



2024 April
Newsletter

Celebrating Catherine, continuing to transform lives

On 24 January 2024, we celebrated what would have been the 100th birthday of one of the world's greatest humanitarians, Dr Catherine Hamlin.

In her beloved fistula hospital in Addis Ababa, festivities were led by the Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia CEO and staff, with members of Catherine's family, funding partners, midwifery students and patients honoring her work and the ongoing impact of the Hamlin healthcare network. They were also joined by local and international dignitaries.

It was an opportunity to reflect on Catherine's deep love for the women of Ethiopia living with devastating childbirth injuries, and her determination to give them back their lives. Catherine's compassion, skill and dedication has left a remarkable legacy. The world-renowned Hamlin Model of Care not only pioneered new surgical techniques, but recognized the need to treat the whole person and repair both the physical and emotional scars. It is not surprising that Catherine's trailblazing model is now the world's leading approach to treating obstetric fistula.



It was also a time to reflect on the work still ahead of us. Our ambitious new Project Zero program is key to fulfilling Catherine's vision of an Ethiopia where women do not suffer the trauma of preventable childbirth injuries. No woman is suffering from obstetric fistula in Ale Woreda (district), where the pilot took place last year.

Informed by learnings from the pilot, the second phase of Project Zero is now underway in Didessa Woreda, in the rural Oromia region of western Ethiopia. Hamlin-trained teams, including health workers, patient identification officers and community volunteers, are going door-to-door to find women living with obstetric fistula and referring them for treatment. They are also strengthening local maternal healthcare services and providing vital information to women, their families and community about childbirth injuries, where to seek treatment and the importance of professional medical care before, during and after birth.

In her last years, Catherine said: "We have to eradicate Ethiopia of this awful thing that's happening to women: suffering, untold suffering, in the countryside. I leave this with you to do in the future, to carry on." On behalf of everyone at Hamlin, thank you for continuing your generous support.

Julie White,
Executive Chair
Catherine Hamlin Fistula Foundation

P.S. Our **Gifts from the Heart** cards include a special card for Mother's Day. Give a gift that gives back while helping to restore the health and dignity of women in Ethiopia living with obstetric fistula.

Your Support in Action

“I was living with prolapse for around eight years. I can’t do my daily work and can’t walk and stand for long periods of time. Because of that I isolate myself from different social activities.” - Fozia

Advanced Stage Pelvic Organ Prolapse (POP) is one of the most common gynaecological issues in Ethiopia. Like obstetric fistula, it has devastating physical and psychological impacts on women.

Fozia suffered with a prolapse injury for eight years. Left untreated, her initial injury worsened resulting in Advanced Stage POP. Like many women living in remote areas, she had little access to medical care.

“I didn’t tell anyone because I thought it was only me who is suffering from this problem. Even

if I want to go to a clinic, I don’t have money. So I kept quiet and suffered alone until the health extension worker come to my house and tell me about you [Project Zero team].”

Fozia was referred to Hamlin’s Metu Fistula Hospital where a specialist surgeon with urogynaecology skills performed surgery to repair her Advanced Stage POP.

“When I arrived, I knew it was not only me who is suffering. I want to thank all of you so much. You brightened our lives.” - Fozia



Exciting new phase of Project Zero has begun

The hugely successful pilot of Project Zero - Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia’s ground-breaking new program to accelerate eradication of obstetric fistula - concluded in October 2023.

In Ale Woreda (district), with an estimated population of 85,408 people, teams of Hamlin-trained community volunteers and some 343 health extension workers carried out a total of 14,664 house-to-house surveys in 24 weeks. Most household members had not heard about obstetric fistula before and were eager to learn more about it.

Seven women with decades-long fistula injuries and 56 women with Advanced Stage Pelvic Organ Prolapse were identified and

transported to Hamlin’s Metu Fistula Hospital for life-changing surgery.

Many of these women have lived in social isolation for decades. Every woman can access tailored counseling, literacy and numeracy classes and vocational and life skills training at Desta Mender to restore their dignity and confidence.

Using learnings from the pilot and with significant support from local and regional health bureau, the Ministry of Health and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the next phase of Project Zero began on 13 February 2024 in Didessa Woreda, with further rollouts throughout the year.

Hamlin College of Midwives expansion progressing well

Phase 1 of the Hamlin College of Midwives’ expansion will be completed this year, with new teaching facilities for 250 students, accommodation for 172 residential students and a new library and cafe. Other new facilities include a lecture hall and laboratory.

Hamlin Midwives are pivotal to the success of Project Zero and the eradication of fistula so these new spaces are urgently needed to cater for the increasing numbers of BSc and MSc midwifery students attending the College.

Konjit Kassahun, Dean of the Hamlin College of Midwives and Prevention Manager, is working hard to expand Hamlin’s Prevention program and ensure Hamlin Midwives have the support they need to undertake their important work.

“The work that is being done is more than words can explain. I am hoping to see future generations of Ethiopian women empowered and free of all obstetric and maternity-related complications.” - Matron Konjit

Restoring 100 women's lives to honor Catherine's 100th birthday



“I got cured. My legs walk normal. I am ready to go home beautiful. I thank everyone who helped me cure.” - Emnet

Emnet lost her baby - and almost her own life - during childbirth.

After an agonising, obstructed labor at home in rural Ethiopia, Emnet was carried to the nearest hospital in a coma. Doctors saved her life, but her baby was stillborn.

Emnet sustained a horrific obstetric fistula, which left her leaking urine. She was also paralyzed. Emnet was transferred to Hamlin's Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital for specialist treatment and care.

But Emnet was too weak for surgery. Over five months, she received intensive physiotherapy, counseling, nutritious food and encouragement to strengthen her before life-changing surgery.

This is Catherine's Hamlin Model of Care - holistic, individualized treatment and care that heals the physical, emotional and psychological effects of obstetric fistula.

In honor of Catherine's 100th birthday, our latest appeal raised funds to restore the lives of 100 more women like Emnet. Thank you for continuing Catherine's legacy of humanity and determination.



Watch
Emnet's story

Celebrating Catherine's birth, 100 years ago



On 24 January 2024, our global Hamlin family came together to celebrate what would have been the 100th birthday of Dr Catherine Hamlin, a truly inspirational humanitarian.

Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia led the festivities at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. They were joined by Catherine's

nieces and nephew, the Board and staff of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia, international funding partners, patients and students from the Hamlin College of Midwives, alongside local and international dignitaries.

There were heartfelt speeches about the impact of Catherine's unrivalled dedication and pioneering work for Ethiopian women and maternal healthcare. A special memorial service and candle lighting ceremony were held, followed by tributes. A specially commissioned song to Catherine was performed and a delicious birthday cake was enjoyed by guests.

Catherine's dedication and selflessness inspires all of us

who continue to work towards her vision of a fistula-free Ethiopia.

Listen to the **beautiful tribute song** performed by the Addis Ababa University's Cultural Department.



When Sam Bloom met Dr Catherine Hamlin...



1998: Sam enjoys a cup of tea with Catherine, as she reads a letter from England

Twenty-five years ago, Sam Bloom - world para-surfing champion and bestselling author - and her husband, Cameron met Dr Catherine Hamlin at her Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital. Sam also met former patient-turned-gifted fistula surgeon and Catherine's closest friend, Mamitu Gashe.

A nurse herself, Sam reflected on her visit at the time: "Catherine was softly spoken and so humble, but it was abundantly clear how much

she loved Ethiopia and its people and how incredibly passionate she was about helping the poor women who came to see her.

Catherine, Reg and Mamitu represented everything I wanted to be when I first decided to become a nurse."

On Christmas Day last year, Sam and Cameron returned to Ethiopia with their three sons. She noticed enormous changes to the hospital, with huge expansions made to physical therapy, triage, post-surgery treatment and mental health support. Sam says,

"Catherine's kindness and selfless devotion to the patients of the Fistula Hospital without expecting anything in return still gives me strength today." - Sam Bloom

"The hospital is creating so many opportunities for these women to live happy and healthy lives and with dignity. One thing that hasn't changed is the dedication and kindness shown to each of the patients by the staff. It just emanates from their smiles and the way they care for each of the women.

Our family enjoyed meeting all the Hamlin staff and reuniting with Mamitu, who is still performing surgeries."



2023: Sam meets a patient at the Addis Adaba Fistula Hospital

Segereda's life of service

As a young woman, Segereda arrived at Hamlin's Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital with a horrific obstetric fistula injury. She was welcomed and treated by Drs Reg and Catherine Hamlin and stayed on at the hospital as one of their earliest staff members.

Twenty-five years ago, during her visit to the hospital, Sam Bloom met Segereda. They reconnected on Christmas Day last year when Sam returned to the hospital with her family. Cameron, Sam's husband, captured this special moment!

Today, Segereda is retired and lives with other retired staff members in a specially made house on the hospital grounds. She tells us what life at the hospital has meant to her:

"I am very happy to live and work in this hospital. I love to work in the operating room. Seeing the patients cured means a lot to me. I also received treatment and care from this

loving staff. I proudly praise Abaye (Father, Reg) and Emaye (Mother, Catherine) for their dedication to supporting us.

After I left my home in search of treatment, Abaye and Emaye became my family. They raised me and gave me this opportunity. Emaye is the most caring mother I ever had. I miss her so much. I believe that she is watching from heaven. She has a good heart."



Segereda after her surgery

Segereda (right) reuniting with Sam in 2023

Meet Konjit, a graduate Hamlin Midwife

“I love being a midwife. It is a rewarding and fulfilling profession. I assist women during childbirth and have the privilege of witnessing the miracle of new life entering the world. Helping mothers is my joyous moment.” – Konjit Tadesse, Hamlin Midwife

Konjit graduated from the Hamlin College of Midwives in 2021. She was deployed to the Olonso Hamlin-supported midwifery clinic south-west of Hamlin’s Yirgalem fistula hospital, where she has worked for the last three years.

Settling into her role as a Hamlin Midwife has been exciting and challenging. She is applying the theoretical



and practical knowledge she gained at the College to real-life situations.

Konjit believes that increased resources, equipment and supplies would enhance the quality of care that she and

her team provide. She says, “Having an adequate number of midwives would ensure that our mothers receive the attention and care they deserve.”

When asked what the future holds, Konjit has this to say: “I would like to further my education through my Masters degree of Clinical Midwifery to manage critical pregnancy complications.

I would love to make my health center a model for strengthening the health structure by empowering women to give birth in health centers and caring for their babies. Being a trusted midwife for rural women and their families is highly gratifying.”

Women’s Empowerment Program goes from strength to strength



Hamlin’s Women’s Empowerment Program at Desta Mender - ‘Joy Village’ in Amharic, the specialist rehabilitation and reintegration center Catherine established - continues to give new skills to former fistula patients so they can return to their communities empowered with hope, choices and independence.

This ground-breaking initiative offers a range of learning opportunities, including leadership and communications training, as well as small-business guidance. Since October last year, 104 women have graduated and returned home. The 13th cohort of 51 women started the three-month residency program in January 2024.

Gifts from the Heart

Looking for a gift that gives back this Mother’s Day? We have a range of **Gifts from the Heart** cards available, including a special card for Mother’s Day.

All of our cards can be printed at home, and start from as little as \$14 so there’s something for every budget. Why not select a special card for the mom in your life this Mother’s Day?

Every card is tax-deductible with 100% of the proceeds supporting our work.

When you purchase a Gift from the Heart card, you are helping to change the lives of women suffering with an obstetric fistula.



Thank you for helping us work towards Dr Catherine Hamlin’s vision of a fistula-free Ethiopia. Forever.

Visit Ethiopia with us in November!

There are only a few places left on our Hamlin Ethiopian Adventure in November 2024.

Don't miss this incredible opportunity to visit the country that Catherine called home for more than half a century.

Your adventure begins at Hamlin's iconic Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, where you will see first-hand the work of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia and meet the staff and patients.

Next is the Hamlin College of Midwives, then the Desta Mender rehabilitation and reintegration center.

You will continue south to Jinka, the gateway to the Omo Valley, one of the most unique places on earth given the diversity of the tribal groups living in this remote area of the Great Rift Valley.

Immerse yourself in the fabric of these societies, including the Ari, Mursi, Konso and Karo tribes, each with their distinct culture.

You'll visit Hamlin's Yirgalem regional fistula hospital, a rural Hamlin-supported midwifery clinic and the largest market in Africa.

You will return to Addis Ababa for the Great Ethiopian Run (or walk!), one of the liveliest and most colourful races in the world.

"I've had an amazing time. I would strongly recommend you come along. It's just great." *Juliana, March 2024, Adventurer*

Places are limited. Book your **Ethiopian Adventure** or find out more today.



Jane's High Tea for Hamlin



Jane, a committed Hamlin supporter, recently held a high tea to raise funds for Ethiopian women suffering from obstetric fistula injuries.

Around the world, people find creative ways to raise funds to help eradicate obstetric fistula from Ethiopia. At Jane's high

tea, around 80 guests enjoyed a delicious spread of homemade sweets and savouries with tea and coffee while Jane spoke about the Hamlin's and the work of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia.

"Catherine and Reg made such an impression on me after reading *The Hospital by the River* 20 years ago. We are looking forward to repeating this event after such a wonderful response." - Jane

Visit catherinehamlin.org/you-can-help/fundraising-challenge to find out more about hosting your own fundraiser.

Make a lasting impact

Planned giving is a simple, power way to make an enduring commitment to Ethiopia women.

"A gift in your Will helps to ensure that future generations of Ethiopian women who suffer the debilitating effects of obstetric fistula will receive the treatment they need." - Dr Catherine Hamlin

Find out more: catherinehamlin.org/you-can-help/planned-giving

Catherine Hamlin Fistula Foundation

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Photos by Joni Kabana, Sabahar, Joe Filshie * Patient names have been changed to protect the identities of those we help.

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