

VISIONS ETHIOPIA

2022 ANNUAL
REPORT



VISIONS
global empowerment
ETHIOPIA

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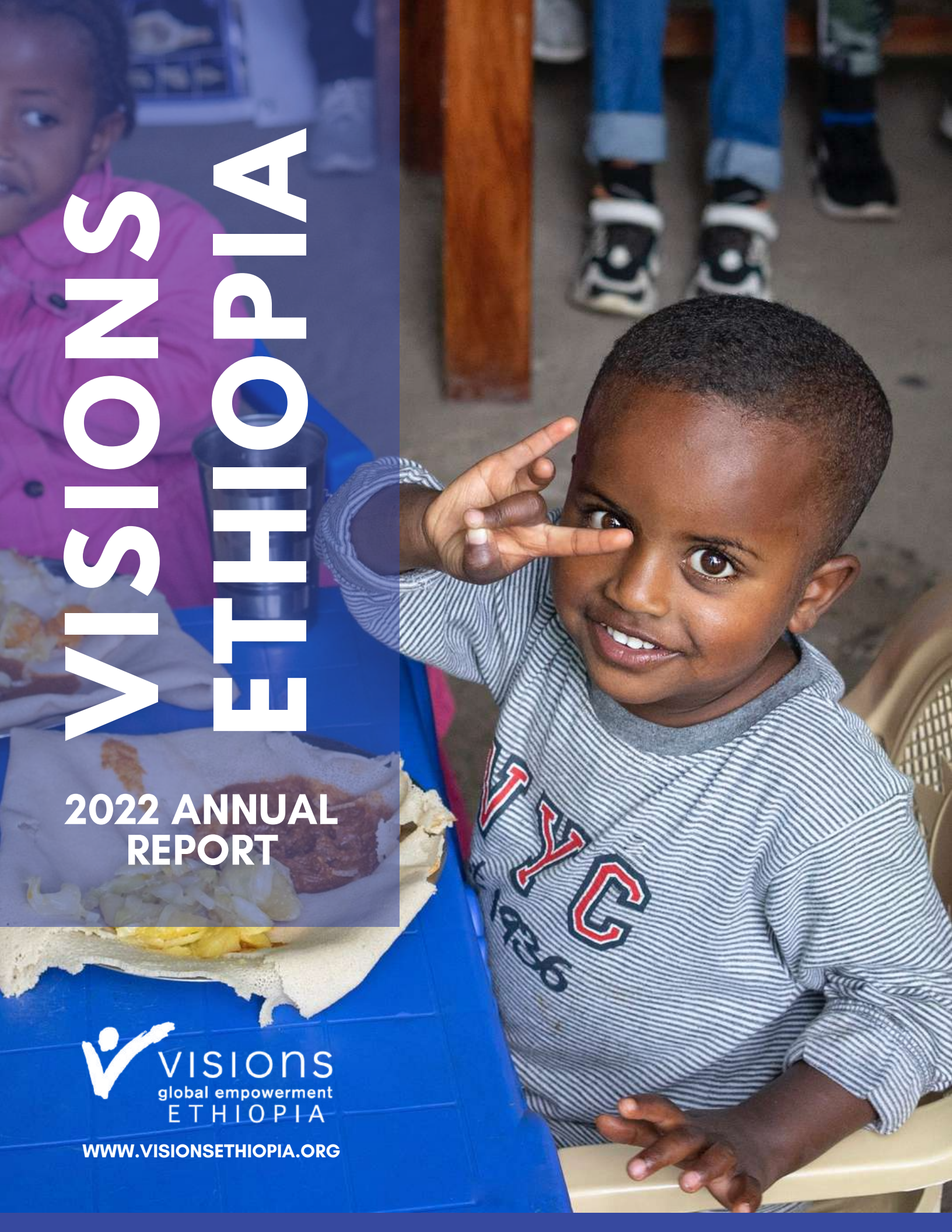


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Message from the Director

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Our story began with a simple mission - to help deaf children access a quality education, acquire formal sign language, and find community & self-confidence. The deeper we have delved into the programming, we have realized just how deep many other issues at stake run, all of which need to be addressed if we are truly to make a lasting impact. Challenges related to transportation, nutrition, availability of time, awareness, stigma, and family involvement are all symptoms of poverty that impact essentially all of the children and young adults we strive to serve.

While there are public schools that technically have classrooms led by Special Needs Education teachers, these teachers lack the training, expertise, resources, and school environment to work with children with disabilities. As a result, the "lucky" few deaf students who ever get to attend school, often never develop sign language and drop out of school at an early age, rarely moving beyond Grade 4. At our Visions Center for the Deaf in Hawassa, students come to us to learn, to find community and friendship, and to access a safe space where they can learn, grow, and express themselves.

Our focus is not solely on education, but on empowering and building the confidence and skills of these children and young adults so that they can have a meaningful life.

We are grateful for the opportunity to make a positive impact in the lives of these youth and their families, and we remain dedicated to supporting them to realize their full potential.



With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amsalu".

Amsalu Desie
Director & Founder

Our Vision

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1 ACCESSIBILITY AND AWARENESS

Increasing public awareness of disabilities and ensuring accessibility of public services for PWDs* (including Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing and Blind/Visually-Impaired persons) and women & girls.

2 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Providing life skills, professional development training, Ethiopia Sign Language development, and educational support to PWDs. Supporting girls and young women in their educational and professional development endeavors.

3 EMPLOYMENT AND HEALTH SUPPORT

Providing material support for PWDs, disseminating information for PWDs on sexual and reproductive health, and equipping PWDs with basic business skills to enable them to engage in market-oriented jobs or professional employment.

4 EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Increasing self-esteem and self-awareness among PWDs, reducing community stigma and exclusion through public awareness-raising efforts, and facilitating the development of sustainable income-generating activities for those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to unleash the innate potential of PWDs, women & girls, and those affected by poverty and other hardships to lead meaningful lives and contribute to the overall wellbeing of their communities and the nation at-large.

*PWD: Persons with Disabilities

Introduction

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Visions Global Empowerment Ethiopia (“Visions Ethiopia”) was established in early 2019 and is a registered Ethiopian Residents Charity (#4134).

While Visions Ethiopia is an independent nonprofit organization, we are proud to be a part of the growing Visions family of organizations worldwide including Visions USA, Visions India, Visions Nicaragua, Visions Guatemala and Visions Sri Lanka.

Visions Ethiopia's work builds off the work of Visions USA, which has been actively supporting deaf education in Ethiopia since 2012.



OUR MISSION: To develop the potential, skills and abilities of persons affected by poverty, disability, gender discrimination or other hardship through initiatives focused on Education, Community Development and Socio-Economic Empowerment.

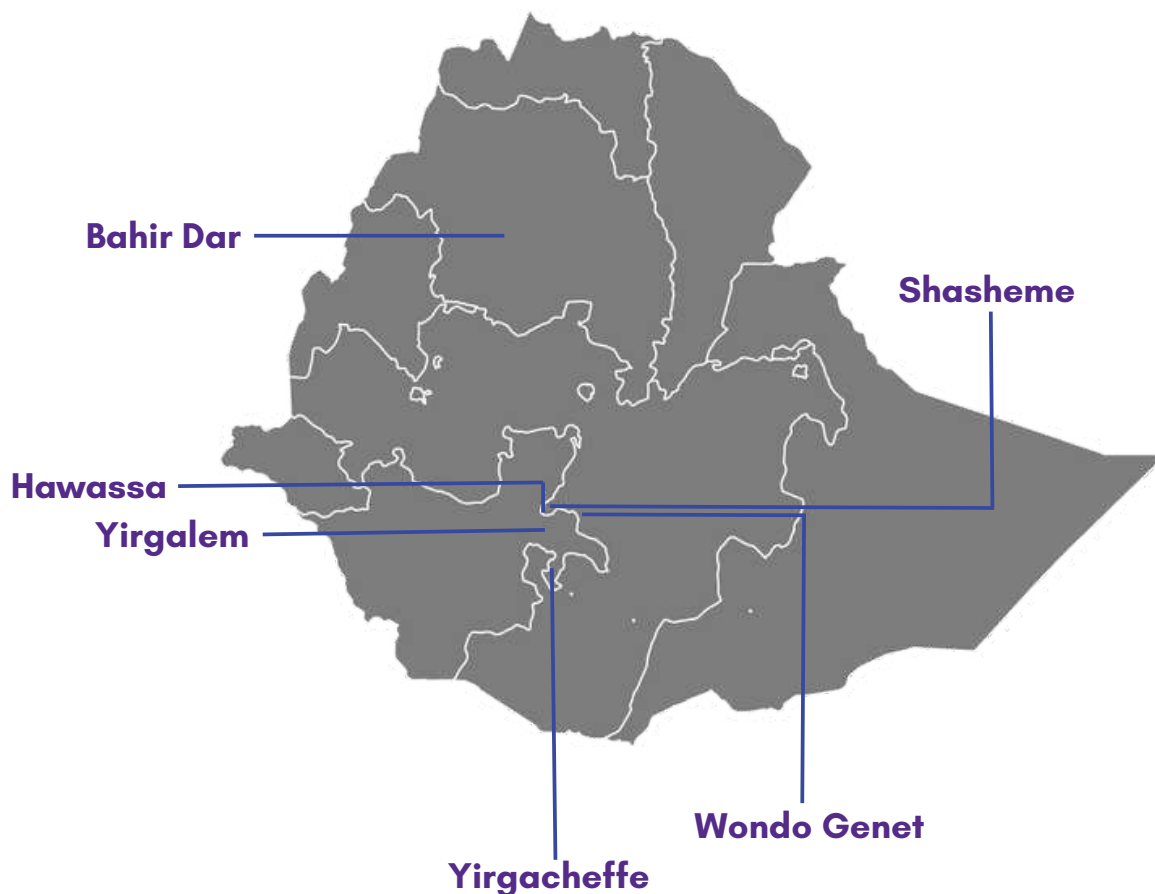


Where We Work

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Our work is currently focused on serving those in need in and around Hawassa, the capital of the Sidama Region in southern Ethiopia, where we operate a Center for the Deaf.

We also currently provide outreach services support to deaf communities in Shashemene (Oromia), Yirgalem (Sidama), Wondo Genet (Sidama), Yirgacheffe (Southern Nations), and Bahir Dar (Amhara).



Recognizing the Need

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Deaf persons in Ethiopia face extreme hardship, social exclusion, and prejudice on a daily basis. For most deaf people in Ethiopia, there are virtually no public services or formal opportunities for education, sign language development, employment, or social inclusion & mobility. With a staggering estimate of more than 5+ million persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, the situation for the majority of these individuals is quite dismal. Best estimates show that more than 95% of deaf persons nationwide are left out of formal education entirely and almost none will ever access formal employment. Deaf civil society has not yet taken root in most places throughout the country, especially those in more rural communities. Knowledge of formal Ethiopian Sign Language (EthSL) is very low, even amongst deaf youth and Special Needs Education teachers at public schools in major urban areas.

95%

Of deaf persons nationwide are left out of formal education entirely and almost none will ever access formal employment

*(*best estimate; no formal census data available)*

DEAFNESS IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is one of the least developed and highly impoverished countries in the world with a population of more than 120 million, ranking 175th globally on the Human Development Index (2021). Aside from the many daily struggles faced by millions of Ethiopians, having a disability adds an extra layer of hardship that makes even the most routine activities difficult or even impossible. For women and girls, additional burdens are added in this male-dominated, traditional society in which women face persistent marginalization, are expected to conform to strict gender norms, and are denied many of the same opportunities and freedoms afforded to their male counterparts.

The 2011 WHO/World Bank World Report on Disability lists hearing loss and deafness as the most common disability worldwide and one of the most debilitating, stating

“A lack of accessible communication and information affects the lives of many disabled people. Individuals with communication difficulties, such as hearing impairment...are at a significant social disadvantage...This disadvantage is particularly experienced in sectors where effective communication is critical – such as those of health care, education, local government, and justice (WB & WHO World Report on Disability; 2011).”

Nationwide there is an extreme lack of services available to the deaf community in particular. Regular challenges faced by the deaf in Ethiopia often include the inability to access basic information or services, receive an education, communicate freely with others (including their own families/communities), hold a meaningful job or trade, or participate in basic community activities.



5+ million

persons who are deaf
or hard-of-hearing
in Ethiopia



Visions Center for the Deaf - Hawassa, Sidama



Building on our own experiences and insights from working with deaf students at public schools in the cities of Bahir Dar, Addis Ababa and Hawassa starting in 2019, Visions Ethiopia established the Visions Center for the Deaf in Hawassa (capital of the Sidama Region) in early 2020 in order to address the growing need for services for the growing deaf and hard-of-hearing community there. This Center, which is based out of a rented private facility in a central part of town, provides regular support to local deaf youth and their families.

Our Students: At a Glance

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80 children attend our Center

80% of our students' families live at or below the poverty line

Sign Language Ability prior to coming to our Center:

57% had no sign language ability

19% had very limited sign language ability

24% had some or a lot of sign language ability



2% of our students had access to educational technology prior to coming to the Center



Our students age range:

2 - 30 years old

70% of deaf youth in general never make it past Grade 2

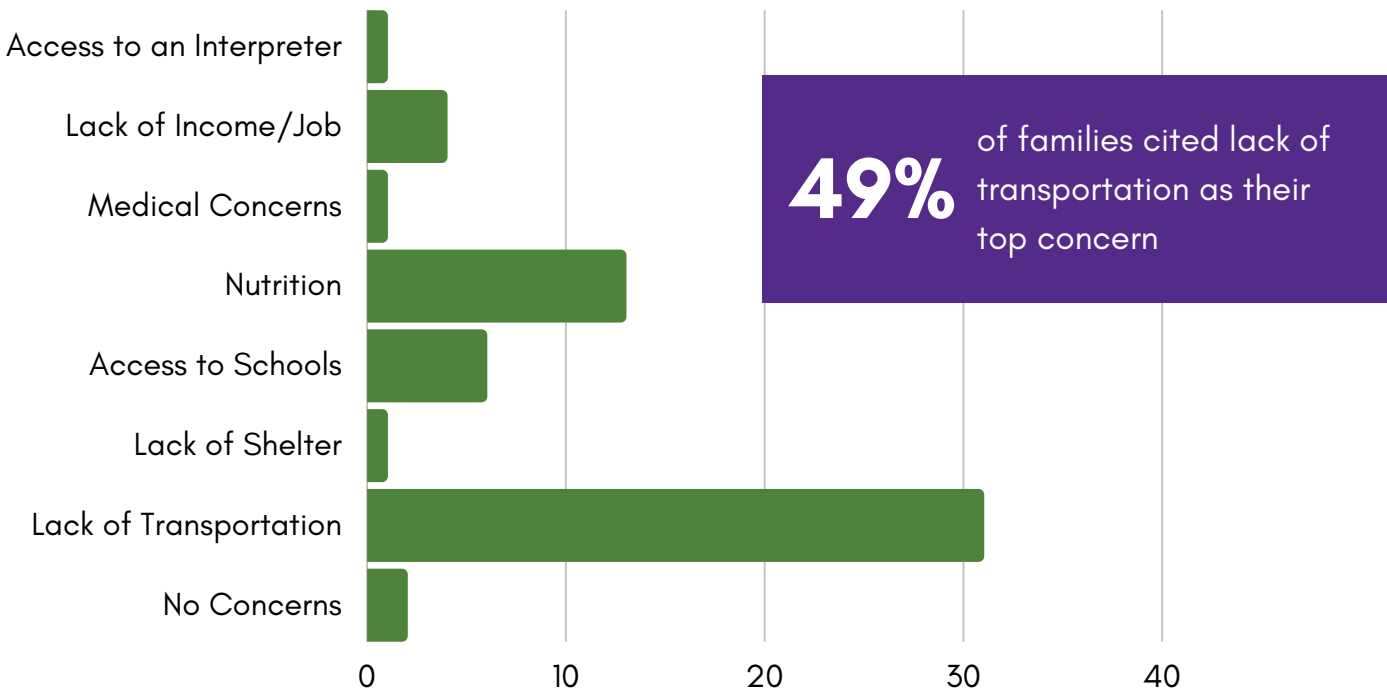
80%

of families say their children would likely not be attending school every day without Visions Ethiopia's support

70% of our students are food insecure

MAIN FAMILY CONCERNS

A survey was conducted to determine the top concerns of family members among a sample of 63 parents. Out of these 63 respondents, just 2 parents reported having no major concerns while the remaining 61 identified several pressing issues. These issues included access to shelter, nutrition, transportation, lack of income or jobs, school-related matters, access to an interpreter, and medical concerns. The survey results presented below can help guide the next steps in ways to support the families of our deaf students and inform strategies to effectively address these issues and improve the overall impact of our efforts.



We understand that transportation is a major concern for many families of our students, with nearly half of them citing it as a top issue. In response, we have implemented a program to cover the transportation fees for students traveling to and from the center. We cover transportation fees for students who use various means of transportation such as motorcycles, vans, and buses. While the closest students reside only 2-3 kilometers away, the majority of our students come from a distance of approximately 10 kilometers. By providing this assistance, we hope to alleviate some of the financial burden associated with transportation and ensure that all students have access to our center's resources and services.

We have also started providing transportation support to deaf youth in Shashemene and Wondo Genet as well, in order to enable more regular access to the free Ethiopian Sign Language trainings our staff hold weekly or twice weekly in each location.



Building a Community

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Our Visions Ethiopia team has expanded both the scope and quality of services for deaf youth at our Visions Center for the Deaf in Hawassa, Sidama in southern Ethiopia, which now serves around 80 children and their families, almost all of whom are from extremely socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.







Services on offer at the Center, all of which are provided free of charge, include a preschool, academic tutoring for all ages, mentorship, sign language training for family & community members, interpreting support, and a daily lunch (including for local deaf young adults who are unemployed or underemployed and are in great financial need). Our Center has become a gathering place for people to find community, language, support, friendship and respect -- the first place of its kind in this area!

Additionally, our staff are now providing sign language and academic support services for deaf youth & young adults in multiple satellite locations across 4 regions -- Oromia; Sidama; Amhara; and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region.



Education & Empowerment

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-  1 Ethiopian Sign Language training & skills development for students, family members, local civil society, and others from the community
-  2 Interpretation services
-  3 Mentorship (predominantly by Deaf professional adults)
-  4 Preschool for early learners (ages 2-6)
-  5 Regular nutritional & transportation support
-  6 Job skills training and support





- We offer free training and skills development in Ethiopian Sign Language to students, their families, local civil servants (such as government workers, healthcare professionals, educators, etc.), and the wider community.
 - Training is provided every Saturday for parents.
 - Training is provided three days during the week for hearing students at public schools.
 - We organize special trainings for professionals or organizations who work with the deaf community, sometimes in partnership with other groups, such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development (ECDD)
 - Students who attend our Center receive daily language instruction and skills development.
- Through these efforts, participants have been able to improve their understanding and fluency in Ethiopian Sign Language, as well as an awareness about deafness and Deaf culture, leading to much more inclusive and effective communication and understanding.

Nutritional Support



90+ meals served per day at our Center (free of charge)

45+ children receive free breakfast and lunch per day (the majority of whom are food insecure)



Early Education

15+ children attend the center's preschool daily



9 hours per day (Monday through Friday) - our preschool is open



5 subjects taught including: English, Amharic, Sign Language, Math & Environmental Science



Growing our Team

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Our team has grown in number over the past year, as well! Aside from our Executive Director Amsalu Desie (who is also a professional interpreter), we currently employ 11 other staff full-time (9 of whom themselves are deaf). Additionally, we have a whole team of volunteers who help out at the Center daily, many of whom are also deaf. This includes local university students and graduates, parents, and other deaf adults.

All these individuals believe in our mission and appreciate finding community and support at our Center. We provide small monthly stipends to several of these volunteers, as runaway unemployment and rampant inflation (35% in 2022!) continue to have serious implications on the lives of most people.



In-kind supplies donated by generous donors of Visions USA were received in June 2022 during the visit of Executive Director Greg Buie & Education Program Officer Niki Castillo

18
Full-time staff
& volunteers in
2022

13
Staff and
volunteers in 2022
who are deaf
themselves

Stories of Hope

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Meet Ayele & Samira

"First of all, thank you so much for making this center happen. I have been looking for a school for my son, but I could not find any. Life is difficult for me, because I am new to this city and gave up my work to come here and put my son's education first. I am committed to that. My work is about 360 kilometers from Hawassa, so I go for a few days and come back. I am grateful to have found a school for my son finally.

The sign language classes you are giving are going well. I am learning and have started communicating with my son. Even though we do not have much time, we are learning. There has already been a big change. Now he is more relaxed, and his behavior is improving.

We thank God that this organization is here, because we have been suffering looking for a school for our son. It was very difficult. Because we keep him at home, he hurts himself when he gets angry, so I cannot go out for work and leave him alone.



I have no words how to say thank you, knowing how things were before.

Now he comes to the center everyday, has his breakfast and lunch here, plays, has friends, and is happy.

It is very difficult to raise a child who is deaf, so we are so grateful for this center. I wish my child to one day become an international professional."



Meet Yemiserach

"I am very happy to see this center, because I have been hiding my son and suffering alone for a long time. Thank you for coming all this way to visit us and to make this center happen, because my son is suffering- he is non-verbal, deaf, and has a serious heart condition. Thank you so much for what you are doing!

I am grateful my son has great teachers here, because he had none before. Now my son has a future."

Meet Mengesha & Kebebush

"Thank you - our child is getting a good education here. She is improving in her school.

She is 10 years old now, and she is progressing in her education. She used to misbehave, but now she is not, and she loves coming to the center.

She is now thriving more than her sister actually. I hope my daughter will one day be a journalist and lead a good life as a working professional."



Our Needs & Next Steps

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On the horizon, we have plans to expand services in 2023, including hearing testing & counseling, interpretation services, more advanced academic tutoring and support, and community advocacy / education. Some specific objectives for the coming year include:

01 — Hiring More Interpreters

We received budget approval from Visions USA to hire 1 more full-time interpreter for 2023 and are actively working to fill that position. Ultimately, we wish to hire at least **2 more full-time interpreters**, one of whom would be assigned to providing free interpreting services around the community at such establishments as hospitals, banks, government offices, courts, etc., and the other of whom would work with deaf students across public schools in Hawassa.

***The cost to hire a full-time Interpreter is around \$300/month.**

02 — Hiring More Deaf Teachers

We are in need of more deaf teachers to provide more specialized academic support to deaf youth of all ages and in all subjects. We are also hoping to do rigorous curriculum mapping this year and hire subject experts who also know Ethiopian Sign Language that can serve as expert tutors, as our students are advancing in their education and require more support.

***The cost to hire a full-time academic tutor is around \$200/month.**

03 — Initiating Job Training Programs

Our families need job training programs and income-generating support schemes to address the issue of mass unemployment / underemployment. We are looking into options for creating our own small businesses that can employ multiple people and provide them with hands-on job training and skills development support.

04 — Expanding Transportation Support

Transportation support is vital to increasing the total number of deaf youth & young adults who have access to our services, as well as to expanding the frequency of their visits. We are hoping to secure a small bus this year to meet the ever-increasing demand for transportation support, which would enable us to both reach a much larger audience as well as to provide services with greater regularity.

***The cost of a new bus (22-seater Toyota Coaster) with import fees and duties is approximately \$60,000.**

05 — Introducing Hearing Testing and Counseling Services

Hearing testing is vital to families' understanding of deafness and to creating an environment that enables their deaf children to thrive. No such hearing testing or counseling services are available currently in this area, although the demand and need are extremely high. We envision having both a physical testing site at our Center in Hawassa, along with mobile services that utilize tablets and specific mobile hearing testing technologies in order to reach the rural populations as well. As the vast majority of Ethiopians still reside in rural communities, bringing these services to them is essential. Ideally, hearing testing would be done during infancy, although Ethiopia has a long, long way to go before that process will be the norm. We wish to do our part in pushing this important service forward!





Thank you for believing in the potential of youth education and empowerment alongside us!

Our Sponsors



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