

PROFILE

Jean Bailey and the Aysanew Kassa Trust

Jean Bailey speaks about her nursing career and the work of the Aysanew Kassa Trust, named after her late husband

Can you briefly tell me about your career as a nurse?

My interest in nursing goes back to my childhood, and at the age of 16 I became a nursing cadet at Bradford Royal Infirmary from 1964–68. I studied midwifery at the City of London Maternity Hospital but I never practised midwifery until one night in Ethiopia 35 years later! Following clinical practice as a staff nurse, I became increasingly concerned that ill health was associated with lifestyles, poor education, nutrition, etc., so I did health visitor training at North London Polytechnic in 1971–72.

I entered community nursing management in Hammersmith and Ealing and was Director of Nursing Services (DNS) in Paddington and North Kensington until the mid-1980s. After the reorganization of the health service I worked at North-East Regional Health Authority. I was the DNS for BUPA and then undertook a range of consultancy work until I joined the Royal College of Nursing in 1995 as management adviser. From the late 1980s I did some consultancy work overseas. I retired from full-time work 3 years ago. I have increasingly undertaken voluntary work with the Tropical Health Education Trust, my local community in East Finchley and the Aysanew Kassa Trust.

How did you meet Aysanew Kassa?

I met Aysanew, my late husband, through friends and we clicked immediately despite our differences; we married in 1991. Our

joint passion was for increasing the health and economy of individuals and populations by ensuring the education of children.

What was your husband's life path from Ethiopia to the UK?

My husband was a lawyer working for the government in Ethiopia, and had come to the UK for further studies. When he became ill he was involved in a human rights project across Ethiopia [setting up advocacy schemes for women and children] funded via the British Embassy. Our plans had been to move to Ethiopia and for him to set-up a law service for poor people; sadly, he died at the Royal Free Hospital in London in 2000.

We had started a small project to help support academically able children in the high school in Azezo [his home town] to complete their education. Following his death, the project became a charity and has grown so that we now support more than 70 children in the high school in Azezo, and 72 in universities across Ethiopia; more than 150 children have graduated from higher education as a result of this project.

How often do you visit Azezo and how do people receive you there?

I was the first white woman to stay in Azezo; initially I always had children following me, but now I am part of the local scene. My husband's family still live in Azezo, so my connections remain strong.

What are your aims for the charity?

The heart of the charity is the children, and helping them to get a good education. The children have to be really poor [many are orphans], academically able and not



receiving support from elsewhere. Once accepted via the local committee in Azezo, they are supported until they finish higher education [up to 10 years]; many are now doctors, nurses, engineers, lawyers, etc.

We support the schools [one elementary, one high school and one school for blind children] by helping improve the infrastructure through grants each year. A priority this year is to build a public library; it has been designed by local engineers, the land granted to the community by the mayor and much of the labour is being undertaken freely by the local community. It is especially welcomed by girls for whom it is an acceptable place to go outside of the home.

What drove you to set up the charity?

Following my husband's death, friends and family wanted to do more. I felt that our old way of sending money had to change to demonstrate transparency and to get the benefit of tax relief through the Gift Aid Scheme. I was helped enormously by a great team of trustees, but especially by our first treasurer, Nick Grant, who resigned because of health reasons earlier this year.

What do you find most satisfying about the Aysanew Kassa Trust?

When a young person in Azezo comes up to me and says: 'Do you remember me, I am now a teacher [doctor, nurse, etc.] because of the Aysanew Kassa Trust support, and I am now helping my brothers and sisters'. Also, working with the trustees who challenge me and the ideas that come from the community in Azezo so that I know that what we strive to achieve is right.

Jean Bailey is chairman of trustees,
Aysanew Kassa Trust. www.aysanew.org