Ethiopia: keeping hope alive
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A service in constant flux

One of the many characteristics of humanitarian work remains flexibility. Flexibility allows for an effective response to the needs of people we work with and serve. This value may mean temporarily letting go of an organisation’s name, as was the case in Ethiopia when Jesuit Refugee Service became Jesuit Relief Service, as recounted by Abba Turenne. Flexibility also means being able to evaluate the service rendered and allow it the test of time by adjusting or even closing a project in order to respond to greater needs and emerging challenges.

It is no wonder that through its work in Ethiopia, as elsewhere, JRS has been able to work in diverse areas such as health, food distribution, resettlement, afforestation, agriculture, water supply, education and psychosocial support in multi-dimensional forms, pastoral care and construction as clearly attested by the various voices in this newsletter. Without this kind of flexibility one runs the danger of applying yesterday’s answers to today’s questions. Yet concrete answers need to always come from those we serve in order to creatively and effectively respond to their real needs.

The work that JRS has done over these many years in service to the many people hosted by Ethiopia from across neighbouring countries would not have been possible without support from many good willed people. As such, JRS work is a witness to human solidarity. Just as the food on our tables requires the input of many in the production and distribution process before we can enjoy its benefits, so does humanitarian work. Donors, government officials, communities and their leaders, those who benefit from our services and many others all play a crucial role in the success of humanitarian assistance. To all, I say thank you.

The current crisis in South Sudan has forced more than 1.5 million people to leave their homes. Nearly 200,000 of those displaced have sought refuge in Ethiopia since the beginning of 2014, making Ethiopia Africa’s largest refugee host. Constrained resources make it hard for JRS to respond though the plight of South Sudanese refugees remains of great concern to us. As we continue our current projects: serving urban refugees in Addis Ababa as well as the Somali and Eritrean population in Dollo Ado and Mai Aini refugee camps respectively we continue to seek ways of responding to challenges faced by the South Sudanese refugees. Alone, such enormous challenges remain hard to overcome. But in solidarity and with flexibility, a little seed of hope can be planted in the hearts of those who have gone through so much to restore their confidence and dignity as seen in the various testimonies in this newsletter.
Living the mission

JRS Ethiopia has over time seen many changes in its programming in order to be more responsive to the varying needs of refugees and internally displaced persons in Ethiopia. When it was first established in 1982, the emphasis was on offering health services to the most vulnerable people at Gosa in southern Ethiopia. Then the 1984 famine prompted the need for food provision in the province of Wolleyta also in southern Ethiopia. Soon in 1985, another project was launched in Kishe in western Ethiopia for internally displaced persons from Tigray and Wollo. In 1992, JRS opened the Orphans’ project in Wukro in the Tigray region to protect children who lost their parents in the civil war.

In the first decade, JRS Ethiopia had built three clinics and three schools, dug wells, introduced agriculture projects and even dammed up a river to make a reservoir which helped with land irrigation at Keffa province.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, JRS Ethiopia ran four projects: Emergency Needs Programme (ENP), Refugee Community Centre (RCC), Rehabilitation of the Displaced in Addis Ababa (RDAA) and Wukro Orphans’ Project in Tigray. RDAA and the orphanage were later phased out. In 2014 ENP was merged with RCC in order to improve efficiency in coordination and resource utilisation. In addition to the projects in Addis Ababa, JRS Ethiopia now runs projects for Eritrean refugees in Mai Aini refugee camp and Somali refugees in Melkadida and Kobe refugee camps in Dollo Ado.

Based in Addis Ababa, the JRS Ethiopia office provides logistical, technical, administrative, financial, and professional support, in cooperation with JRS Eastern Africa. The office coordinates the implementation of emergency assistance provision, educational support (adult education and access to a library, computer labs and the internet), pastoral care, psychosocial support, community services (sports and recreational activities), and vocational skills training. JRS has also constructed a fully furnished primary school for refugees in Melkadida refugee camp run by the government refugee agency. The school consists of two blocks of four classrooms, a pedagogic centre, two blocks of toilets, a playground and a feeding hall.

JRS does and will continue to work in partnership with various influential interest groups including the refugee communities themselves, Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), the UN refugee agency, implementing partners, donor community and other stakeholders.
In December 1981, I attended the provincial consultation in Nairobi and as I was about to return to Ethiopia Polycarp Toppo SJ, the Regional Superior, told me that Fr Arrupe (the Father General of the Society of Jesus) wanted to see me at the Mwangaza Retreat Centre. I immediately worried I was going to be reprimanded.

When I arrived at the centre Fr Arrupe took me to sit under the shade of a big tree. Once seated, he looked me in the eyes and asked, “What are you doing for refugees in Ethiopia?”

Startled by the question, I could only answer, “Nothing, Father.” It was the General’s turn to be surprised, “Why not? Why are you not helping the refugees in Ethiopia?”

I told him the truth: the idea of helping refugees had never occurred to us because we were all busy elsewhere and we were unaware of the presence of refugees.

Under that shade tree was how JRS Ethiopia was conceived. A few months later, Fr Dieter Scholz, the JRS International Director arrived in Addis Ababa and asked me to accompany him to the city of Awassa to see Bishop Gasparini. The Bishop told us that he had appealed to Fr Arrupe and had contacted the relief commission in Awassa regarding a response to refugees. Initially, JRS in Ethiopia became known as the Jesuit Relief Service because the government preferred the word “relief” to “refugee.”

We called our team the JRS Medical Mobile Team. Some Belgian donors sent us an ambulance by air which was used by Dr Isabel to operate on patients affected by trachoma. The Gosa clinic was soon built with the help of the Canadian Ambassador. While awaiting the construction of a chapel, an ordinary room was used for Sunday mass.

In 1984, a famine affected many parts of Africa and our mobile team was invited to organise a feeding centre in Wallecha, in the province of Wolleyta. While half the team continued working in Gosa, the other half operated the feeding centre in Wallecha. These were not easy months for the team, but we soon received the help of scholastics - Miguel Garcia, Denis Gravel and Joe Cassar - who had been teaching at the Minor Seminary in Addis Ababa. Even the Provincial came once to pull my Jeep out of the mud and assess the situation at the feeding camp, as featured in the film, Le Dernier Jesuite. We continued feeding people from June 1984 to August 1985, until the rains arrived and the local population good produce a good harvest.

Some years after it came to power, the Marxist revolutionary regime launched a controversial resettlement project which aimed to give starving populations of the northern provinces a new start in life. In the midst of this mass exodus of people who found themselves displaced but not resettled, JRS tried to bring some help and solace. Five Jesuits took turns offering their services within a period of five years in Kishe.

Thanks to Fr Scholz, we obtained financial assistance from Misereor and Cebemo to build three clinics and three schools, dig wells, introduce an agricultural project and dam a river to make a reservoir for land irrigation. An afforestation programme planted one million trees.

I later left JRS in his able hands, but in 1991, our Kishe headquarters were destroyed by marauding soldiers of the disbanded Mengistu army. But not before our work in the region had been completed. Fr Rodrigues remarked that it was a blessing in disguise because he did not know how to disengage JRS from the project. Indeed the relief commission had been reluctant to let us go.
By Hanna Petros
JRS RCC Director

In 1996, the Refugee Community Centre (RCC) was established to welcome some of the 800 registered refugees arriving in Ethiopia each year. The centre partnered with the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs and the UN refugee agency to provide counselling services as well as recreational, educational, childcare, and sport activities to refugees fleeing from war and political upheaval in countries such as Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Rwanda.

Soon after its establishment, it was realised that refugee children who accompanied their parents to the centre needed special attention. Thus the child care service commenced at the beginning of March 1997 through the help of a trained nurse serving 40 children. Since then the number has tripled. The children benefit from basic primary level education in subjects such as math, English, drawing, and recreational activities. Educational materials, tea and bread are also provided for all the children.

“Discussion with 10 year old Sudanese child.

“If I don’t visit or come to the centre every day after school I feel sick. I want to come every day to see my peers, chat with them and take my tea. JRS tea and bread is special for me,” said one 10 year old Sudanese child.

The centre is well known for its unique and special services for refugees who are actively involved in planning events.

“The concern, love, compassion, acceptance and care toward the refugees make JRS different from other organisations,” said a Congolese refugee.

“I am away from my home but when I come to the RCC I feel as if I am in my home with my family members. The way JRS staff treats refugees reminds me of the Bible verse ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’,” concluded one Sudanese refugee woman.
Community centre for urban refugees

The Jesuit Refugee Service Refugee Community Centre (RCC) in Addis Ababa provides refugees with access to a wide range of free services including language and computer classes, a day care, a library, music, professional and life skills training, counselling, an internet café, as well as recreational activities. The centre also hosts a cafeteria and a beauty salon run by refugees allowing some to earn extra income, complementing their monthly subsistence allowance.

The RCC also provides life skills training in topics such as reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, basic health, child rights and development, financial management, and entrepreneurship so as to help them cope with the difficulties that come with living in an urban setting.

“Though my physical health needs were properly attended to by other organisations, my emotional, psychological and social needs were not met until I came to the RCC. The centre is an excellent public place where every refugee has the opportunity to play sports, watch movies, meet friends, share experiences, take classes, and so forth....these activities inspire refugees and give them hope,” said Jean Paul*, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In addition, the day care centre gives refugee mothers a safe place to leave their children while they can take advantage of the life skills training and adult education courses.

Niamal Chang*, a Sudanese woman and mother of six, said, “The day care service provides food for my children when they feel hungry, hope when they feel depressed, education when they need to learn, games when they want to play with others, and love and affection when they need it most. Whenever I take my children to the RCC they feel like they are going to a second home.”

This facility provides not only intellectual empowerment but also hope to refugees struggling to survive each day. It is a meeting place that brings community members, leaders and implementing partners together and thus strengthens relationships between community members and humanitarian workers.

African and Middle Eastern refugees bring with them a huge wealth of experience, knowledge, expertise and resourcefulness. The RCC helps them to harness their skills and tap into their full potential so they become beneficial to themselves, the refugee community and the wider Ethiopian society.

*Names have been changed for reasons of security.
Equipping refugees with basic skills

For nearly two decades the Jesuit Refugee Service Refugee Community Centre has been serving refugees residing in Addis Ababa with informal education. The centre began holding English and French language courses for adult refugees in 1996. Soon after, the centre introduced an Amharic language course which has allowed many refugees to integrate into local communities.

The following year, the centre offered a basic computer literacy programme for a small number of students. In response to increasing demand, JRS opened an additional computer class equipped with the latest model of computers in 2011. To date, a total of 365 students have been afforded basic computer skills training.

With the acceptance of some refugees in Ethiopian higher education institutions, their demand for advanced computer training was an issue the centre needed to address. In 2012, the centre began providing advanced computer courses such as Computer Maintenance and Troubleshooting, Web Page Design and Development and Networking of Computers. So far, 85 students have benefited from the programme.

Today, English classes are offered at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. As a result, many refugees who have successfully attended the course are now able to express themselves when they go to various humanitarian agencies to get assistance.

“In 2006, I travelled from Dimma refugee camp to Addis Ababa in order to get treatment for malaria and in the meantime decided to enrol in the JRS language class. I managed to successfully complete all levels of the English course and eventually took computer training courses. The language training changed my life as it improved my communication and writing skills. I also benefitted from interacting with students from other countries and cultural backgrounds,” said Bol Chol*, a refugee from South Sudan.

There are now more than 80 students in the computer training programme and 120 students in the language classes. The adult education department also prepares four workshops per year for approximately 200 refugees from seven nationalities. In these workshops, topics like peace and conflict resolution, positive attitude building and normative ethics, HIV and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), as well as youth and social adaptability are addressed.

*Name has been changed for reasons of security.

As a result, many refugees who have successfully attended the course are now able to express themselves when they go to various humanitarian agencies to get assistance.
Overtime, the library shelves have been filled with up-to-date books that refugee and host community members can access. The space plays an invaluable role in the provision of knowledge and information to both the refugees and the local community; approximately 25 users each day are secondary school students, local children from poor households and refugee families.

Books are purchased in close consultation with regular library users with donations from the British Council Library, UN Economic Commission for Africa (UN/ECA) and the Society of Jesus in Addis Ababa.

Provision of up-to-date materials to our users is of paramount importance as information is a source of power and knowledge. Kibrom Tekeste*, an Eritrean refugee university student, says the library greatly assisted him to successfully pass the entrance exam to Addis Ababa University.

The library serves people from all walks of life with various needs, but is dedicated to the lifelong learning of refugees and children from the host community.

*Name has been changed for reasons of security.
Emergency needs programme

JRS Emergency Needs Programme began its work in Addis Ababa in 1997. During this time, neighbouring countries of Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo were affected by political and tribal turmoil that displaced millions of people to neighbouring countries including Ethiopia.

The programme targeted newly-arrived asylum seekers and vulnerable urban refugees such as single mothers and their families, widows, orphans, persons with disabilities and the elderly. The intention was to provide immediate response to the basic needs of new arrivals and urban refugees, whose needs were not met by other organisations.

For the past 17 years, JRS has provided financial assistance to enable refugees to meet the cost of food and safe accommodation in Addis Ababa. For refugees registered in camps by Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, transport assistance is provided to their respective camps.

On a daily basis, JRS refers and accompanies new arrivals and vulnerable urban refugees in need of medical care to St Raphael Health Centre for treatment. In addition, blankets are distributed to help mitigate the cold in their homes in Addis Ababa.
After fleeing my home in South Sudan as a young child, I moved to the Ethiopian countryside with my father after he separated from my mother.

Life in the countryside was difficult as my father had remarried and I didn’t get along with my stepmother. At six years of age I reunited with my mother and sister in Addis Ababa where I started school but soon disliked it and often fought with other children.

I became a very difficult child, especially at school. My mother and the people around us tried to advise me but I continued to deteriorate. I then visited the JRS Refugee Community Centre (RCC) and joined the other children playing there. I was very happy experience kindness from my new friends and the JRS staff. I loved the place so much that I started to go there every day.

I soon started fighting with the children at the centre though and became a disturbance. JRS staff did not kick me out, instead they continued loving me. They counselled me for a long time and by the time I turned twelve years old I changed. My siblings and I have grown up at the RCC and we love them very much for showing us so much love and help.

I am now seventeen and still feel at home at the RCC - a home that I will never forget. From the bottom of my heart, I am grateful for the way they changed my life.

*Name has been changed for reasons of security*
I grew up in North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo with my brother and sister until two years ago when, around midnight, Hutu rebels came to our village, burnt our houses and killed many civilians. My mother died in the attack but my father escaped with my two siblings while I fell into the hands of the rebels. They severely beat, tortured and raped me. They then took me with them to the forest where I lived with them for a year.

**A testimony from Rose*, a Congolese asylum seeker**

JRS rescued my life

Sometime in June 2013, I managed to escape alongside eleven other women when the rebels went out to fight with government soldiers, leaving us unattended. The journey was very long but I finally reached Addis Ababa the next month. I spent the first night at the bus station, because I didn’t know anyone or any place where I could go. In the morning, I overheard two men speaking in Swahili and approached them. They spoke to each other and then hired a taxi that took me to JRS.

The JRS Emergency Programme team warmly welcomed me, shared my deep sorrow and immediately provided me with bread and milk. Then they referred and accompanied me to a health centre, St Raphael Health Centre, where I stayed for one week of medical treatment. The programme provided me with emergency financial assistance for food and accommodation.

After I got better, the JRS team accompanied me to the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs where I got my refugee status. JRS truly rescued me and gave me a fresh breath of life. I don’t know what would have happened if I didn’t meet them when I did.

*Name has been changed for reasons of security.
My name is Rebel Getachew*. I was recruited by the Eritrean army at the tender age of 17 where I served for three years. When I finally returned home, I found that the only member of my family, my eldest sister, had vanished. Nobody seemed to know her whereabouts. I was devastated for I had thought that the worst was over when I left the military.

Now at the age of 23, I am seeking refuge at Mai Aini refugee camp in Ethiopia. I have been searching for my sister for two years without success. I lost hope of ever finding her and I sought solace in alcohol and drugs to fill my loneliness and emptiness in life.

I then considered leaving Ethiopia but after being warned of the dangers of doing so, I decided to remain in Mai Aini. This is when I met friends who helped me accept the situation and spend my time in a productive way. I was introduced to Jesuit Refugee Service who counselled and guided me to realise my potential and accept what I could not change. While there, I met a friend whom I knew back home in Eritrea and he helped me to join the JRS theatrical art club. I now write poems and theatre scripts.

To crown it all, one day after a live performance and youth day celebration at Shemelba refugee camp, I saw my sister among the spectators! I could not believe it and began to weep uncontrollably as we were finally reunited. All of a sudden, I felt the pain that I had experienced over the past few years vanish. I am now a very happy person and I have big dreams amidst all the uncertainties of being a refugee.

*Name has been changed for reasons of security.
Finding refuge in sports

My name is Yonas G. Sellasie*. I was born in 1996 in Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea. One day my father was arrested for reasons my family and I did not understand. Although we were concerned about him we were powerless and helpless to get him back so, despite the insecurity, we opted to remain in Eritrea and wait for my father.

My mom tried everything in her power to find where my father was jailed. After a while a policeman came to our home and warned her to stop otherwise her and I would also be put in jail. This was the turning point for us. A week after this conversation, my mother and I hit the road to the Ethiopian boarder. The week long journey was tiresome and frightening, ridden with the risk of hyena attacks and without hardly any water and food. It was a tough and risky exercise hiding from the Eritrean soldiers patrolling the borders.

When we arrived at the Ethiopian border we were welcomed by soldiers from the Ethiopian side who were comparatively friendly and warm. We were taken to a screening centre called ‘Endabagona’ where we were questioned.

My mother fell sick while we were at the screening centre and was able to see a doctor who gave her medicine. Still, as the days passed, her health kept deteriorating and she lost significant weight. She passed away a week after our arrival to Ethiopia. Her last words to me as she struggled in pain were, “Boy, I am happy that you are here, at least I do not fear that you will be taken to jail or even killed. Take all the opportunities in your hands and strive to be a better person. Try your best to find out if your father is still alive.”

Then she died. I felt empty and lonely. I had lost a mother who was everything to me. I was in deep distress. I knew life would not be the same from then on.

A little while later, I met a group of young boys who had crossed the border unaccompanied. I started chewing khat, smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol with them. Then one day, I heard of a sports tournament in the Mai Aini refugee camp at the JRS compound. I went there and was stunned to see young boys and girls of my age playing sports with great skills and talent. I wished I could do the same. The next day, I registered for basic sports skill training as well as counselling with JRS.

I am now a ninth grade student and a volunteer basketball coach for young children. I have cut off my association with khat and alcohol. I am happy and proud of my achievements in sports. I thank JRS for the many opportunities they have given me in a camp where recreational facilities are limited.

*Name has been changed for reasons of security
Habtom Asgedom, a 32 year old Eritrean refugee, was born in Ethiopia, near the Eritrean border. He attended a Catholic missionary school where he joined the Sunday church choir. Here, his enthusiasm for music was born. However, his joy was cut short when he went to the Ethiopian-Eritrean border on family vacation and conflict broke out, causing his family members to scatter in different directions. It took a while for them to trace each other before they were separated again fleeing from military conscription. Thereafter he found himself in Mai Aini refugee camp.

For the love of music

He then heard about the music training at JRS; it was a pleasant surprise considering all he had been through. After attending his first class he deepened his passion for music and is now a member of the JRS band and working to publish his first album. Habtom says he has received a lot of encouragement from the instructors and is optimistic of getting his album published despite the obvious financial obstacles.
Accompaniment and service in Dollo Ado

Looking at the past

Just three years ago Dollo Ado, a town located in the Somali region of Ethiopia, was on the front pages of western newspapers. The severe drought compounded with conflict in neighbouring Somalia resulted in an unprecedented influx of refugees to the camp, attracting the attention of millions around the world.

In August of that year, the then JRS Eastern Africa Director, Frido Pfüger SJ, and the then JRS Eastern Africa Communications Officer, Angelika Mendes, and the then JRS Ethiopia Director, Seyoum Asfaw, witnessed the dire situation on a needs assessment. They decided JRS should contribute to the alleviation of the crisis and the project in Melkadida refugee camp was born.

The first JRS team in Melkadida travelled to the camp for three days by road. The long trip was an adventure marked with rough roads, hills and extreme weather conditions. They were met by heart-breaking scenes of animal carcasses lying on the sides of the main road, where they had been left behind by their owners who sought refuge elsewhere.

In the beginning, it was very difficult for the group to cope with the weather conditions. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) tents became very hot during the day and it was almost impossible to find shade to rest under. When the rains came, the tents flooded and the bedding became soaked.

Settling in Melkadida

The pioneer team for the first JRS project in Melkadida was made up of Jaime Ignacio Moreno SJ, Gonzalo Sanchez Teran, Neway Alemayhu and Assefa Mebratu. They were later joined by Abraham Alemu, Godfrey Ogena, Beltran Presas Javaloyes, Petra Dankova and Carlos Mejia. The team designed programmes they felt were of immediate need for the refugees.

Youth centres were designed to enhance social interaction among the youth, allowing young refugees a space to productively spend their time. The centre serves as a space where they can make new friends, watch movies and participate in activities such as football, basketball, table tennis, dominoes, darts, and music. This immediately attracted large numbers of young people on a daily basis.

In addition, the psychosocial programme supports families distressed by the painful experience of civil war coupled with drought. An adult literacy programme caters to those who missed out on education in their home country due to protracted conflict. Likewise, the skills training programme supports adults to acquire skills for sustainable livelihood activities.

The journey of JRS in Dollo Ado

After two and a half years, the successes of the JRS programmes in Dollo Ado are evident. The office buildings, community centres, multipurpose halls, primary school and library, and dining hall built by JRS are well-ventilated and built to suit the hot weather conditions. Refugees are now able to comfortably congregate in these spaces while engaging in recreation activities with protection from the harsh outdoor environment. The facilities set up to run this programme are also environmentally friendly with walls and roofs made of locally available bamboo.

The working and living conditions of staff have also improved. The base compound provides staff protective shelter from the challenging weather. The installation of a satellite TV enables staff to keep updated with global current events. Plants and piped water in the compound have reinvigorated life and enhanced staff comfort and morale.

The JRS facilities and programmes have been hailed as models to be replicated in other camps. The Kenya Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs and UNHCR consequently invited JRS to begin operations in nearby Kobe refugee camp in the latter half of 2013. More recently, UNHCR extended another request to JRS to consider replicating the youth programme to a third camp called Helweyn.

the psychosocial programme supports families distressed by the painful experience of civil war coupled with drought.
Community football tournaments

Since November 2011, JRS has been coordinating football tournaments between refugees in Melkadida refugee camp and the host community in nearby Dollo Ado. Due to the active participation and involvement of the youth association, many young people have taken part in the competitions.

In 2011, just four refugee teams and one host community team took part in the tournaments, but since the number has grown and in 2013, fifteen teams participated. In September 2013, the programme was extended to 20 zones in the camp; each zone was represented by one football club fully managed and controlled by the zone. This was realised after Martin Kamau SJ, a Jesuit scholastic trained community leaders to promote active community involvement and leadership in the youth development programme.

At the moment, community self-governance structures, namely the Refugee Central Committee, women’s association, youth association, zonal leaders and community police, have begun to take over the coordination of football games with support from JRS for the provision of coaches and sporting materials.

In the process, a higher level of motivation, commitment and engagement by the community to run the programme is evident. As a result, football has become a unifying means of satisfying emotional and social needs amongst the refugee communities.
Preventive and curative are two words which sum up our intervention in psychosocial care in Ethiopia. In the first, we empower people by raising awareness on relevant issues such as peaceful conflict resolution, forgiveness, parenting styles, drug addiction and abuse. The curative intervention on the other hand consists of individual and group counselling sessions for those most in need. Through home visits, we accompany them in their attempt to reconcile with their traumatic pasts and find courage to live the present, to dream of a better future.

**Success.** Through training refugees to serve as peer counsellors we equip them with the skills to conduct home visits. During these visits, they identify and counsel vulnerable refugees. They also identify candidates for group counselling and refer difficult cases to qualified staff. This has proved beneficial, changing the lives of many refugees. We also have trained teachers employed by different agencies in handling children affected by trauma.

**Challenges.** Even as we continue to remind refugees of the limited capacity of JRS so many come to staff asking for help with their material needs. Life for staff in Ethiopia is further compounded by difficult weather conditions and minimal means of communication with families and friends back home.

Refugees also face unique challenges. Often men are separated from family members as some have several wives and, consequently, children in different camps that are inaccessible without written authorisation for security reasons. For some families, they have other family members still in Somalia.

Food security also presents other challenges as rations from aid groups are hardly enough to survive on. They have neither fields to cultivate nor animals to raise in order to supplement the rations. These realities fill the refugees with a sense of helplessness, anger, and depression.

**Lessons Learned.** As the JRS psychosocial team we have learnt that every person has something to offer others. As we work in a largely Muslim community, their strict observance of prayer time and the word ‘Inshallah’ are a constant reminder that God is our benefactor. We have learnt to trust in God in everything we do.
No one is too old to learn

The severe ethnic-based conflict, civil war, famine and natural disasters in Somalia has forced thousands of Somalis to Dollo Ado, an Ethiopian town which now hosts nearly 200,000 Somali refugees living in five camps. JRS is working in two camps, namely Melkadida and Kobe.

In Melkedida, adult education and vocational skills training programmes are implemented. The programmes have attracted a significant number of adult refugees who have never received formal education. At the age of 25, Mrs Fatuma Ali* has finally found the opportunity to get an education. She has successfully completed the first level after seven months of attendance.

Fatuma is very devoted to her studies and regularly attends literacy classes while carrying her baby on her back. She says she wants to continue to the next level and is very happy that she can now read and write in Somali and English, and do simple arithmetic.

When I spoke to her she expressed the joy of learning even though she must juggle raising her four children on her own and attending classes. She does not know the whereabouts of her husband.

Achievements
On 5 February 2014, JRS Dollo Ado celebrated the graduation of 110 refugees undertaking different adult education courses like plumbing, embroidery, tailoring and masonry work. Of the graduates, 45 percent were women who under normal circumstances have fewer opportunities for education due to long standing cultural barriers. However, as experience has demonstrated, women are highly motivated to learn skills for self-sufficiency.

JRS constructed and fenced a permanent primary school that consists of two blocks of classrooms, a pedagogy centre, a feeding hall, and toilets in Melkadida camp.

JRS Ethiopia works jointly with the government refugee agency to assist primary school refugee students. To this end, JRS constructed and fenced a permanent primary school that consists of two blocks of classrooms, a pedagogy centre, a feeding hall, and toilets in Melkadida camp. In Kobe camp, with funding from the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) and Canadian Jesuit International, JRS has now constructed four semi-permanent literacy centres where 250 students attend adult education classes.

After five months of attending classes, Nuriyo Udugow*, 48, is able to read and write reasonably well; her husband, unlike many in the camp, supports her education.

“My husband is illiterate and has never been to school but he encourages me to continue my education. Furthermore, he takes care of our children while I am at school,” she said.

She is very enthusiastic about going further in her education as she understands its importance.

In both Melkadida and Kobe, necessary learning materials are supplied. Solar lights are also distributed for all students in cooperation with UNHCR. Teachers are also not left out as they are given various capacity building trainings to equip them in delivering high quality adult education in a refugee context. Our motto in the camps is “no one is ever too old to learn.”

*Name has been changed for reasons of security.
**Overcoming substance abuse**

My name is Mohamed Idris*, I am 40 years old and the breadwinner for my wife and six children. I was born in a village called Barrder in Somalia where I ran a well-established business.

I moved to Melkadida refugee camp with my family to escape terror attacks in our town. Leaving the place where I was born was a difficult step to take. I opted to save my life and that of my family while leaving behind the riches I had worked to accumulate for years. Life in the camp was difficult to adapt to as it lacks basic facilities and needs, in comparison to the abundant life I led back home. Moreover, it was difficult for me to idly spend the day and night doing nothing.

Chewing *khat* is part of the Somali tradition and is vastly popular in the eastern part of Africa. I had chewed it for the last 15 years. All along, no one had told me of the social, psychological, economical and medical side effects of this habit. Given that I have no source of income in Melkadida, I started to sell some portion of the family ration to ensure of my daily consumption of *khat*. This brought problems in the family and my wife complained about the habit. Consequently, my relationship with my family deteriorated and I preferred to keep myself isolated from the family, neighbours, and the community at large.

In fact, I started to live where *khat* was sold. One day, an old friend visited me and told me that he wanted to talk to me. We walked to the JRS compound and sat under the shade of a tree. In the past, we used to chew *khat* together but he had since been able to quit and I asked him how he managed. He told me this was actually what he wanted to talk to me about. He explained that he was a trained JRS peer counsellor and that taking on this role had been a turning point in his life. While in training, he decided to stop and dedicate himself to helping those addicted to it.

As we were already good friends, he kept visiting me purposefully and started orienting me on the economic, health and social negative impacts of chewing *khat*. I had agreed to have sessions with him during our first meeting.

When he came back for the second session, I started hiding *khat* from him. I had known that chewing *khat* was not only affecting me personally, it also had a negative impact on my family, especially my children as they had begun to chew the leftovers. After the next few sessions, I promised the peer counsellor I would stop and managed to spend the next five days without chewing *khat* or smoking. However, after the fifth session, I was unable to control myself and started again. I chewed for two days and then stopped for fifteen days. Thereafter, I managed to totally stop for three months. This is when I realised that I could do it. I now deeply feel that it is possible to experience joy and peace within oneself and a sense of wellbeing without chewing *khat* and smoking. Subsequently, the JRS counselling team enormously helped me to stop the habit completely and has given me an intensive orientation on how to prevent my children from this addiction.

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*I Name has been changed for reasons of security.*

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By Salatha Ali and Fatuma Kahiyo, JRS Dollo Ado Community Mobilisers
This is a story of 28 year old Kadija* who made tremendous transformation after undergoing counselling after suffering depression due to horrific experiences in Somalia.

Back in Somalia, she had a quiet and ordinary family life with her husband and two children. One day as she was in the market going about her daily business, her home village was attacked. She ran away with her older brother, leaving the rest of her family to make a terrifying two-week journey to Yubu transit centre on the Ethiopian border. Two weeks later, she was transferred to Melkadida refugee camp.

Kadija was identified by JRS peer counsellors during routine home visits which they carry out in order to reach the most vulnerable refugees. As one can imagined, she felt guilty for having left her family behind. She was not taking care of her personal hygiene nor cooking for herself. Her mind was preoccupied day and night with the whereabouts of her husband and children.

The JRS psychosocial team had to be very creative to win her trust and confidence. They visited her twice per week arranging her small home, washing her, dressing her and then encouraging her to narrate her story, which she eventually poured out with tears and grief. The team also sensitised her brother and the neighbours about her condition. This brought visible improvement in her life. Her case was recommended to the responsible agency which built her a better house in place of her dilapidated one.

After three months of individual counselling and therapy sessions conducted twice per week, Kadija’s vision for her life changed. She understood that it was not selfishness that separated her from her family, but conditions that were beyond her control. She no longer wants to die but to live and give life.

Now, Kadija is not only married but is ready to start skills training offered by JRS to enhance her life. In her own words, she says, “I feel reborn. I am grateful to Allah and to JRS for the great help.”

*Name has been changed for reasons of security.
Accompaniment and service in Mai Aini refugee camp

Tucked in the northern most part of Ethiopia near the border with Eritrea is Mai Aini refugee camp, which hosts refugees of Eritrean origin. JRS first pitched tent here back in February 2010 after observing that the refugee population in the camp needed services that were not offered by any other agency at the time.

Mai Aini is no ordinary camp as its residents are mostly young people and quite a lot of unaccompanied minors. Being young and full of energy, the youngsters need to keep themselves busy otherwise they can easily direct their energy to destructive behavior. As such, the situation called for innovativeness in designing programs that addresses their needs.

A decision was therefore made to focus on services that allow the youth to express themselves. Four departments were thus started; counselling, theater training and sports training. The theatre departments are proving to be the most popular, with their shows attracting large numbers of spectators. For many refugees, it is not just entertainment but it is also therapy for some. As one refugee once quipped, ‘these shows are so great they are chasing away more and more of my past nightmares.’

The sports department is no different as it attracts even more refugees, with excellent results being recorded in soccer, basketball, volleyball, and athletics. A lot of youngsters who had lost themselves in alcohol and tobacco have become active members of these sports teams.

Quality training in the theatre and sports departments has promoted and nurtured talent amongst the refugees. As a result, more and more are inspired to join the trainings which in turn give them hope of a better future when the time comes to leave the camp.

A lot of youngsters who had lost themselves in alcohol and tobacco have become active members of these sports teams.

By Fanuel Abebe, JRS Mai Aini Project Director

Photo: Christian Fuchs
Map of Ethiopia