

Tearfund Pembrokeshire Volunteer's Life Changing Visit



Tearfund Pembrokeshire Volunteer Co-Ordinator, Francis Maull, Hywel Meredydd, Director of Tearfund Wales, and six volunteers recently visited Ethiopia for ten days.

Arriving in Ethiopia's capital, the Tearfund team experienced four hours driving on desolate roads with wandering livestock, to Hawassa, the place they called home.

Apart from its' capital, Francis describes Ethiopia as: "very rural. Towns are not towns as we know them. Most buildings are wooden or mud, with thatched or zinc roofs. "

It was in such a building, Francis spent his first nights: "I spent evenings in a single room mud hut, with zinc roof. I didn't sleep because I could hear dogs running about!"

Receiving warm welcomes from hosting families, Francis shared fond memories: "Every night we had coffee ceremonies. On little charcoal burners, pink coffee beans are roasted, then ground by pestle and mortar. The coffee grinds, brewed in Ethiopian coffee pots, are served thick, with lots of sugar, followed by maize popcorn. One night I had seven cups it was so lovely!"

The main reasons for the visit were to: immerse in Ethiopian culture, and see how Tearfund partner, Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church (EKHC) self help groups work. EKHC has seven million members, Tearfund fund some of their national leaders.

Visiting communities where EKHC work, Francis shared that: "Tearfund are almost invisible in this initiative because its' totally community based. There's no money handouts, it's all about self help. Groups of ten plus meet weekly, saving the little they have."

Despite poverty, people try to save something; pennies, bits of grain or corn, storing enough to create a lending bank. So instead of killing their last cow, eating the last grain or using money lenders, people in self help group can get loans or gifts.

Self help groups teach about family planning, setting up a business, and adult literacy; sometimes inviting teachers from different groups. Some rent small pieces of land, sowing sweetcorn, this is sold to raise more funds. These initiatives support and empower people.

"To see the confidence, particularly of the women, is amazing. Their way of life is so simple, the regional office is a mud hut in a field! I'd love to see this concept of self help coming here. The chairmanship changes every week, giving everyone a chance to lead. They meet regularly to talk, share and pray, they're not alone."

One day the team travelled for ten hours visiting communities and projects. Francis was moved by "the people's friendship. As we approached people moved wooden benches into the shade. What little they had, was shared with us, unbelievable."

Francis shared how EKHC's holistic vision ministers to local communities, where millions suffer physical and spiritual poverty, desperately needing enough money for food, seeds and school

equipment. ECKH bring spiritual and socio-economic transformation to millions of these people. “To see the impact of Christian faith in action is amazing. We witnessed desperately poor people building for their futures, investing the little they have, making a difference through self-help groups. The trip was life changing!” shared Francis.

Francis Maull hosts a Tearfund's stall at **Saturday, 13th November's “Mission and Praise in Pembrokeshire” 4pm**, Pennar Community Church (old Bethany, Pembroke Dock). To book Francis to speak call:01248 723086 / email hywel.meredydd@tearfund.org

