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Restore. Empower. Equip.

APRIL 2022



Equipping for Success – Asmira’s Story

Before the reintegration [programme] I had nothing to eat or wear. We used to live by luck. We used all the money we had searching for a cure for fistula. But since I passed through the Desta Mender training and reintegration programme my life has changed. The education equipped me with confidence in fighting for my legal rights, and I succeeded in getting back the farmland taken from me. Now I harvest enough food to feed my family. The seed money I received five years ago [from Hamlin] has now grown to big capital. I have constructed a new and better home. Emaye [Dr. Catherine] gave me back my health and became a source of wealth to my family. - Asmira

Asmira, who estimates her age to be around 40, is now living in a remote rural village in Northern Ethiopia, close to Hamlin’s hospital in Bahir Dar. She lives with her two daughters and her husband of 25 years, Lemma. The long labour she faced in her third pregnancy severely damaged her bladder.

Asmira and her husband spent every single coin they had searching for a cure until they finally arrived at Bahir Dar Hamlin Fistula Hospital for help.

Her case was complex and required multiple treatments and surgeries. Asmira lived for almost five years with incontinence until she and her husband decided to take the brave step for a diversion surgery. It has been five years since her diversion surgery at the main hospital in Addis Ababa. Since then, Asmira completed the rehabilitation and reintegration training at Desta Mender and started business back in her village using the seed money provided.

Lemma has been there by her side in all her sufferings as well as her successes. Thanks to the education Asmira received at Hamlin Fistula, they have been able to rise above subsistence living and thrive in their work together:

“Because of that devastating problem my wife was restricted to home unable to support herself, let alone the family. Now, after you treated her, she visits markets with friends, goes to church, eats, and drinks whatever she wants and protects her health. The seed money you gave her decidedly changed our

life. We have been working hard to raise our income. I work on the farm, and she handles the market. Currently we have enough food to feed our family for over a year. We have a new house, two cows and planted cash crops on our farm. The seed money is the start of all of these. You brought happiness back to our home, and I can't thank you enough for your generosity." - Lemma

In a recent visit from Hamlin staff, Asmira's happiness beamed from her smiling face as she welcomed them with love and affection. It was clear to see that her quality of life has improved beyond what most in her community would hope for. Her

daughters are in good health, her home is clean and comfortable, and she enjoys some of the benefits of modern living.

Since 2002, women at Desta Mender (meaning 'Joy Village') have been empowered to lead lives of dignity. The Hamlin Model of Care prioritises equipping patients for the future. Where needed, women are provided with the support and resources to generate income for themselves and their families, with start-up grants for businesses/micro enterprise. Your support means more women like Asmira are equipped to return home and make a positive impact in their families and communities.



Asmira and Lemma with their daughters



Well stocked with a year's supply of food



Hamlin Begins Master of Science in Clinical Midwifery

Training highly skilled midwives remains one of the key strategies in Hamlin's Model of Care to prevent and eradicate obstetric fistula in Ethiopia.

Through the Hamlin College of Midwives (HCM), Hamlin has produced more than 200 highly trained BSc graduate midwives so far and deployed them in rural government clinics lacking maternal healthcare services.

Hamlin midwives have advanced skills in complicated deliveries such as ventouse and breech births. However, there is a great need for specialist emergency obstetric services and a shortage of obstetric surgeons, especially in rural areas. Ethiopia's goal is to decrease its maternal mortality rate (MMR) from 401 per 100,000 live births to 279 (for perspective, New Zealand's MMR is 9). To do this requires expanding emergency services, and Ethiopia has joined the league of the more than half of African countries training non-physicians in emergency obstetric surgery. This programme will equip midwives to perform operative vaginal deliveries, caesarean sections, hysterectomies, laparotomies and manage postoperative complications.

Thirty-one experienced midwives from the Oromia and Sidama regions were awarded scholarships and joined

the Hamlin College as the first batch of post-graduate students. In the welcome session on January 5 2022, Mr Zelalem, Dean of the College & Hamlin Prevention manager spoke, "Today you joined one of the best midwifery training colleges in Ethiopia and Africa. Quality and world-class training are what we are known for. We have done lots of preparations for your training and I hope you will be satisfied by our services. You are not just our students you are also our ambassadors responsible in the continuation of the legacy of our founders, the Hamlins. After graduation you will be expected to fill the gap in the field and perform caesareans at clinic level for the first time in Ethiopia."

Aster Sodo is one of Hamlin's returning graduates. She graduated from the college in 2017 and worked at Olonso Health Center in the Sidama Region for four years. She was the head of the midwifery centre before returning to attend the master's programme. "I am so happy that I rejoined this beautiful college. For me it is like coming back home. I expect this master's programme will help me to upgrade myself professionally and serve the community with better knowledge and commitment."





Meet our first international midwifery student Sr. Domenica Vensia

Thirty-six year-old Sister Domenica is originally from South Sudan in a small town called Upper Nile, located very close to Ethiopian border. After she obtained a diploma in nursing from a college in South Sudan, Domenica joined a mission in the Benishangul region of Ethiopia, which runs a sanitarium.

“I have been serving in Ethiopia for the past 9 years and witnessed many unbearable challenges rural women face while giving birth. Because of lack of skilled professionals in the area, I saw women lose their lives in delivery, even after arriving at a health institution. Stopping this has always been my dream. I always wanted to upgrade my profession to higher and specific level so as to prevent the poor mothers from dying. I love Ethiopia and I never have considered myself as a foreigner.” – Sr. Domenica

When she first heard about the Hamlin College of Midwives and the work of Hamlin Fistula hospitals in 2019, Sr. Domenica recalls, “The information I got about this college and its high-quality training for young girls was what I have been dreaming about in my life. I thought to myself this is it.”

Normally, Hamlin only grants scholarships to young women from rural Ethiopia who are willing to serve in their hometown for 4 years after graduation. However, the health boards requested that Hamlin recruit students in the Gambela and Benishangul Regions. Being from the Benishangul region, the door was now open to Domenica as a special case.

“When I got the call from the college, I couldn’t believe the truth I am hearing until I come back to the college in person. Finally, the impossible became possible, and I joined the college as a first-



year midwifery student,” she explains. Domenica passed the entrance exams and was granted the scholarship for the 2021 academic year as the first ever international student.

“On April 17, 2021, I joined the college I have been dreaming about. This is the perfect college that matches with my interests. Most of all the well facilitated teaching learning process added with highly skilled teachers and the breathtaking environment made me find the college better than my expectations. I am now looking forward to finishing my study successfully and saving the lives of many mothers dying out there in their happy moment of delivery. I thank you all for granting me the scholarship.”
– Domenica.



Hamlin sets the standard for birth injury care

Hamlin Fistula has been setting the international standard in fistula care in Ethiopia for 63 years. Every patient is assessed and treated with a personalised programme including nutritional status, surgery, treatment of co-morbidities, physiotherapy, psycho-social trauma, counselling, education, skills training and financial assistance. If only the NZ government could treat Kiwi mothers the same.

Around 4.5% of Kiwi women will experience a severe tear in childbirth, including obstetric fistula. This usually requires repair under general anaesthetic and ongoing physiotherapy to treat issues such as incontinence and prolapse. For New Zealand women, causes of obstetric fistula include forceps deliveries, induction, older age of the mother and larger babies. But no matter the cause, every mother deserves holistic care and treatment. Every woman matters.

In February 2022 more than 900 personal stories of Kiwi women’s traumatic birth injuries were shared with Minister Sepuloni, outlining why the Government must provide treatment of all birth injuries and trauma. To date, obstetric fistula has not been covered for ACC treatment, as rigid ACC definitions deemed the injury to have been caused by an internal force rather than an external force to the body. A baby is not considered an external force until it is born.

A bill before parliament would amend ACC legislation to cover more birth injuries such as fistula and uterine prolapse and provide ongoing physiotherapy. It is estimated that 17,000 to 18,000 women will be helped each year. The bill is short sighted however, and the proposed changes fail to cover the full spectrum of birth injuries, the debilitating physical repercussions and resultant



mental trauma, or treatment for those women currently with birth injuries.

No woman experiencing the pain and trauma of obstetric fistula and other birth injuries should be left untreated. At Hamlin Fistula, we are proud that the treatment for women suffering with an obstetric fistula is focused on not just repairing the injury but restoring dignity. We continue to provide women the complete Hamlin Model of Care. You can continue the legacy that Drs Catherine and Reg started. This pioneering couple changed the world for thousands of Ethiopian women and restored lives. You can be proud that your donation helps provide world class care for women with childbirth injuries.



Hamlin 2022 Barefoot Challenge

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Every year, hundreds of fistula sufferers endure an arduous trek over tens to hundreds of kilometres to seek treatment at the Hamlin Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Many of these women will do this barefoot.

This year, Hamlin are challenging you to complete your own barefoot journey while raising funds for these courageous women.

Get Inspired A Walk to Beautiful is an award-winning documentary that captures the long and arduous journey of women in rural Ethiopia seeking treatment for their fistula injuries. This moving documentary will transport you to the world of a fistula sufferer without leaving your home.

Gather your friends together for your own private screening of A Walk to Beautiful, and be able to share this incredibly touching journey. Contact Hamlin by registering your interest below, and we will post you a DVD copy of A Walk to Beautiful for you to watch in the comfort of your own home.



Get Active Using the resilience shown by these remarkable women as incentive, you and your friends can commit to your own trek, raising funds for fistula patients as you go.

Challenge yourself by pledging to commit to walking to your own beautiful!

You can make it as simple or creative as you like. It could be a barefoot walk by the river or in the park, up a mountain, or a day barefoot in the office! You decide what suits you.

Ready to take on the challenge?

Pick a date for your challenge between May 1 - May 23, International Day to End Obstetric Fistula. Go to www.hamlinfistula.org.nz/barefoot-challenge to get started.

Inspired but not able to participate? You can still show your support and encourage others by donating instead. Check out our teams under the Fundraise/Barefoot Challenge drop down on our task bar www.hamlinfistula.org.nz/barefoot-challenge or donate online at www.hamlinfistula.org.nz/donate.

Register your interest: To organise for a copy of A Walk to Beautiful, or to speak to a member of the Hamlin Team, go to www.hamlinfistula.org.nz/barefoot-challenge or email natasha@hamlinfistula.org.nz.

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