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The library at the Qwiha Primary School was planted by Cynthia Calabrese and Mark Gelfand, a couple who have done much philanthropy in Ethiopia, mostly in the sciences. Cynthia, specifically, has a passion for the literacy of children. She writes, “My grandmother never learned to read, write or speak the English language. So my mother, as she grew and had her own children, realized the importance of education as well as the power of being able to read, and the public library became my personal information highway.”

Before the implementation of the TLMP Library, Qwiha Elementary had about 500 books but, as is often the case, they were high school and college level English grammar texts. Elementary aged kids need picture books and stories written in their languages to thrive, so the books they had weren’t relevant.

The School Director was excited and thankful to receive the new library books and furniture. He is very committed to the school and recently had a new block of classrooms built. He is experimenting with what he calls “self-contained classrooms”, where each class is outfitted with books and teaching materials of its own, rather than borrowing from the materials room. His goal is to create a true reading culture at Qwiha Elementary with the library at its core.

Students use the library for access to books, but they also find a quiet haven to study within its walls. The library provides proper furniture and lighting that they may not have at home. It is a place for them to prepare for national exams that will dictate whether they get the chance to pursue further schooling.

Ephrem is 12, and in grade 7. He lives outside the town and walks 30 minutes to school. He is ranked 18th in his class of 50. His father grows beans and vegetables while his mother tends a small shop. They live together with Ephrem’s grandmother in a one-room stone house that his father built. He speaks Tigrinya and Amharic. Although he often has to work on the farm after school, he uses the library to study as much as he can. He likes to read math and stories in Tigrinya and English.

Girmanesh is 14 years old and in grade 8. She lives in the village with her mother and 3 brothers in a two-room mud



Cynthia Calabrese and Mark Gelfand



Staff

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Ephrem, age 12

house that the family built. Her father was a soldier, but has passed away. Her mother braids hair for money. She is fourth in her class of 50, and uses the library every day to study for exams. She reads old 12th grade exams and some fiction. She is proficient in Amharic and Tigrinya, and speaks some English. Her dream is to be a doctor.

About Qwiha

Qwiha (Kwiha) is located in Northern Ethiopia in the Tigray Region. The name comes from the local word for willows, which are abundant in the area. It is a small town about 10km south of Mekele in Tigray, just south of the Mekele airport. The village has a long history with long-time military associations. The Italians located a base near the school. Supposedly the school's current soccer pitch was the Italians' pitch some 70+ years ago. The Ethiopian military currently has a base across the street from the school.



Girmanesh, age 14



Children at the Qwiha Primary School

Qwiha Elementary was founded in 1945 for military families. It's one of the oldest schools in the region. The school serves 1300 students in grades K-8, about 350 of who are orphans (most from HIV/AIDS) sponsored by the Catholic Church and by an Ethiopian organization called OSA. About 25% of the students' families are farming families. The rest come from the town of Qwiha. Some of the children are children of military who are left with mothers or with extended family. Parents and/or caregivers run small shops, sell *kolo* or *t'ela* (barley mix and traditional beer). Some of the mothers run small

businesses. Children from the town itself walk only 10-15 minutes to school, while farmer children walk 30-45 minutes to school.

Cynthia Calabrese and Mark Gelfand are also the generous donors of the Chankuar Dalkoch School Library in the Gambella Region.

