



*Cross International
Catholic Outreach*

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PROJECT 0618

Community-Based Rehabilitation Handicapped Support

Giving help and hope to families and their disabled children

— Addis Ababa, Ethiopia —



Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

Proverbs 23:18

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Project Synopsis

Project

Provide rehabilitation, care, and support to 250 physically and mentally handicapped children and their families; promote awareness on issues the disabled face and tolerance in the community through education.

Goals

- 1) Provide the care and rehabilitation handicapped children and teens desperately need; give them hope for a future and a normal life.
- 2) Support parents with physically and mentally disabled children through income-generation projects, psychological counseling, financial help, and education.
- 3) Change the community's negative perception of handicapped people through education.
- 4) Show these families that no problem is too big for God.

Affiliation

The Medical Missionaries of Mary

Location

In the "Kebeles" — poor, urban neighborhoods in the heart of Addis Ababa, the capitol of Ethiopia

Cost

\$19,800 helps keep this life-saving program running for an entire year.

Quick Facts

- The Community-Based Rehabilitation program began in 1994 with just seven families and now serves 250 children and their families.
- It provides a host of services: counseling, financial support, income-generation programs, physical therapy, training for parents, and promoting acceptance in the community.
- Cross provides nearly 70 percent of the funds needed to keep this program running, including staff salaries and training, food for the nutrition program, workshops, training for parents and disabled children, and instructional materials for families.
- AIDS awareness and testing is a large part of what CBR does since many of the handicapped children it helps have been physically and sexually abused and are susceptible to HIV.



One of the ways the Community-Based Rehabilitation program supports poor families with handicapped children is by helping them generate income. With training and the supplies to get started families can create small businesses, such as the vegetable stand above.



Abandoned and Forgotten

Dilawit's parents didn't want her.

The 3½-year-old was always sick. She had cerebral palsy, a debilitating condition that affects the motor control centers of developing brains often leaving its victims immobile and prone to a host of other problems. Dilawit's case was severe. She couldn't walk or talk; she only cried.

Her parents, desperately poor and unable to comprehend what was happening to their daughter, left her on the side of the road.

Sadly, Dilawit's story is common in Ethiopia where poor families don't have the means to care for handicapped children. Compounding this is the false, but common belief that people with handicaps are cursed or being punished by God. Parents of the disabled face constant ridicule, being told by family members and neighbors that something they did brought this on their children or that God is angry with them. Some abandon their children; others just keep them in hiding.

As a result mentally and physically disabled children — even those who are perfectly capable of having a normal life, such as a child with a single clubfoot — do not go to school or

learn skills to support themselves. Some families will even keep their handicapped children from clinics or hospitals, instead taking them to witch doctors. Sadly others are just abandoned.

Without a serious change in people's understanding and attitudes toward the handicapped, disabled children like Dilawit and their families will continue to suffer unimaginable pain. Without help these precious children will have no chance at a normal life.

But there is hope! Community-based rehabilitation and awareness programs are slowly changing attitudes and lives.

"The attitude [in the community] was very negative. Parents didn't have the courage to bring the disabled out. So they would stay in the home and become dependents," said Abeba, director of the CBR Handicapped Support program sponsored by Cross International Catholic Outreach. "With a little awareness things are now changing. After understanding that the disability is caused by scientific reasons parents are comfortable in bringing their children out. They send them to school."



Dilawit, now a talkative 5-year-old, has recently begun primary school. After she was rescued and taken to an orphanage run by kindly nuns two years ago, she began receiving physical therapy treatment at CBR's therapy center. She not only talks but now has no trouble standing on her own. She is one of hundreds of children who received new life through the CBR program supported by Cross.



When Michel, 11, and Mentsnot, 12, could no longer attend school because of their worsening muscular dystrophy, CBR began sending a teacher to their house each day. Their parents also received financial support and counseling through the program, which gave them new hope in their difficult situation.

Bringing Life to the ‘Dead’

Having a child with a handicap can feel like a death sentence for parents in Ethiopia.

Not only are they fighting against centuries of misinformation and intolerant communities, but they also face the constant worry of not having enough money to pay for their child’s special needs — most poor families don’t even have enough money for food every day. To make matters worse, only 61 percent of the population in Ethiopia has access to any public health facilities, let alone centers that offer specialized physical therapy and psychological support.

The CBR Handicapped Support Program has been working to change this seemingly hopeless situation by creating a support system for parents and providing the special care their children need. And since the program started in 1994, hundreds of families have been brought back to life.

Michel and Mentsnot’s family was one of them.

These two young boys were born with muscular dystrophy. As they grew, their bodies weakened and Mentsnot is now confined to a wheelchair. Both eventually had to drop out of school because they were too disabled. Tesfaye, their father, is a displaced soldier, whose left hand and lung were injured during the country’s two-year war with Eritria. Though he gets an occasional job as a guard, what he makes isn’t nearly enough to meet the family’s needs.

“We were very worried about our two boys and how we could pay for their treatment. The stress grew as their health began to deteriorate,” says Tesfaye, who along with his wife had all but lost hope that they would make it through their situation.



Seven-year-old Estifanos, a child with cerebral palsy, practices his motor skills by playing a block game during a physical therapy session at CBR's therapy center.

Then they began attending monthly parents' meetings hosted by CBR where they met other families facing similar situations. Tesfaye and his wife began to learn what their sons' disease was; they went to spiritual counseling and received financial support through CBR. Now a field worker comes to their house each day to visit with the boys and teach them. The boys also attend physical therapy three days a week. CBR even built a wheelchair ramp into their house, so Mentsnot's parents could easily get him in and out.

Tesfaye and his wife, Aregash, believe doctors will one day develop a cure for their sons' disease; they no longer feel the crushing pain they once did over the situation. "I have hope," Tesfaye says. "Through CBR I participated in different workshops, and I had a chance to see situations that are even worse than ours improve over time. It makes me feel hopeful about my situation."

CBR currently helps about 250 handicapped children and their families — some of the poorest in Addis Ababa — with everything from financial support and physical therapy to scholarships for school and vocational training. Since handicapped children are often abused and at a great risk for AIDS, CBR also devotes a large amount of its efforts into AIDS awareness and testing.

Through talks at schools, pamphlets, and community programs CBR is changing the attitude of the people toward the mentally and physically disabled. Instead of being shunned and ridiculed, the children and their families are now met with open arms and the love of Christ.

Cross is committed to supporting this life-changing program. We hope you'll prayerfully consider helping us free hundreds more poor, hopeless children and families from their "death sentence" and bring them new life.

You were wearied with the length of your way, but you did not say,
"It is hopeless;" you found new life for your strength,
and so you were not sick.

Isaiah 57:10

Our Promise to You!

100 percent of the proceeds of this appeal will be used for this project. In the rare event that we receive more than needed to fund this project, additional gifts will be used for other urgent needs for the poor.