

Project Emmanuel – Ethiopia

“Disability is not inability” Project manager Melese Eyob Heramo, Physiotherapy Soddo, Ethiopia & and Dr. med. Rahel Roethlisberger, General practitioner, Luegstrasse 8, CH-3472 Wynigen, Switzerland (rahel_medizin@gmx.ch / 0041 (0)78 900 62 15)



Introduction: Project Emmanuel is an innovative microcredit enterprise for disabled persons in Soddo, Province Wolayita, Ethiopia. Emmanuel means “God is with us”; the motto “disability is not inability” stands for the vision to enable disabled people to lead independent lives and have an independent income through orthopedic supplies (surgery, foot braces, crutches, wheelchairs), but also on a socio-economic level by creating microcredit jobs.

Medical supplies, income, shelter, food and training for the disabled in Ethiopia are the focal points of Project Emmanuel.

Disabled persons in Ethiopia live under the most difficult circumstances: Children are often cast out by their families; as adults they end up on the street as homeless and unemployed beggars or thieves. There is hardly any government or public support, and few private institutions or NGOs deal with these needy, disabled people. There is

medical help (examples in brackets), such as orthopedic surgery (Soddo Christian Hospital), crutches, foot braces to correct false positions (OrthoWorkshop in Arba Minch). Despite surgery and medical aid, people often remain unemployed, because no one wants to hire them due to their handicap, despite the fact they have completed school and further training!



Melese's life story: Melese Eyob Heramo, initiator of Project Emmanuel, fell ill with polio at the age of 5 and since that, both of his legs were paralyzed. His family cast him out because he was deemed incapable of the daily work expected of him; he had no perspectives in this hopeless situation and even thought of suicide. However, one day, his life changed completely when someone told him about the Soddo Christian Hospital. He traveled for two days, partly crawling on two knees, partly limping with two wooden poles, and covered the more than 50km distance to Soddo. At SCH, he not only received crutches, but also received surgery for his contracted left leg, so that afterwards, he could actually walk with crutches! During his three-month rehabilitation at the hospital, his severe malnutrition was treated, he learned Amharic, the Ethiopian national language, as well as English. He then found work in the hospital, first folding sterile gauze; he now works as a physiotherapist and makes crutches for orthopedic patients and disabled persons. He is thankful for all of the help he has received; he has received new hope and a future. His greatest wish is that other disabled persons can also receive such assistance.



In 2012, after getting to know an impressive self-help project for disabled persons in Addis Abbaba (the capital), he was excited. The group had progressively set up a well-running restaurant, a gas station and even a small hotel! Melese made detailed inquiries about how to develop such a microcredit project and returned to Soddo with a vision: he wanted to do everything possible to set up a similar project in Soddo, to provide the disabled with medical help, jobs and income. In this way, they would have opportunities to escape despair, homelessness and unemployment and have a life of hope and dignity. “Emmanuel, disability is not inability” is the motto he chose.

January 2015: Start of the Emmanuel Business Project:

The Emmanuel Business Project officially began in January 2015 with the initiation of different microcredit activities designed to promote income, such as shoe shining, street kiosks, all-round craftsmanship for the men as well as a hairdressing salon for the 6 young women of the group. In addition, there is a copy shop with an Internet café, which is being run in cooperation with the city officials (within the framework their business development policy). Private sponsors provide the starting capital for the project in the form of repayable microcredits. This form of income promotion provides the disabled persons involved with an income they can use to buy their own food, pay for accommodation and orthopedic aid, as well as to purchase further tools and work material and redeem the borrowed starting capital.

Previous activities of Project Emmanuel:

- Microcredit activities: shoe shining, street kiosk, all-rounders, copy and Internet shop, hairdressing salon (jobs for 20 disabled persons)
- Aid: financing and production of crutches, braces, wheelchairs, hand-driven bicycles
- Accommodation for homeless disabled persons: houses, rooms
- Animals: chickens and goats as a food source (own needs as well as sale)
- Cooperation: city government, Soddo Christian Hospital

Visions for the future:

Medical supplies, income, shelter, food, training for many other disabled people in Ethiopia are the focus of Project Emmanuel.

- Accommodation with multiple uses: secure shelter, business areas, workshop for the production of crutches, wheelchairs, hand-driven bicycles, training rooms for supervision and coaching, fruit trees, vegetable garden and chickens in the backyard
- Mini taxi: Transportation of disabled persons and & customer taxi
- Cooperation with local churches, NGOs, government
- Training, further education and jobs for disabled persons
- Message to society: Showing that disability does not mean uselessness or a burden for society; integration and rehabilitation of the disabled: granting them the dignity and appreciation that all people deserve as beloved and unique creations of God, whether they are disabled or not.

Emmanuel Business Center – Contact and donations:

Many thanks for your support!

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For donations: Many thanks on behalf of “Emmanuel”

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