

Greetings family and friends,

As usual, there has been so much happening here that I have found it difficult to actually sit down and write to you. Our days seem long and by the time I finish at night it is almost midnight and I need to be up to supervise bottles, toddlers and staff change-over at 6:00am. Do not get me wrong ... I really enjoy teaching the workers and spending time with the toddlers.

We moved to Bahir Dar at the beginning of June and into a house that Marcie (our American founding team member - www.mammameheret.org) found within walking distance of her house. The house is perfect for the beginnings of Grace with a residence in which we all live and also a good size Grace nursery consisting of 3 rooms, plus 4 other rooms currently occupied by our housekeeper and mothers with their toddlers. It has been a busy start to the Grace Centre in Bahir Dar! We have met with the local authorities, found premises for the day care centre while we await the building, checked out the drainage needs of the land with all the rain we have been having here, and found our way around the town.

Bahir Dar is like a country town from the 1950's! There are no supermarkets or even large shops for that matter, the local doctor does all procedures in his rooms (literally), many vendors tout their wares on the street, and everyone greets each other or stops for a chat in the street. The people are friendly and diverse, street children come to the car for biscuits and a casual chat, bicycle riders greet you as they overtake, and it is easy to be known by the 'locals'. The fruit and vegi market is a bustle of activity and bartering, chickens are carried upside down by their legs to be killed plucked and prepared for dinner, and farm fresh eggs are all you can buy. Around this the city is getting ready for the nation's millennium celebration on 11th of September with lights in the trees along the main road and extensive street cleaning.

We are currently housing the 8 children we have in care. 4 of them are under 3 months of age, and the other two are under 3 years. Plus we also have the 1 year old twins with us. They are waiting for the courts to reopen for their case to progress. One of the twins has been very sick. While we saw her gaining weight and developing, the test results disclosed the magnitude and severity of her condition yet she seemed to be doing well. She is our little miracle! Unfortunately over the last 2 weeks she has been fighting pneumonia and her recovery has been slow. Please hold her in your prayers.

Three mothers and their toddlers arrived from Addis last week from the Godenow project we were working with in Addis which houses and trains

pregnant rape victims. We have hired them to work within Grace and we are looking for accommodation for them so they can live close to the centre where their children will also receive day care while they work. It is lovely to see them settling in with their children. They are all very enthusiastic workers who are delighted to be able to work and keep their children.

We also have 4 other children in day care. One is only a week old. Her mother was a street lady and she was begging with the baby. This is the wet season so you can imagine the problems she would face. We gave her support to find a house and care for her baby so she could work. The other baby is also very young, approximately 1 month. His mother had her dream of a home and family shattered when her 'husband' left when the baby was due. She is a day labour on building sites carrying bricks, sand, etc. Because of day care she can still work and provide for herself. She is conscientious and the girls here have really embraced her and given her clothing for herself and the baby. It is a real blessing to see God's grace flow through others.

We have recently run the child care training program. Almost 70 women applied for the training and 31 attended this first training while another 8 were caring for the children and received on the job training. We are delighted that we could employ our top graduates and we now have 3 staff working with us in the house



and 14 staff to work with the children or in other areas of the project, like washing, cleaning and staff supervision. They are an amazing group of ladies and we feel so blessed to have them. One is a very enthusiastic 16 year old who wants to change her life through this work. She is determined and when we did not offer her a job immediately she come daily to see if we needed her. After less than a week she began work after another worker did not turn up for her shift. I am now doing her a month's roster! The girls work floating shifts so they overlap and do not have night shifts for more than 8 days a month. We maintain a ration of 1 worker to 2 children but to do so our workers need sponsors.

The project continues to move forward. We have the first stage of approval from the Catholic Church finalized, and now have to wait for the formal approval of the project by the Regional authorities. After this, we sign the formal agreement with the Catholic Church, and then we are able to exist as a Tax Exempt entity here. This will mean that we are able to do more with the finances that God is making available to us. Meanwhile we continue to grow and we have realized the need for a bigger day care centre. We have been looking at options around this area as well as near our land. Many young mothers are single and struggle to find reliable people to care for their children. Even couples are finding it difficult to create a better future without both parents working, and that means there is a huge need for reliable day care. The other day we took a wrong turn and found an ideal house for rent that would be good for the local day care. It is almost within view of the current house and has a large paved area and garden. We will begin negotiating today. It will need child gates made for the outside stairs and a playground built that can be moved to the land when we have built. We have a large eucalyptus mill on the road outside the house so think an Adventure playground made from logs might be the best option.

We brought the first baby to MOLSA (the local adoption authority) and found great favour as we explained about organisation. Our care, hygiene and structure (baby to carer ration) is excellent. They are very happy to work with us and we expect the first children to go to adoption in the next few weeks.



We plan to begin a feeding program at the Catholic School for the street kids as well as the after school program to keep kids off the streets when school returns in Sept.

With the Millennium celebrations and the influx of tourists there are more and more children going or being sent to the streets to beg and con foreigners. Sadly, many of the boys do well financially and socially so they do not want to return to family and school. The feeding program is a way to reach the children who can be as young as 8 years. Marcie and I

have a little girl who is a regular outside the bank selling kholo (fried wheat) and begging from the foreigners. She is a rough, tough 8 year old who already knows the way of the street. We worry about her future and her safety, and sadly she is one of many on the streets at this time. We are concerned also about the legacy of babies and young mothers the Millenium with produce. It all seems so seductive!

Please pray for our work in the community over the next months, the health of the team and particularly the health of our babies and children.

On a personal note I am 'not as young as I used to be'!! My knees ache often especially with the hard concrete tiles floors. I celebrated my birthday with Zewditu over lunch on the lake which was very nice. It was especially lovely to have time with Rob recently. Zewditu is doing well at distance ed and enjoys time with the babies. She would like to be doing more but at 13 I do not want her working with the responsibility of babies. We bought her a bike as Bahir Dar is flat and many people ride bikes. She has enjoyed racing around the compound on it and has ventured out a few times. She has also been doing skipping including double-dutch with some of the girls (mothers and workers).and is waiting for her basketball from Addis so she can begin playing here too. Last week Zed showed the early signs of Malaria so we began treatment immediately. I could not believe she got Malaria so soon! Her test results took 3 days by which time she was halfway through treatment before the diagnosis was confirmed. Thankfully she has recovered quickly and only has a mild residual headache and the bitter taste in her mouth left by the medicine, both of which will fade over the next few days. Thank you for your prayers for Zewditu and I.

The children in our care and our trainees, as well as children in the community who will access our school, after school and feeding programs are seeking sponsors. To find out more about sponsoring a child or worker or other needs of the project please see www.gracecentres.org Remember that donations made to the Grace project over \$2 are tax deductible.

~Leith