

The Aysanew Kassa Trust

Improving Education in the Azezo Schools

NEWSLETTER

Education in Ethiopia, Issue 20, December 2023

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The newsletter of the Aysanew Kassa Trust, set up in memory of the late Aysanew Kassa by his wife Jean Bailey and friends.

The year started with much optimism as, after an absence of three years, our chairperson Jean was able to visit Azezo once more. Jean was there during the Christmas 2022 period until the end of January: unlike previous visits, she spent the whole time in Azezo, working with the blind students and reviewing our work at Atse Fasil school, the high school and the library. This included going with the children of St Raphael's school for blind and partially sighted children to accompany the *tabots* being moved to their overnight resting place on the eve of *Timkat*. There, the children were dancing, drumming and singing, along with many, many local people. In Jean's view they were the stars of the procession! The festivities carried on in the compound until dinner time and continued the next day.



Jean with one of our students, who is waiting to start university

Unfortunately, as this newsletter goes to the printers the local political situation means that a return trip this year is on hold. However, weekly telephone calls mean that the students and staff in the schools know that we have not forgotten them and we remain optimistic that we can return in early 2024, before the children do their mid-year exams.

The economic situation for people across Ethiopia is very tough as the price of basic commodities has increased and the value of the birr has decreased. For example, teff is now 7000 birr per quintal, up from 3000 birr per quintal three years ago. It is hard to know how some poor families are able to put food on the table. The hospitality industry is particularly affected due to a lack of tourism.



The feast of *timkat*



At Atse Fasile school

Please support us!

If you're stuck for ideas for Christmas or birthday gifts, you can buy a complete set of school text books (£20), a football for a blind child at St Raphael's (£28), digital recorders to allow blind students to record lessons (£45) or sponsor a university student for one year (£100, including transport and a monthly allowance).

Donations can be made by cheque, payable to The Aysanew Kassa Trust, or by bank transfer (account number 80808350, sort code 20-58-51). If you are able to Gift Aid your donation, please complete the Gift Aid declaration you will find on our website, thus increasing the value of your gift at no extra cost to yourself.

Higher Education. This year, 17 of our sponsored students completed university, while 20 have gone. This includes a student from a very poor family, who was not sponsored during his secondary school but who we have accepted into our programme for university. This brings the total number of students who we are supporting through university to 131, of whom several are blind.



The new outdoor hut (*tukul*) at St Raphael's

Atse Fasile school. It is always a joy to visit this old school, which somehow manages to retain a friendly atmosphere despite having more than 2844 children, including 423 in the kindergarten. The new toilets we funded are functioning in the kindergarten and the new water tank and pipes are in place.



Jean with our Azezo committee, without whom we would not be able to function as effectively

St Raphael's school for blind and partially sighted children. The school and home currently has 64 students. Four students completed university this year, bringing the total number who have completed university since St Raphael's was founded in 2002 to 55. Jean stayed at St Raphael's for 4 weeks and each day had a timetable set by the blind students to help them. Since many text books are not available in Braille, she read into small digital recorders for various year groups. The newly refurbished dormitory floors and walls, along with the outdoor hut, all look good and are loved by the children. The sick bay was also finished and has been used a couple of times, with chickenpox being the main culprit during Jean's stay. The children were delighted to all receive new clothes and shoes for Christmas and thank all the AKT trustees and donors for their wonderful support every year.

This year the AKT trustees continued to attempt to meet the many needs of the children of Azezo and held three major fundraising events. The London 10K was great fun and our six runners, of whom three had never run before, were brilliant. Our Buxton walks were a huge success, with more than 40 walkers taking part over the 2 days. Thank you to Tessa and her family for their generosity. A second clock hunt in the City of London was fun and let participants learn so much about historical London. Each occasion led to much socialising as well as good eating and drinking! A huge thank you to all who participated and our many other donors. You know who you are!



Students studying at the library we funded over ten years ago

Azezo High School. Student enrolment this year is interesting: for the first time, female students outnumber males in every year group. The total number of students is 3700 and, to accommodate this number, a shift system is in place with pupils attending classes either in the morning or in the afternoon, with class sizes between 80 and 90 students. Each small desk accommodates at least 3 students, so note taking is very difficult and the blind students have to try to record the lectures and listen later. Despite this, our 80 sponsored students are all performing well. The area around the staff room, funded by the Aysanew Kassa Trust, has now got many bushes and trees providing a cool area for both teachers and students. The security staff uniforms are now beyond repair and need replacing if we can find a sponsor. We need six, and they cost £40 each.

Circus Azezo. The group continues to develop and last year was sponsored to tour and perform in Turkey. This was deferred from 2020 due to Covid.

AKT library. The library was clean and appeared well organised. 23 students were in the library during Jean's visit and another 12 to 14 were studying under the trees in the compound.