

**AMBO LAZARIST DEAF SCHOOL  
END OF YEAR REPORT 2017 -18**



**AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR!**



Some of the Deaf children who gathered to meet us at Enchine. (3.5-hour bus journey from Ambo).

## **AUGUST: Visit to the rural districts to assess the situation of Deaf children.**

Our visit to the rural districts revealed the reality of so many Deaf children living in what can only be described as 'double isolation'. Not only were they living in isolated communities, but were also living isolated lives within those communities.

This was due to the fact that people in rural areas often associate deafness or disability as a curse. Very few of the children we met had ever been to school as neither their parents nor the teachers in the local schools considered them capable of learning. Speaking to the parents of the children in their local language, our principal Mr Eshetu highlighted the many misconceptions that people have about deafness. He also told the parents about the Deaf school in Ambo and the potential it has to unlock the capacity for their children to participate fully and equally in both education and society. Given the right educational support, their Deaf child has the same ability to learn as their hearing siblings. While some of the parents found a lot of what was being said very challenging, the majority seemed relieved to learn this information and desperate for their child to receive such an opportunity. Indeed begged us to build such a school in their district. The social affairs employees mentioned that there were many more Deaf children registered with them, however some of them were too afraid to travel from their homes to attend these meetings.



Meeting some of the Deaf children living in the rural district of Gedo





18 of the new students  
who registered at the ALDS 2017/18

**SEPTEMBER:  
New Students Register at the  
ALDS  
A New Space at Lydia's Place.**

After our visit to the rural districts, we anticipated about 5 or 6 students might register at the school. We were genuinely a little shocked and of course delighted when day after day new students turned up at the gate of the school

asking to be registered.

Over a period of two weeks 22 new students enrolled at the school. The majority of these had arranged to stay with relations living in the town. A number had been accompanied to Ambo by an older sibling and were renting small houses close to the school. (Some of the student sponsorship money goes towards paying the cost of rental accommodation for the rural Deaf children).



A typical mud hut house in Ambo



Some of our students are  
developing a bit of attitude!

We had a slight concern about whether the new and the old students would mix together. However, within a few weeks nearly all of the newcomers had settled in and new friendships had been formed, these friendships have only been strengthened over the school term.

Unfortunately a couple of the children found it difficult to adjust or their parents missed them and so they returned home. We are hopeful that we might be able to welcome them back some time in the future.

One of the biggest joys of working at the ALDS this year has been the opportunity to observe the children from the countryside discover themselves at the school and to discover a language that allows them to build friendships and gain access to learning.



### Lydia's Place.

September also saw Lydia's Place become a space that was available to the children. They enjoyed the fact that it was a much more free and fluid space (we were using water based paints for the art classes...) It also proved really popular for the children to

learn maths through the Numicon method. They could gather around tables and engage in learning with each other. As mentioned above the space was also ideal for the organising of the workshop for teachers. There is a TV in the room which is used for showing some educational videos, but they love when we put on Charlie Chaplain... It's also the space for craft work and using the Kindle Tablets. We hope to put in a white board next Sept, it will be a sort of break out space from the formal setting of the classrooms...



**OCTOBER:  
ALDS: Rural Outreach Day.**

For those rural Deaf children not lucky enough to have the opportunity to attend the school we organised a 'Rural Outreach Program'. We invited the children, their parents and social affairs employees to visit the Deaf school and participate in a day of fun and learning. It proved to be a huge success and was repeated five times



Rural Outreach Program: children and parents gather for a lesson in Sign Language

during the school year. Again, it was a privilege to be able to observe so many children arrive at the school; nervous and a little overawed by the welcome they received from our students. However, they quickly began to see themselves reflected in our students, could see that there was a means of communication that was accessible to them and were soon fully involved in playing some sports, trying to learn a Sign or two.



Ms. Fiona Broderick and her husband Matthew attended our final Rural Outreach Day in July. Fiona works at the Irish Embassy in Addis. The Embassy have been very supportive of the school.

However, another vital part of the program was the opportunity to meet with the parents of the children and facilitate them in discussing their concerns about their Deaf child, the problems they encounter in the local community, their exclusion from education etc. All of them agreed that having the opportunity to come to the school had really opened their minds to the potential their

child possesses. They were intrigued to see the students who are already attending the school display just how capable they are when given the proper support in learning. A boarding facility at the ALDS would allow so many of these children the opportunity to prove their own abilities.



Teaching maths to our pre-school children.

## **NOVEMBER:**

**Margaret Farrell organises a series of 'Numicon' workshops for the Teachers and a celebration to mark the graduation of our first group of students from the ALDS**

Ms Margaret Farrell, a retired teacher for the Deaf from Dublin returned to the to the ALDS to volunteer for a second time. She spent over three weeks at the

school teaching in the mornings and in the afternoons, Margaret facilitated a wonderful series of workshops, introducing the teachers at both the Deaf and the Kindergarten schools to the 'Numicon' method of teaching maths. A kind benefactor in Ireland had donated a complete set of Numicon aids to the schools. We used 'Lydia's Space' for the workshops and it proved to be ideal for allowing the teachers interact and engage with each other. She also introduced our older students in Grade 8 to Circular Weaving. Indeed it could be said, that Margaret has now woven herself into the hearts of the students and teachers here at the ALDS.



## **Grade 8 Graduation.**

November was also a landmark month for the school as we celebrated the success of our first group of grade 8 students in the State Exams. At an early age many of the students would have been told such an achievement was not possible for a Deaf person. However, they were encouraged to



Celebrating the graduation of our Grade 8 students. Our first group to take the Government exam.

believe in themselves, to work hard and develop their abilities and we are delighted that each of them passed the exam. The students are now in Grade 9 at the government school. However, they struggled to adapt, as they do not have the necessary back up, support and understanding. Unfortunately the ALDS is not in a position to offer education at these grades, as it would require the building new classrooms, employing new teachers and upgrading our facilities. We have however, arranged to deliver a 'Deaf Awareness Training Course' to the teachers, staff and students at the government school. *(In May and June of this year the ALDS to provided tutorials for the students as they prepared for their grade 9 exams. Only recently we learned that despite the difficulties they faced in integrated education, all of the students passed their exams and have graduated into Grade 10)*



Our students were delighted with their bright new uniforms.

### **FEBRUARY: A New Beginning – A New Uniform.**

With so many new students coming to the school, we decided to update our uniform to something a little more colourful and uplifting... the students were delighted with the new colour. Having 52 students leave the school each day and

head down dressed as smartly and brightly as they were, caused a bit of stir... that they were signing and smiling made an even bigger impression. In Ambo each school is clearly defined by its uniform and there is no mistaking ours!





Angela. Two of Fr. Stephen's sisters and a good friend helped put together a display for the Patrick's Day Gala Ball highlighting the work of the ALDS

## **MARCH: St. Patrick's Gala Ball.**

This year the Irish Association in Ethiopia chose the ALDS to be one of the beneficiaries of the annual St. Patrick's Gala Ball. It was a wonderful evening and an opportunity for us to let people know about the needs of Deaf people, the work of the school in Ambo and to celebrate the very close connection between

Ireland and Ambo. Recently the Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ms Sonya Hyland presented a cheque for over €8000 to the school (proceeds from the Ball) Fr. Stephen's two sisters and a friend were visiting him at the time and helped to put together a display highlighting the work of the Deaf School. They also had a great evening celebrating with over 600 guests who had paid to attend the Ball. We are keeping our fingers crossed that the ALDS will be chosen as beneficiaries again next year....

## **APRIL – MAY**

*Throughout the year, but most especially in the months of April and May there was a great deal of civil unrest in the Oromo region and Ambo town. Without going into the political issues that led to the problems, the resulting disturbances meant that all schools in the region were closed for long periods of time. I estimate that the students missed a total of 8 weeks of education. Thankfully the year has ended with the restoration of peace and calm and people are very excited about the appointment of the new Prime Minister Mr Abiy. It is hoped that the reforms he is implementing will be a new dawn for Ethiopia.*



**JUNE: Schools Immersion Program.  
Exams and Graduation of Grade 8 Students.  
A Visit From Professor Lorraine Leeson.**



During the months of June and July students from two

Vincentian Secondary Schools in Dublin joined us: St. Vincent's Castleknock and St. Paul's Raheny. Each school spent two and a half weeks in Ambo facilitating a summer program for all the local children, teaching them English and maths and generally having some fun. A significant highlight of their time in Ambo was the opportunity to go to the Deaf school where our students took time to teach them Ethiopian Sign Language. The Irish boys very quickly picked up the basics in Ethiopian Sign Language allowing them the opportunity to really engage with the Deaf students and even teach some maths classes. Of course there was the annual Ireland V Ethiopia football match to be played, a very competitive affair. (Ethiopia won 5-4)



A pupil from St. Vincent's College teaching maths at the ALDS



**Grade 8.**

In June our second group of Grade 8 Students participated in the State Exams and graduated from the ALDS. They are anxiously awaiting the results, which will decide if they can progress to Grade 9 at the government school next year. We are of course sorry to see them go, but delighted we were able to give them the opportunity to progress this far in their education. We will continue to support them in what way possible. We wont have a graduation class again for four years. In the mean time we will examine the possibility of providing grades 9/10 at the ALDS for students graduating in 2022.



### **Visit from Lorraine Leeson (A Professor at Trinity College)**

We were delighted to welcome Ms Lorraine Leeson to the school for a brief visit. She received the usual warm and Ambo welcome and the students were delighted that she possessed some ability to communicate with them. Lorraine set up the School of Deaf Studies at Trinity College and is a professor of linguistics. She was able to identify something special happening in the development of Sign Language here at the ALDS. We hope to keep in touch and explore some links between Ambo and Trinity College...

### **Your Support Is Essential To The Success Of The School.**

As we said, it's been an extraordinary year here at the ALDS and such a year is only possible through the generosity of people who assist us with donations or by sponsoring a child.

If you would like to support us in our work here, please see the information about our new website which is printed below.





The **Ethiopia Deaf Project** now has its own website.  
[www.edp-ambo.com](http://www.edp-ambo.com)

We are especially grateful to Olivia Flynn for  
volunteering her skill and time to build the site.

We developed the site in response to so many people  
who were asking how they could Sponsor A Child or  
make a Donation to the work of the ALDS.  
This is now a matter of simply pressing a few buttons.

**Sponsoring A Child** is the most effective way of helping  
us provide a life changing opportunity to a Deaf child  
here in Ambo and you will be able to follow their  
progress throughout their education here at the school.

The Site is also designed to help people, but especially  
schools to become more aware of the reality of life for  
people in a developing country, especially if you are  
living with a disability.

It also contains a series of Videos which will help you to  
learn the basics of Irish Sign Language!

We would be more than happy to receive any feedback  
or advice on how we might improve this site...

Please visit us at <https://edp-ambo.com>

You can also follow us on facebook:  
**EthiopiaDeafProject**

