

The Aysanew Kassa Trust

Improving Education in the Azezo Schools

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NEWSLETTER

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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 **coronavirus pandemic** has given rise to so many challenges throughout the world. We hope that you have got through this difficult year ok. Here at the AKT, our fundraising activities have taken a huge knock, with all of our fundraising events postponed or cancelled. We have, however, **minimised the effect on our individual beneficiaries**, making the decision to defer some of the capital developments that we had planned.

2020 in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has also suffered the effects of COVID-19. From an educational perspective, schools and universities closed early, with all students having to return home. The exams that should have taken place in the summer term have been put back to December/January (although the current situation, see below, may affect that further). **Our student numbers therefore remain the same as last year**—130 at university and 80 in high school—as none have managed to graduate yet and new students will not start university until the end of January 2021, **when we expect the number of students we are supporting to increase.**

The recent outbreak of fighting between government and regional forces in the Tigray region in the north of the country is a sad and worrying end to the year. At the time of this newsletter going to press, it is unclear how long the conflict will last, how it will unfold and what the impact will be to our students' education. We keep all those caught up in the fighting in our thoughts: all those who are trying to make a success of their lives in already difficult circumstances, and who now find themselves swept up in a war neither of their choosing or making.



projects this year to make sure that we could continue to provide the support our students rely on. However, the old lino tiles that formed the flooring of the girls' and boys' dormitories at St Raphael's were becoming a health and safety hazard for both children and staff and so, using funds received from GEES, **we replaced these with new floors made from ceramic tiles**, which are safer and more durable.

We were also extremely grateful to have received a very generous donation from the Rossi family in Italy to **replace the outdoor structure used regularly by the blind children**, to gather during recreation, hold meetings and study: **Casa Maria** is now used every day by the children.



Computing

Coronavirus has highlighted the importance of IT throughout the world, as a way for children to continue to learn when schools have closed their doors. For the Azezo students we support, the lack of access to computers and a stable internet connection has made online learning difficult. Technology, and the ability to use it, is especially vital for the blind and partially-sighted children in St Raphael's: this year, **we helped eight blind students who are in Grade 12 attend a three week course in Addis Ababa**, run as part of a government initiative.

Furthermore, some of your donations have allowed us to **continue a series of computing classes for students at Azezo Senior High School** (while it remained open); and, through the legacy of the Gondar (Ethiopia) Eye Surgery, **we have been able to purchase more desktops and laptops for St Raphael's.**

St Raphael's school for blind and partially sighted children

As mentioned, we had to put on hold many of our extra

Azezo Circus & Gymnastics Group

The usual end of term activities, where children show their parents what they have achieved during the scholastic year, were all cancelled as schools rushed to close in April. So even the Azezo Circus & Gymnastics group, who often perform at these events, **lost a regular audience and the little income they receive**. They are now in urgent need of more financial support and are still trying to attract more girls to train up for the Ethiopian team.

In last year's newsletter, we reported on the **inaugural Azezo 10K**, our first ever major fundraising event in Ethiopia, co-organised by the AKT local committee and Mayleko Lodge. Due to Covid, it could not be repeated this year, but we sincerely hope that we will be able to hold it in 2021.

Other news

Covid restrictions on the newly opened schools now mean that there are 3 shifts in each of the Azezo government schools so that some social distancing can be achieved. How this is impacting on the teachers remains to be seen: three shifts a day will be incredibly difficult for them to sustain without a massive increase in teacher numbers. Class sizes have reduced to approximately 45 per shift!

Back in the UK, **AKT's home at 72 has had to move**: after 37 years, Jean decided to downsize and moved home. So please see the new address **1 Clifford Lodge, Bibsworth Road, London N3 3RS**; and telephone number **+44 (0)208 346 9624**.



Thank you!

The successes of the AKT, even in these difficult times, are thanks to the many individuals and groups who constantly support our work, as well as the coordinating efforts of our volunteer committee in Azezo, led by Melash and Eshete. Thank you to St Mary's Church (Wilshaw), the parishioners of St Mary's (East Finchley), the Gondar (Ethiopia) Eye Surgery and all of you who donate and assist us from all around the world. You know who you are!

The continuing uncertainty around the pandemic and the potential impact of Brexit, coupled with the increasing cost of basic commodities in Ethiopia and, now, the conflict that has broken out, **suggests that 2021 will be exceedingly difficult for our beneficiaries**. The global fight against coronavirus continues, and **it is unclear when we will be able to organise much needed fundraising activities**. Just as this last year, however, **we will not be reducing the support we give to our students**.

We will also be looking for ways in which we can best collaborate with the local schools in Azezo to recover from this pandemic.

We appreciate that the year just gone has been hard for you, too, and it has caused financial hardships throughout the world. As we enter the Christmas period, please consider supporting us in any way you can: the students of Azezo will be immensely grateful.

You may wish, for example, to consider giving loved ones an 'alternative' gift during the festive period: a complete set of school text books for £15, a football for St Raphael's (£17) or sponsor a university student for one year (£70). If you are interested, please get in touch and we will make sure that your money will be spent as you instruct (as well as sending you one of our cards to give to the lucky recipient).

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, thus increasing the value of your gift at no extra cost to yourself.