



**ERITREA**  
**Shaping Futures**



**W**e have always said that we are not a sticking plaster organisation; we're here to create real and lasting change for every child who needs us and we will do whatever it takes to achieve this. Our ultimate aim is to be in a position where our direct support is no longer needed, so we are pleased to be able to share the news that we have reached a watershed moment in our work in Eritrea. The Government of Eritrea, who is also firmly committed to ensuring that all children grow up within families, is now in a position to take over the network of Small Family Homes (SFHs) we established.

Eritrea, and the Eritrean Government in 1999 to develop a new form of family-based care so that these children would not be condemned to life in an institution. We had already established SFHs in our country programmes across Central and Eastern Europe and other parts of Africa so we adapted this successful approach to suit the children's needs and the country's culture and traditions.

This is truly remarkable because when we started working in the country nine years ago, Eritrea had been ravaged by 30 years of war. Eritrea's economy, physical infrastructure and social fabric had all been devastated and the country was facing a long journey back to stability. The prolonged conflict had left over 100,000 orphans. A lot of these children were cared for by their extended families but some had no one to turn to and they were growing up alone, facing a bleak future.

Like our other SFHs, these Homes were to provide a stable, family environment for children to grow up in. The houses themselves are on ordinary residential streets and a house mother, who lives there permanently, cares for up to 12 children. The children go to school, play and go about their daily lives like any other child would but for our Eritrean SFH project we had to go to special lengths to ensure that the children were a true part of their communities.

Dr Tseggai Gherezghiher Director of our implementing partner Vision Eritrea, explained,

We started working with our local partner, Vision

"When you work with orphans there is no end to your commitment to these children, as what you put in place for them now will affect the rest of their lives. We are always looking forward, not just at the day to day but at their whole lives as we are not just raising orphans but members of a community."

**GROWING UP ALONE**

It is challenging enough to be an orphan but in Eritrea your heritage plays such an important part in adult life that not having a family, and the belonging and identity that comes with it, is a severe disadvantage. Your surname, tribe and the region of the country you are from are all interlinked and without this grounding, you are unlikely to be fully accepted into a community. In Eritrea especially, the community is at the heart of day to day living and you can not lead a happy and fulfilled life without being a real part of this.

Tseggai added, "We needed to ensure that the local communities were completely on board when we established the Small Family Homes. From day one, we held meetings and encouraged community elders to be part of the decision making process. All the Homes were named by the local community and this community wide sense of responsibility really helped the project become accepted."

Without this acceptance the children would not have had land or marriage rights in line with local customs. For example, it is the responsibility of a young adult's tribe to start them off in life by giving them a piece of land when they come of age. The community then helps the young adult build their home to settle in. However, without recognition by their tribe and the support of the community, these children would not be entitled to this land and this would affect their marriage prospects.

**A FAMILY AND A FUTURE**

Tseggai continued, "Family is such a large part of what makes us who we are and this project is unique in that it works not only to give these children a family and a home, but we also made sure that they are legally recognised within their communities. This is a major step towards making their adult lives normal and giving them the opportunities they have a right to, such as the freedom to marry, which would otherwise be difficult, if not impossible."

Now that the children in our SFHs are becoming adults this work to ensure they are fully integrated in their communities is more important than ever. But it is not just the children we directly cared for who are benefitting from our work as we have shared our approach with the Government and other NGOs so that our work will have a lasting legacy. Additionally, by working with a local partner organisation we have helped to build the capacity of the country's childcare professionals so that our work will continue through them.

This project has been a challenging yet gratifying one, especially for Tseggai. "It is so rewarding to see children that we have helped really go on to achieve their potential," he said. "Recently there were two children who had been in the programme for seven years. They had come to us when they were just 10 and 11 years old and they had nothing. No family, no home and no hope. Having lived in the secure and loving environment of a Small Family Home, they attended school and their confidence grew. They have both just left to go to university and look forward to fulfilling and exciting lives. Without this project, their situation today would be dramatically different."

The Government of Eritrea, under the watchful eye of Vision Eritrea, will now take over our projects but we will always be on hand to offer guidance and support should it be needed.

*We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported our work in Eritrea as without you, none of this would have been possible.*

**Below:**  
Dr Gherezghiher visiting a Small Family Home



**Above:**  
Children get the care and support they need in Small Family Homes