

## Stories from Ellilita-Women at Risk

Dave Mann. November 2009



Tadelech (left), Dave and Emewodish at E-WAR's offices

### Tadelech (which means 'The fortunate one')

Tadelech isn't sure exactly how old she is but thinks she was 17 or 18 when she first started selling her body to men and continued to work as a prostitute for 8 years, so she's 25 or 26 years old.

She was born in a rural village but moved to the city with her mum as a child after her father died. The family was very poor so the money she could earn as a prostitute was very attractive.

Life was good when she first began selling her body for sex – money, fun and independence. But after a few years she realised that she had become isolated from her family and friends. The stigma attached to what she did and what she was alienated her from everyone.

She knew a couple of girls who had been through E-WAR's rehabilitation programme and had seen how their lives had changed dramatically so she asked E-WAR for help.

Tadelech was accepted into E-WAR's programme in 2007. She says she didn't find the programme difficult because she really wanted to change her life. The only hardship was learning to live on much less money than she'd earned as a prostitute.

E-WAR gave her the opportunity to train in food preparation at a vocational training school. She also received training from a top UK chef through E-WAR.

After graduating from the rehabilitation programme in August 2008 she secured a part-time job at Chocolatta, the cafe Cherry established a few years ago, where she makes cakes and pastries. Tadelech dreams of becoming a chef and earning enough to live a decent life away from the streets.

She still finds life difficult as she does not earn much, but she says she will never return to prostitution. "I have given my life to God and will never go back to prostitution."

Morning devotions at E-WAR were the most positive part of the rehab programme for Tadelech. Through the bible study she understood what prostitution really was for the first time. Before then prostitution was just a business.

**Emewodish** (which means *'The one I love'*)

Emewodish was raised by Christian parents in the town of Debre Zeit, about an hour's drive SE of Addis. She admits she was a wild child and became pregnant when still at school so ran away from home in shame. She ended up in Addis.

Because of her Christian upbringing she knew that prostitution was bad but when her baby daughter was born she had no other way of earning money. Her daughter is now 7 years old.

Emewodish worked in bars serving drinks and finding clients. She left her daughter at home while she worked, sometimes a neighbour would watch over the child but often she would be left alone.

In time she was desperate to leave her lifestyle but knew she needed help to do it. She learned about E-WAR from a friend and was accepted onto their rehabilitation programme in 2007.

She says that coming to understand God's word was the most important part of the rehabilitation programme. When a child she had heard the word of God but she now realised what it meant to put God's word into practice in her life and how it could change her completely and has a peace she never had before. Since becoming a Christian Emewodish has renewed her relationship with her parents.

After graduating from E-WAR's rehab programme last year Emewodish has been working as a waitress in a restaurant on the Bole Road. Although it's financially difficult for her she says "I trust in God. He will open another door for me."



Gedamnesh in her cafe

**Gedamnesh**

Gedamnesh graduated from E-WAR's rehabilitation programme last year and started a business selling spices and vegetables but it didn't make enough money so she decided to join a cooperative of 59 women who started a cafe. All the women had been or were still involved in prostitution and wanted to find alternative employment.

Gedamnesh became a prostitute at age 16 and continued for 15 years. She had tried to leave prostitution 5 years ago but couldn't because she had such a low opinion of herself and didn't think she could earn money any other way. She says she had become addicted to her lifestyle.

She cried out to God to help her leave prostitution. A friend introduced her to E-WAR and through their rehabilitation programme they helped to break her addiction.

There are now 19 women involved with the cafe from the original 59 who formed the cooperative. Gedamnesh also makes beads and sells them at E-WAR offices and at the NGO bazaar.



Tiringo at her small store

### **Tiringo**

Tiringo is in her final 6 months of E-WAR's rehabilitation programme. She had been a prostitute for 7 years before entering the programme.

Her motivation for becoming a prostitute was the money she could earn, but she came to realise that her lifestyle was bad and she wanted to change. One of Tiringo's friends had been through E-WAR's programme and encouraged her to apply.

She says that she benefited most from learning the bible. She now has a personal relationship with God and says that is the most important thing.

The programme has taught her about business and trade and E-WAR provided a small grant which she used to start a business selling vegetables and making injerra and tea.

Tiringo hopes to live a healthy life and wants to work hard to make a living. Even if she can't earn as much she says she will never return to her old lifestyle.