and the eager students of the Hamlin College of Midwives.**

Yeshi had once been a patient at Desta Mender herself, one of the first fistula survivors to arrive under the guidance of Dr. Catherine Hamlin. Now, she lives in her own furnished home, a symbol of her hard-earned independence. She took pride in her café, fully equipped with everything she needed to cater to her customers, and all purchased through her own efforts.

When Yeshi first arrived at Desta Mender, she was one of fifteen women who had suffered from fistula injuries. Dr. Catherine had brought them together, offering a home and a chance at a new life. They had arrived from the hospital, uncertain of what lay ahead. "My children, this is your home from now on," Dr. Catherine assured them.

The early days were filled with training and education. Yeshi, who had never learned to read or write, began to grasp the basics of literacy and numeracy. "I could only sign with my thumb because I didn't know how to write," she recalled. "But thanks to the training I received, I can now write and read everything. I control my business because I learned what was essential for me to succeed."

Dr. Catherine visited them regularly, bringing small gifts that made them feel cared for, as if they were part of a family. Yeshi cherished those moments of connection,

sharing coffee and stories with the doctor who had given them hope. "From the fifteen of us, only I and one other remain." It can be sad, remembering those who have moved on or passed away. "But I am happy in my life," she said, her eyes shining with pride.

These days, it is difficult for Yeshi to speak of Dr. Catherine. "She is the base for life, not only for me but for all the women," she says. "I would be happy if someone like her could take her place. May she rest in peace."

Yeshi often reflected on the support she received from staff and donors, recognizing that their kindness had played a crucial role in her journey.

Embracing her thirst for knowledge, Yeshi enrolled in evening classes, where she learned various subjects and completed the eighth grade. "The literacy and numeracy class in this village helped me a lot," she said, her enthusiasm far more evident than most of those in Year 8!

"I love working," Yeshi says. Before opening her café, she had worked as a cashier and had overseen kitchen activities for three years. After that, she transitioned to embroidery, always keeping herself busy. But it is the café which has bought her the greatest joy.

Yeshi's café became more than just a business; it was a testament to her journey, a place where she celebrated her independence and the bonds she forged with the community. As the sun set over Desta Mender, Yeshi often reflected on her life, grateful for every moment that had brought her to this point. She stood proud, a beacon of hope and resilience, embodying the spirit of all the women who had come through the doors of Desta Mender, and a tribute to the work, kindness and forethought of her beloved Emaye, Dr Catherine Hamlin.



It doesn't look like an Australian coffee shop, but it provides hot drinks, good food, and a welcoming atmosphere to everyone at Desta Mender

Yeshi in her own domain...  
her coffee shop

Yeshi has everything  
she needs to run her  
thriving coffee shop

EMAYE LIVES ON

# Emaye's flag

**Bekelu is just one of the thousands of women who have come to a Hamlin Fistula Hospital in the midst of extreme suffering. Her story of passing through that suffering into hope and confidence is inspiring.**

I have suffered with fistula for six years, and now I am getting treated.

It was my first pregnancy. There is no health facility in my village. When the labour started I didn't know whether I was in labour or if it was something else. I stayed in pain for two days but I didn't know I was labour. There was no transport to take me to the clinic but finally a relief organization car took me to the clinic on the third day.

Then, thanks to God, I gave birth to a living baby boy! However, I faced this devastating problem...fistula. Afterwards a conflict was raised around my village, and I was displaced and started living inside a church compound under great stress and terrible poverty. We stayed there for almost three years.

As I live in the desert part where there is no health facility, I never knew there could be a cure. It was my friends who informed me about the fistula hospital and sent me here, after collecting money for transport.

Now I am at Dr Catherine's home. We call her Emaye meaning 'mother'. Her home is continuing to serve women like me even though we have lost her. She made sure there are doctors and nurses who continue her legacy. Emaye's good deeds and history will never be completed. Thanks to God, I became hopeful after I arrived. On our arrival we received soaps, clothing, and so on. We miss nothing. Everything is full. We are receiving the utmost care. The doctors never abandoned us because of the stench. They are committed to our cure. God makes them Emaye's replacement and gave all the knowledge and skills. I give my thanks to them.

I had to leave my son at home as I have not enough money to take care of him. Now I miss my baby, but I am so happy with the services I am receiving here. Now I am planning to spread information about this hospital when I go back so more women like me would come and cure.

The moment I arrived I felt a big relief of my pain. The beautiful compound, the motherly welcome and everything was so amazing. We took a shower, and got new pyjamas, shoes, and blankets which made us feel renewed. We sleep on a clean bed, eat varied and healthy

food, and are given fruits, eggs, milk and more. Emaye's home is different to anywhere I have ever been.

This blanket is the sign of Emaye. It is her flag. It helps us remember her forever. We were helpless and hopeless before we came to Emaye's home. It is here we got treated as a person and got cured. The blanket reminds us of the life we have passed through and remains a sign of cure when we get back home. We will pray for her soul to rest in peace whenever we see this blanket.

I would like to thank all the supporters who gave me this new blanket which is a sign for my cure. Your support helped me throw away my old blanket and replace it with a new one which depicts the start of my new life. I thank you very much.

Bekelu was apprehensive about the surgery



The gifts every patient receives to help them stay clean, warm and comfortable



The surgery was performed with great care



But now, wrapped in the "flag" of Emaye, she is looking forward to a new life



# The vision continues

A visit to Ethiopia has seen Denis Pontin, Deputy Chairman Hamlin Fistula Australia, attend a gala evening jointly sponsored by Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia and UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund a fund dedicated to improving maternal health), inspect the completed building works at the Hamlin College of Midwives, and liaise with local supporters of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia, representatives of government departments and embassies.

“On May 30th, I attended *See the Unseen – An Evening for Fistula Survivors*, at the Hilton Hotel along with the Ethiopian Prime Minister and Minister for Health, among many others,” he said. “It was a time to be inspired, to celebrate and to renew our commitment to the work. All money raised from the evening will be used to support maternal health and – in particular – to provide free surgeries and comprehensive post-operative care for obstetric fistula and pelvic organ prolapse survivors. It was a joy and a privilege to be reminded of how far we have come, and to commit ourselves to continuing Dr Catherine Hamlin’s vision to see fistula eradicated in Africa.

I was then able to see the building work at the Midwives College which is almost fully complete. I have

to say thank you to Abba Architects who have designed and project managed this expansion of the College; and Rama Construction – the builders – who are also sealing the road into the College at cost as a gesture of support for the work that Dr Hamlin started over 60 years ago.

The original intake of Master of Midwifery students included male midwives who were accommodated at Desta Mender. These students will complete their MSc this year and the College will focus on a small intake of MSc students. They are currently advertising for students to enrol. The new course will have an intake of only 15 female students and the preference will be given to Hamlin midwife graduates.

It was greatly encouraging to see the progress of the building work, and to think about the enormous generosity of our donors who have made so much of it possible. On behalf of Hamlin Fistula Australia, and the students and staff of the Hamlin College of Midwifery, thank you very much.”

Denis will be speaking on *Catherine’s Vision and Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia in 2025* at St Phillip’s Anglican Church, South Turrumurra on 1 August at 11am. For details contact Jill on 0448 711 730.

**The dormitory** is one building with two wings, each consisting of 14 bedrooms with two beds in each. At the end of each wing are toilets, showers and a small laundry. Between the two dormitory wings is a lounge with TV and chairs.



**The library** is a two-storey building and books are now being loaded in. The old library will be converted to classrooms and a new teaching laboratory.



**The lecture hall** can seat around 120 students and is slightly raked to enable students to see the front of the lecture hall and video screens and raised lecture platform. The College has not had a modern lecture hall before and the data cabling and internet connection with modern LCD “smart” screens will allow lectures and conference speaker presentations to be streamed to other venues.



**A fence** may seem like a small thing, but when that fence is preventing hyenas from wandering around amongst students and patients at Desta Mender, it becomes a major thing! We increased the scope of works to include a new fence around both the College and Desta Mender.