

A journey to Ethiopia

**Sponsors Eric and Laura
Anderson meet their
sponsored children**



Photo: Eric & Laura Anderson

Eric Anderson is no stranger to charity. Last fall he launched a new social enterprise called My Happy Shirts. Designed to give to those in need, Eric donates one brand-new shirt for every one sold and, on top of that, more than one-third of all profits are designated to support specific projects through organizations such as Plan. After some research, Eric decided he wanted to directly support a Plan project in Ethiopia to help provide nutrition to malnourished children. In the midst of setting up support for that program, Eric also became a sponsor to four children in Ethiopia.

Eric and his wife Laura are also in the process of adopting an infant girl from Ethiopia. In March, they traveled there for a court proceeding as part of that process. While there, the Andersons wanted to take some time to see the work that Plan International Ethiopia is doing within the community. With a busy schedule already, they thought they would only have time to see two of the children they sponsored as well as a Plan-supported school. What they got was so much more.

A Plan International Ethiopia staff member, Tesfanesh Befekadu, and a driver picked up the Andersons at their guesthouse, and the two visitors spent the next several hours seeing just how their sponsorship dollars were being spent in Ethiopia. The first stop was a visit to a Plan-

supported hospital and clinic. It was small and somewhat crowded, but the facility was clean and provided many services free to the public. Eric and Laura were introduced to a couple of technicians who take blood from patients in order to test for HIV/AIDS and other diseases, testing that many in the community would not have access to otherwise. In the hospital, they met three women who had given birth that day. Eric took time to make balloon animals for several children who were there to meet their new siblings, while doctors checked Tesfanesh's and Laura's blood pressure.

Next, the Andersons were taken to a Plan-supported school. The group was met outside by crowds of 8- to 12-year-old children who had been taught enough English to say "Hello, my name is..." It was a rush for Eric and Laura; they had not been expecting such a reception. After arriving at the school, they were ushered into a third floor classroom filled with several half-circle rows of desks, and 14- to 16-year-old students excited to see their guests. The students were preparing to give presentations, and the Andersons were asked to sit in the middle of the room. A Plan staff member told the class about My Happy Shirts and about the support they were giving Plan.

From there the Andersons were taken to the Abebech Gobena Orphanage, which is supported by Plan and is run by one of the most revered women in the country, Ms. Abebech Gobena. Ms. Gobena has dedicated her life to helping the orphans of Ethiopia. At one time, she had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her selfless care for others. The Andersons were greeted warmly by Ms. Gobena, and gladly accepted a tour of the grounds, visiting with so many very young children. Groups of 2- to 3-year-olds were being cared for by nannies, whom the Andersons called kind and sweet. The group made its way through a garden before returning to the office, where the Andersons were presented with a gift of appreciation: a traditional table setting wrapped in cloth. The thought of so many children needing a home was difficult for the Andersons, but knowing that there were so many dedicated to care for the children made the leaving easier.

There was one more stop to make before visiting their sponsored children. Eric and Laura were driven to a school that was built with the help of Plan. This school would not have been possible were it not for Plan's work and the sponsors that support it in Ethiopia. The school educates more than 1500 students. Children wear blue uniforms and on the outside, Plan logos are painted on the three-story building. Everyone was ecstatic to see the supporters that Plan brought along. Students know that the building is there, in part, because of their selflessness.

After a morning spent visiting projects supported by their sponsorship, and by the thousands of sponsors like them around the globe, the Andersons were off to meet their two sponsored children. The first was a 10-year-old

boy with big bright eyes and a great smile. The child's family warmly welcomed their guests from Plan, serving coffee in the traditional ceremonial fashion, and engaging the Andersons in conversation about college and daily life. The family was excited to be a part of a community in which Plan had done so much. Eric brought out more balloons and proceeded to make everyone laugh with his creations. After about 30 minutes, the Andersons left to visit the second child, who was only a short walk away.

The second child was 6 and it was clear that his family was much poorer than the previous. His mother had just been discharged from the hospital that day with her infant daughter, only a week old. Eric said it was much harder to make the 6-year-old smile, but his family was just as humble and welcoming of their visit as the last. Time was short, and after a few more balloon animals and another coffee ceremony, the Andersons left.

The visit to the families and the various Plan projects left quite an impression on Eric. It was an incredible experience for the Andersons and they were very appreciative of the time their Plan hosts took to show them around. The day was a bit overwhelming for the couple, but they were happy to see that their monthly contributions were going to support so many, so well. "Plan is doing amazing work in such poor areas. We were humbled by what we saw and so grateful to see the impact Plan is having on so many lives," Eric remarked.

Visit www.myhappyshirts.com to find out more about My Happy Shirts. To see the Plan program to which they are contributing, visit www.planusa.org/happyshirts.

If your company is interested in learning more about becoming a partner with Plan International USA, please contact Janet Trombetti at 1-800-556-7918 or by email at janet.trombetti@planusa.org.

