



**About Us: Healing Hands of Joy** (HHoJ) is a non-profit 501c3 NGO founded in 2010 that is headquartered in Charlotte, NC, U.S. and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Beginning operations in the Mekele, Tigray Region (northern Ethiopia) in 2010, HHOJ scaled-up its operations to include two more regions: Bahir Dar, Amhara (northern Ethiopia); and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR –southern Ethiopia). Our growth continued into 2021 with the latest facility opening in the Oromia region in partnership with Jimma University Hospital. The Addis Ababa office houses our national office that works as a central unit to facilitate and coordinate all planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of our programs.

HHoJs works in collaboration with Hamlin Hospital and its Hamlin Fistula Treatment Centers and university hospitals, as well as Jimma University Medical Center, Mattu Hamlin Fistula Treatment Center (Oromia region), Yirgalem Hamlin Fistula Treatment Center (SNNPRS), and Mekele Hamlin Fistula Treatment Center (Tigray region). Additional partnerships include the Regional Health Bureau, the Federal Ministry of Health, Health Extension Worker program, schools, churches, health centers, regional women's associations, and religious leaders. Our efforts focus on improving the maternal healthcare system in sub-Saharan Ethiopia with a goal to eliminate obstetric fistula in Ethiopia by 2030.

HHoJ's \$2M FY 2025 operating budget employs 65 full time and 12 part time staff in Ethiopia, all who are from the regions they work in and who speak the local languages. HHoJ's eleven-member Board of Directors represent leaders in fields that include, but not limited to: business, law, real estate, faith-based organizations, global health, accounting, and government. Collectively, they have spent decades in Africa working on a myriad of health initiatives, financial management, education, and the Ethiopian banking system, to name a few.

**The Need:** Obstetric fistula is an entirely preventable and treatable childbirth injury caused by prolonged, obstructed labor that results in stillbirth, chronic incontinence, spousal abandonment, social stigma, and personal shame. It is estimated there are over 142,387 existing fistula patients in Ethiopia with 9,000 new ones every year, the majority which occur among underserved or poor women in rural areas. Founder Allison Shigo established HHoJ after witnessing the profound need for obstetric fistula prevention, case identification, and reintegration services while working on the Emmy Award-winning documentary "A Walk to Beautiful". [A Walk To Beautiful](#) followed women living with fistula in rural Ethiopia seeking care at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital

**Our Work:** Healing Hands of Joy's holistic Safe Motherhood Ambassador™ Training program, with training centers in the Amhara, SNNP, and Oromia regions of Ethiopia, along with active Ambassadors and staff in Tigray provides spiritual, physical, emotional, and economic **Rehabilitation** of obstetric fistula survivors, as well as support for reintegration back into their families and communities. Ambassadors serve as volunteer Community Health Workers that educate their community and grow awareness of obstetric fistula as part of a **Prevention** strategy to promote safe childbirth practices, and who assist with **Identification** of hidden or any cases of existing obstetric fistula to bring these women in for treatment. To date, we have trained almost 4,000 Safe Motherhood Ambassadors and supported the safe delivery of 28,000 babies. A full list of our Programs and descriptions is provided on the reverse side of page.

Throughout HHoJ's 15-year history, our faith and dedication to the women of rural Ethiopia have driven our programs and services in support of our mission, "to improve maternal child healthcare in Ethiopia and eliminate preventable childbirth injuries including obstetric fistula."

## ***Rehabilitation***

**Safe Motherhood Ambassador (SMA) Program:** Fistula survivors undergo a 17-day training program to become Safe Motherhood Ambassadors. They receive training to promote maternal health by organizing conferences for pregnant women, collaborating with local health groups, and identifying new obstetric fistula cases. They also receive life skills training, enabling them to start small businesses to support themselves, their families, and boost the local economy.

**Housing Support for Gender-Based Violence Survivors:** Women survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) face unique circumstances. After residential rehabilitation in an HHoJ center, the next step is to help them secure income so they can afford housing. HHoJ closely monitors their mental and spiritual health during this rebuilding phase, with the goal of long-term self-sufficiency and reintegration.

**Small Business Support & Continuing Care Support:** Women receive small business support and training from Healing Hands of Joy after rehabilitation. This economic support has helped women multiply their assets, support their families, and enables their volunteer work as Safe Motherhood Ambassadors.

**Male family Member Workshops:** Male family members generally act as decision makers in rural Ethiopia. We host sessions to educate them about support for fistula survivors as they return to family and community, prevention strategies, and how Healing Hands of Joy is an ongoing resource.

**Individualized Reintegration and Follow-Up Support:** Individualized reintegration follow-up and support focuses on women facing challenges, particularly those not fully cured. The approach includes community visits, follow-up phone calls, and establishing strong connections with local associations and health workers for lasting support.

## ***Prevention***

**Pregnant Women Conferences:** Healing Hands of Joy hosts pregnant women conferences where Safe Motherhood Ambassadors share their testimonies and the importance of maternal healthcare at all stages of pregnancy to prevent childbirth injury.

**Religious Leaders' Training:** Religious leaders are significant voices of influence. Workshops urge them to promote safe motherhood practices and help increase community awareness about the risks of childbirth injuries. They learn the importance of prenatal care and delivery with health professionals.

**School Awareness Events:** Reaching youth is a key prevention strategy for Healing Hands of Joy. Girls are encouraged to complete their education, and all students learn about the dangers of early marriage and the risk of obstetric fistula. HHoJ is experimenting with a variety of media tools to enhance our presentations and attract young people.

**Maternity Waiting Home Renovation:** Maternity waiting homes offer expecting mothers a safe place to stay before childbirth, located near hospitals to ensure rural women from remote areas are able to reach medical care in time. Healing Hands of Joy renovates these homes to provide a safe and welcoming environment that includes prenatal care from community partners, helping to reduce the risk of fistula and other preventable childbirth complications.

## ***Identification***

**New Case Identification:** Identifying cases of obstetric fistula is essential to our mission. Safe Motherhood Ambassadors seek out undiagnosed women and girls who often hide due to shame. They share personal stories, showing that rehabilitation and reintegration are possible. SMAs connect these women and girls to formal diagnosis and treatment, and after recovery, women can join the HHoJ rehabilitation program to become SMAs themselves.

**Health Professionals' Obstetric Fistula Diagnosis Training:** In rural health centers, not all health professionals know about obstetric fistula, let alone how to diagnose it or the treatment options. HHoJ provides training to help properly diagnose obstetric fistula, usage of partographs to identify labor complications and to ensure referral to specialized treatment centers once a diagnosis has been made.

## **Healing Hands of Joy**

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