

Addis Ababa, March 2013

Dear Friends of MCRC,

Once again, it is time to greet you as the spring begins to creep into Europe and North America. Here in Addis, the rains have finally arrived which, hopefully, will enable the farmers to harvest a second crop. We, who are not farmers, are also glad to see the rain as it smells so fresh and helps to reduce dust and pollution.

We have successes among the mothers. Several have started their own small businesses and are doing very well. The entrepreneurial skills they learned while at MCRC have served them well and each woman's business is thriving. They come back to tell us how things are progressing and it is rewarding for us to see how proud they are of what they have accomplished and how excited they are as they talk of the plans to expand their business.

Some mothers have joined together in small groups to start jointly-owned businesses. An example of this is the group of mothers who run the Spice Shop. Ownership has made them very aware of the need to work hard so they can support themselves and their families. They now understand the importance of good customer service so that their clientele keeps coming back for their excellent products and so word of mouth will continue to increase their customer base.

We also help fathers if the family requires it. We have a wonderful success story of one father who had a hard time keeping a job and therefore supporting his family. Last year we decided to send him on a course to train weavers. We monitored him closely and followed his progress by means of discussion with his teachers. He became one of the best students in the class. He graduated and MCRC provided him with start-up funds for his weaving business. He has made a great success of it and now has orders from companies to make "Gabies" (linen blankets that are used on beds, chairs and sofas) as presents for special guests. He now has so many orders that he works day and night to make his deadlines. It is likely he will need to employ an assistant in the near future.

The story of this father segues neatly into news that is not so pleasant. At the moment, MCRC is experiencing a serious issue that is being felt throughout the country, but particularly in Addis and other major Ethiopian cities. Women who are unable to support their families will leave behind their children to go to work in one of the Arab States to earn money which they hope to send back to the families. This is what the wife of the weaver father decided to do before he finished his training. What they most often find upon arrival in one of these countries is a life of great hardship and danger working seven days a week with no time off. Often their passports and identity papers are taken away from them and many times they receive little or no pay. The dream of supporting their families quickly dies.

The Centre's issue is that we are now dealing with children who have been left behind by their mothers; children who do not know when or if they will ever see their mothers again. The children are exhibiting a variety of traumatic symptoms – silence, children clinging to staff members because of lack of affection, feelings of loss, anger and fear. Some exhibit an extreme fear of making mistakes in



something as simple as a class assignment or test because they are scared that they might be sent away from the Centre and at this point in their lives, the Centre is the only secure place they know with people who care for them and look after them.

To help deal with this new trauma the staff are giving extra care and paying special attention to these children. Children are encouraged and taught to express their feeling of loss, anger and fear in healthy ways by means of counselling, additional activities to keep them busy and by offering a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on when things are really bad.

What is so heart breaking is that the children, young as some of them are, realize that their mothers are gone for a minimum of two years. Although two years is a difficult concept for them to understand, they know that they will not be receiving kisses, hugs or mother's cooking for a long time.

They are also aware that some mothers who have taken these jobs do not return to their families for a variety of reasons, including death. When this happens, the family bonds are shattered and a new way of life must be created. How are they aware that this might happen? The answer is simple. They know young cousins, friends and mere acquaintances to whom this has happened.

Is it any wonder that some of the children are so traumatized that they scream in terror as the sleep or throw themselves on their knees at the feet of a person to whom they have become attached, saying "Yikarta" (Sorry) over and over again.

Two news strategies that we have found to be helpful are circus training and percussion training. All students have the opportunity to take part in circus training at least once a week. Specially traumatized children or those with severe anger management problems take two hours of circus each day with a professional trainer who acts as a strong, supportive and disciplined role model.

Percussion enables students with anger issues to release their anger in an acceptable way. They work with a percussion teacher has developed a strong bond with them and, as in circus training, they learn discipline, focus and a strong feeling of accomplishment for tier hard work.

On a most positive note we welcomed back our friends from Regis University in Denver, Colorado, including the Dean of the College of the physiotherapy faculty and the Dean of the Physiotherapy College. The relationship between Regis University and MCRC has been on-going for three years. In this time we have received groups varying in size 21 to 24, including faculty members and post graduate students.

Each group has been receptive to the working and learning opportunities provided to them by our mothers and children. The students and faculty have become aware of the most common medical problems with which our beneficiaries present. They have learnt about the state of health care available to citizens of the country's largest city as well as what is offered in rural arias. They have brought to our nursing and physiotherapy staff their knowledge, their teaching skills, their empathy and, most important, their sensitivity to the cultural differences in this country.



MCRC has benefitted greatly from these visits. Our nursing staff as well as our paediatrician, psychiatrist and physiotherapist have learned new medical techniques and changes to existing practices. Our beneficiaries have gained much from the physiotherapy exercises, nursing care, First Aid training, workshops on topics such as violence prevention, appropriate child punishment, child development stages, sex education, etc. All training workshops have been delivered with sensitivity to the cultural values of the many Ethiopian tribes.

Our students at the grade 5 and 6 level have had the opportunity to study Mathematics and Science with one of the Regis Chemistry professors who was able to make the difficult topics of ratio and proportion and conversion of units, interesting, relevant and engaging.

The pharmacists have catalogued all our medicines and, together with our paediatrician, drew up a list of items that were either lacking or were needed because they were in great demand.

The staff members at MCRC sincerely hope that the students gain as much from this relationship as MCRC has gained. We hope that they return home with an awareness of and a lasting interest in global health issues as well as a love for the beautiful people of this very beautiful country.

This has been a lengthy spring letter, but there is much to be proud of in our Centre as well as continuing and new problems to solve. We believe that solutions are possible and step by step, we make progress. Spring is the season of renewal and new life and we will continue to work hard to renew the lives of all those who have found their way to our gates.

Jutta De Muynck
Managing Director of MCRC

