



Adoption Advocates International
Families for Children

April 2008

Dear Friends,

It is spring! Orphan children continue to join their new families and the work is going well. We are especially pleased to report that nine children from our new Ghana program have now joined their adoptive families, and 17 more are in process. The program is just one year old, and has now moved out of the status of "pilot program" to welcome new families. We have outgrown the Eban House and to solve the immediate crowding, a temporary school room is being constructed in front of the house. This will allow the current class room to be used as sleeping space. The school room can be moved to a new location at the time we are ready to move to a larger facility.

We have an adoptive family seriously interested in adopting the Chinese baby who is HIV positive that I mentioned in the last newsletter. This will be new for China but we hope it will mean that many more HIV+ children will grow up with adoptive families. Unfortunately, Temesgen, the wonderful 12 year old boy I wrote about last time has not yet found a family. We hope that a family will find it in their hearts to welcome him to their family soon.



We are pleased that the HIV+ children from Ethiopia continue to join adoptive families. Erin, our coordinator, reports that 29 HIV+ kids are now HOME with their new families, 9 HIV+ kids are in the process of being adopted and 9 more children are waiting for identified families to finish the placement agreement process. What a different story this is from 10 years ago.

Families are traveling to Ethiopia each week to receive their children. I enjoyed being there in February and as usual stayed at the Volunteer House where there was another outstanding group of folks giving their time and energy to benefit the kids. Ryan, a 29 year old from Illinois, engineer by training and world traveler, was there recently and I want to share some of what he wrote after leaving Ethiopia (see his column below right.)

Last week a group of volunteers spent a week at Layla and Wanna sprucing up the bedrooms and playing with the children. The leader wrote a wonderful description of her trip. (see below, left)

We are so grateful for the energy and enthusiasm of these volunteers and for all of you who provide [the support](#) that makes our work successful.

Merrily and Ted

I returned home from my third mission/volunteer trip to Ethiopia in three years, this past Sunday. As always, I am left in awe, amazement, sadness, and joy for all the children who touched my life while I was there.



We arrived on a Sunday night and immediately jumped into Layla House life on Monday morning. I met Ivy, the compound coordinator, first thing and within moments, I decided that this was a woman whom I would come to adore and I was absolutely right! The children adore and respect her. If Ivy says it is time for chores, she gets no backtalk, the chores get done. They clamor around her for the opportunity to walk the two dogs outside the Layla House compound. They fold the clothes that the laundry staff painstakingly washes by hand. They cut the vegetables for the kitchen staff to prepare the meals. This is not the same Layla House that I visited a year ago and that is thanks to Ivy!

Our week was filled with experiences beyond our imagination from picking up an abandoned baby in the countryside, to seeing men jumping into a small lagoon from the side of a



Ryan at Layla House

Of course I was eager to get my first glimpse of [Layla House](#). The large, blue gates that guard the compound swung open to reveal a world like I haven't seen before. Layla House buzzes with activity. Like children everywhere in our world, the children here are outgoing and curious. They're full of joy and energy. The Ethiopian teachers and staff are so hospitable and warm. The other volunteers and foreign staff members could not stop talking about the beauty of this place. I realized immediately that I would not witness Ethiopia as a tourist, I would experience the full spectrum of Ethiopian culture and participate in the society as a working [volunteer](#).

During the many weeks that followed, I volunteered with several other North Americans at Layla House for five days a week. I chaperoned field trips to the swimming pool. I played board games with the children and I supervised chore times. I taught math classes and health classes. I taught America classes, during which we discussed topics that ranged from the pledge of allegiance, to proper table manners, to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. My most important role at Layla House, though, was being a big brother to these kids... taking the dog for a walk together, playing soccer games, conducting math tutoring after school.

Some of the most heartwarming and heartbreaking events that occur at Layla House are the going-away parties for the children who are



departing for America. Layla House is quite a transitional place. American families arrive in Addis Ababa every week in order to complete the long and extensive international adoption process, which can sometimes carry on for over a year. During the time that I



Our hearts were broken to have a young teen share a photo album of all the children who have come and gone while she continues to wait for a family. She named the states where her friends had gone and blessed the families who adopted them.

Our hearts were filled with joy for the children who shared their photo album of their new families and the excitement in their voices about going to America.

It was hard to leave at the end of the week. We had not done enough, not comforted enough children, not shared enough hope with the children.

It is those children who fill every waking moment of my thoughts. It is those children who I feel are my mission to find a family, so they too can feel the joy and love that so many of their friends, now experience.

You can read more on the [Hearts of Hope blog](#).

spent here, I witnessed over 25 children leave Layla House with their new, adoptive families. They were flying back to cities and towns in New York, Indiana, Wisconsin, Texas and Washington, to name a few. It is quite an emotional time for the newly adopted child, as he/she prepares to leave Layla House. I'm incapable of describing how each of these children must feel while they prepare to leave behind the only friends, family and culture that they've known during their short lives in order to travel to a far-away, unknown place with a new--and largely unfamiliar--American family.

Meanwhile, every child that remains behind at Layla House has nothing but best wishes for the adopted child that has found his or her family. They pray for their safety and happiness in America. They promise that they will not forget the friendships that were formed here. Every child at Layla House wants nothing more than to go to America with a family that they can call their own. In due time, every child will have his or her own going-away party. There is a 100% placement rate at Layla House; every child gets adopted by a family in the States. Some children wait



only months; others wait years. However, every child does eventually get a family to call their own.

Like every adopted child who departs Layla House, volunteers also have their own going-away parties. My party was held just last week. The day of my party was a patchwork of emotions. The children showered me with hugs, kisses, best wishes and small gifts. We celebrated with songs, games and treats. I reflected upon the dozens of new friendships that were established here. At the end of the day I tucked the children into bed and tearfully said my good-byes. I walked through the large, blue gates with an uncertain sadness in my heart. When will I have the opportunity to return to this beautiful country? Will I get the chance to see these wonderful kids again? When will my travels allow me to reunite with the volunteers and



If you have not yet seen it, please check out the lovely coffee table type book, "[FACES of LAYLA](#)" by photographer Emma Dodge Hanson. This book visually expresses the heart and soul of Layla House and is a treasure each adoptive family will want to have. It is available for sale at our on-line store, [BenefitOrphans.org](#) or you can contact Kathy at AAI to order by phone or send a check to the office. The cost is \$56 including postage and all proceeds go to AAI's [GRACE Fund](#).

You can also support the GRACE Fund and AAI's other humanitarian projects by [donating on-line](#).

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staff that I became so close with during my time in Ethiopia?

In the days since I've left Ethiopia, I've been trying to set aside the buzz of emotions and gain some perspective. I'm fully aware that, despite my best efforts, I may not see most of these children again. It may be a long time before I'm able to return to Ethiopia and Layla House. Most, if not all, of the children will have continued with their lives and found a new home in America. I'm so thankful for the short time that I was able to be a part of these children's lives. It's worth repeating what I stated earlier in this note: I'm extremely grateful for the time that I was able to spend in this amazing country. Ethiopia will certainly hold a special place in my memory.

We have an on-going need for volunteers so if you or someone you know would be interested, please contact susan@adoptionadvocates.org.



Metha,
born
September
14, 2004
most
probably
suffers
from

Developmental Delay, however his

regarding giving and putting things in certain places. He appears to be quite teachable when living in a stimulating and loving environment. He is an easygoing, happy child who loves to laugh, and who rarely cries. He makes emotional connections quickly, remembers people, and will steal the hearts of some lucky family.

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