

LEGAL RIGHTS

Fighting for justice for children.



Our legal program started in 2006 when we discovered a desperate grandmother and her 8 year old granddaughter sleeping in the corner of our office. The pair were distraught; the girl had been raped by her HIV+ father and her mother had recently died of AIDS.

The case was taken on by Rahel, a member of the HFC staff. It was a daunting job for a recent law graduate with few legal books working from an office made from a used shipping container. This however, was the least of her difficulties.

The police refused to charge the father because he was an influential military man and they had little regard for the evidence of children. This did not deter Rahel or the brave grandmother and girl. They persistently pressured the police, gathered evidence and rallied the local community until the police had no choice but to charge the father. Rahel then supported the pair during the long court hearing and along with them, endured constant death threats, stalking and harassment from the accused father. After an exhausting trial and appeal, the father was eventually convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

The girl is now sponsored by HFC to live with her caring grandmother. HFC has given them a chance to live safely and provided them with psychosocial support to deal with their considerable trauma and grief. The girl is now doing well in grade 8 and is fortunately HIV negative.

Although this case is extreme, it is not exceptional. Children in Ethiopia face considerable abuse and exploitation.

Orphaned and vulnerable children need help to protect their basic civil rights. When a parent dies and there is no-one around to protect the remaining children, it is not uncommon for a neighbour or surviving relative to steal any remaining property, or for the landlord to evict the children and force them to live on the street.

In a recent case, HFC represented Elizabeth and Abel when their step-father tried to evict them from their mother's home and take all their possessions after her death. The court ruled in favour of Elizabeth and Abel and ordered the step-father to leave the house and return the property to the children. Elizabeth and Abel are now sponsored by HFC, have a safe place to live and can continue with their

schooling.

Since it first started, our legal project has supported children in over 55 cases. Until recently, we also ran an important child rights education program for the community but unfortunately recent laws passed by the Ethiopian government have made it illegal to conduct child rights education.

The success of the legal program is largely due to the dedication of HFC's staff, particularly Rahel. Like many of HFC's staff in Ethiopia, Rahel personally understands the plight of orphaned children having been one herself. It is through the love and support of HFC's director, Woinshet Maresha, that Rahel was placed in a loving foster family which allowed her to get an education and grow into an inspiring young woman who dedicates her life to using her legal skills to work with HFC to support and protect children.

HFC would like to congratulate Rahel for her dedication and hard work. We also thank Kim Lovegrove, of Lovegrove and Lord, who is the major supporter of the legal project. We welcome other financial support for this important project.

GIVING HOPE

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