



CATHERINE HAMLIN FISTULA FOUNDATION

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 3 DECEMBER 2020

CHAIR'S REPORT FOR PERIOD 1 JULY 2019 – 30 JUNE 2020

We started FY20 full of hope and expectation of a prosperous and busy year for all at CHFF and in Ethiopia. Fundraising was going well; we received some generous bequests, and the September and Christmas appeals were well on track against budget.

Discussions begun in October 2019 with Mamitu Gashe to tell the story of her life and the vital role that she has played at HFE entwined with the Hamlin's and the patients, having herself been one. A publisher was found and the long and arduous work of interviewing Mamitu with a translator beside her in Addis, whilst Sue Williams the chosen author sat on the other side of the world at the end of the phone.

The worst bushfires in living memory that hit the east coast of Australia across December and January gave us pause as we pondered the destruction and heartache across the country. The generosity of Australians saw no bounds and we became acutely aware that 2020 may be a time of difficulty for us to raise needed funds for Ethiopia and the work of HFE.

Then we were hit with another tragedy. Sadly, Dr Catherine Hamlin passed away on the 18th March after a life well lived. A fitting tribute was conducted for Dr Hamlin in Addis Ababa with the President and Prime Minister, along with many hundreds of mourners in attendance at the funeral and memorial service and the sadness of so many at her passing was very much on display. It was a particularly difficult time for the staff of the hospital and all HFE's locations as so many of the staff had personally known and been patients of Dr Hamlin. The sadness was also exemplified by the beginnings of the COVID pandemic which meant that very few overseas friends, family and funding partners could make the journey to Addis to bid her farewell.

However, from this tragedy springs hope. The Hamlin Model of Care lives on through the hospitals and the Hamlin trained midwives working across the country and the love and care that first begun over 60 years ago by the Hamlin's is now in the safe and caring hands of our Ethiopian doctors and nurses, as envisaged by Reg and Catherine when they first set up the Addis Ababa Hospital.

Eradicating Fistula. Forever.

Catherine Hamlin Fistula Foundation

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When we were first faced with implications of the COVID pandemic it was as we launched the Wendy Sharpe Art Exhibition - this was a terrific event and we were so lucky to have been able to hold an art exhibition and sale just before Sydney and Australia as a whole went into lockdown. Wendy's paintings were so evocative of Hamlin, the hospital, staff, and patients. The auction was a tremendous success with all paintings sold and through Wendy's incredible generosity 100% of sales went to CHFF to support Hamlin's work in Ethiopia.

However, it was with great trepidation that we faced the rest of the year, not knowing what effect the economic consequences of COVID-19 would have upon our fundraising ability. I would like to thank and commend the staff of CHFF for their incredible dedication and efforts to keep our donors engaged and to continue to look to new ways to increase our fundraising during this time. All staff agreed to a reduction in hours through the most difficult time and the Federal Government Job Keeper scheme was a welcome fillip.

I must also acknowledge the wonderful support that Hamlin Fistula Australia gave to us as we faced an uncertain fundraising landscape. To provide security of funding to HFE, in the early days, as we waited to see how the year unfolded, HFA agreed to not only continue their usual capital funding commitments but to also provide a monthly operational grant to HFE replacing funds that would normally have been remitted by CHFF.

Pleasingly our donors have stayed strong and loyal - the Regular Giving Program has continued to grow at pace and our attrition rate has been below annual expectations. Major donors have also been incredibly generous, and the tax appeal was enormously successful. Due to COVID 19 we were unable to go ahead with the March fundraising trip to Ethiopia, but other areas of fundraising were able to compensate for this.

One of the most interesting outcomes from COVID -19 has been the resurgence in sales through the Hamlin Online shop. The shop at Turrumurra was closed in June, as per our strategic plan to focus on online and this has proved a successful financial strategy. In addition, we formed some new retail partnerships including with Birds Nest, an online shopping portal aimed mainly at women in rural and remote regions of Australia and this is bringing a whole new customer and donor base to CHFF.

As can be seen from the Annual Financial statements our fundraising revenue has stayed healthy and this has been a source of great relief. It means that we are now well placed for the coming year as we are sure that the economic implications of COVID are still to play out. We have been able to retain a strong surplus to meet our running costs for the coming year, plus provide the needed financial support to HFE.

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2019/2020 also saw CHFF focus on ensuring that all systems were fit for purpose and considerable time, expertise and funds were spent on upgrading and improving our data management systems to ensure that we are both maximizing our donor reach but also ensuring strong data and cyber security. This was an important financial commitment for CHFF but one that was vitally necessary to ensure the effective and profitable sustainability of the organisation into the future. We also have broadened our fundraising footprint into the USA and Canada with a focus on providing HFE with a visible outreach in those countries and ensuring that we can increase year on year the needed funds to underpin and secure HFE and its work. Many of the smaller partners of Hamlin are struggling in their efforts to increase their funding commitments and Australia must step up to ensure that shortfalls are met wherever possible.

The important work that CHFF exists to support has continued in Ethiopia and though it has not always been easy to work through COVID, with transport and other lockdowns limiting at times the ability of patients to reach our hospitals, staff at HFE have been brave and stoic and their priority has always been to support and help the many women who have presented at the hospitals and clinics. COVID safe practices were introduced and PPE equipment available. There have only been a handful of positive cases amongst staff and patients, all immediately placed into isolation and with only one patient requiring oxygen and no cases in ICU.

A tremendous amount of work has also been done by HFE to ensure that the hospitals and clinics are fit for purpose and that costs are contained but priority needs are being met. We commend the leadership of HFE - Dr Tesfaye Mamo and his executive team, the Clinical team led by Medical Director Dr Demerew and the Board led by Dr Ephrem Lemargo, for their commitment and hard work in ensuring the best possible care for all women who seek help from Hamlin and their treasured guardianship of the Hamlin Model of Care.

In addition, a new mode of reporting has been introduced. The Treatment Dashboard records patient admissions, number and type of surgical procedures, fistula closure rate, incontinence cure rate, outpatients and patients discharged - at each of Hamlin's six hospitals. These results are vital to enable Hamlin's Management and Clinical Teams to monitor and evaluate each hospital's performance by month and cumulatively for the year, so they can make informed, timely decisions. CHFF has been financially supporting this work through the engagement of UK management consultants who have spent considerable time working and training HFE staff to better monitor and report.

The midwifery training has continued remotely as best it could during the year and HFE College staff have gone to enormous lengths to ensure that all students received the resources and materials that they needed. There was a remote graduation of the class of 2020.

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I would like to acknowledge and thank the Board of CHFF for their commitment and engagement and for the tremendous support that they give to the CEO and staff, as well as to myself as Chair. I am incredibly proud of the way that we have all pulled together as a team as we faced this past year and the support that the CEO has especially given to Dr Tesfaye Mamo and his team in Ethiopia as they have all navigated the vagaries of the year.

We now look towards a 2021 with a sense of renewed hope and optimism. “Healing Lives” Mamitu’s story has been published in Australia and NZ to great acclaim, reaching No 1 on Amazon’s Women’s Health List and No 11 for Black and African biographies (in the company of Michelle Obama’s three versions of her autobiography and two versions of Barak Obama’s) and it is hoped that it will soon be available through UK, European and US publishers. Even more exciting is that Mamitu has also returned to the operating theatre and is thriving in her role once again as a surgeon.

Hopefully the current civil unrest in the Tigray region will be resolved soon and that for HFE and CHFF 2021 will be a year of great achievement- the women of Ethiopia need us to continue our work and to tackle fistula with all the resources that we have available. Patient Identification is the priority for 2021 and a major campaign is currently being developed to reach the furthest corners of Ethiopia, working towards the achievable goal of eradication of fistula by 2030.

Julie White
Chair of the Board
Catherine Hamlin Fistula Foundation

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