

Confronting new challenges



Finding new solutions



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

2008 ANNUAL REPORT

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A Message from Barbara Ribakove Gordon, NACOEJ Founder and Executive Director



*I*n my message in this space last year, I ended by saying, “May we accomplish as much — or more— in our second half century as we did in our first.”

As I write in October 2008, that wish looks a lot harder to realize than it did a year ago. The collapsing economy, the fluctuating dollar, and the shocking withdrawal of much of the institutional funding on which NACOEJ has relied (especially for food for children, women and families in Ethiopia) means that we will be struggling both in Ethiopia and in Israel simply to maintain our programs. Cutbacks are inevitable, at least for a while. With so many children depending on us for food and education, it is hard to bear.

But bear it we must, and overcome it, we will. Jewish tradition instructs us that when there is no mensch in sight, be a mensch. This is not the first time NACOEJ has been called upon to be that lone mensch, and we’ve gotten pretty good at it over the years. If we all now work our hardest, this may be our finest hour.

Barbara

A Message from Faye Lieman, NACOEJ President



*R*emember the marvelous fable about the Lion and the Mouse? The absurdity of such a small animal helping one of the largest? Also remember the ending; the mouse did save the Lion.

NACOEJ is that small organization. Our goals of helping Ethiopian Jews survive in Ethiopia, reach Israel, succeed in their new homeland and preserve their ancient culture are large tasks that have been only partially met. Shouldn’t these goals continue to be our responsibility?

NACOEJ has met awesome challenges throughout its existence; and only with renewed energy can we continue to meet them today. We want Ethiopian Israelis to succeed in their new life... and to the best of our abilities bring Jews remaining in Ethiopia home to Israel.

NACOEJ is that small mouse. Ethiopian Jews depend on us: to survive in Ethiopia, to succeed in Israel. We cannot nibble our way out; but really must look to more vigorous funding. These programs will succeed only within the context of our funding.

How can the NACOEJ Board ensure that in these difficult times, it does not abandon its large tasks?

Faye

ETHIOPIA: Feeding, Education and Advocacy

In September 2007, a Public Committee for the Remaining Jews of Ethiopia was formed in Israel to persuade the current Israeli administration to implement previous government decisions relating to the aliyah of the Jews remaining in Gondar. The honorary President of the Committee is the former President of the Supreme Court of Israel, Meir Shamgar. The Committee also includes former Justice Minister of Canada Irwin Cotler, the Chief Rabbi of Ethiopian Jews in Israel Yosef Hadane, former Supreme Court Justice Menachem Alon, former MKs Geula Cohen, Naomi Hazan and Hanan Porat and numerous other prominent spiritual and Israeli community leaders. In 2008, following the government's decision to end the aliyah from Ethiopia, the Committee continued to be very active, calling for the government to examine the remaining 8,700 members of the community in Gondar to determine eligibility for aliyah.

Ethiopian-Israelis protested the government decision. Two Knesset bills advocating continuation of the aliyah overwhelmingly passed preliminary readings (three readings are required for final passage). U.S. support for continued aliyah came from local Jewish Community Relations Councils, rabbis from the Rabbinical Council of America, the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, the Union for Reform Judaism and more.

Eventually the government agreed to examine 3,000 of the 8,700, and to take those found to be eligible to Israel at a rate of 100 per month. (Eligibility depends on having unblemished maternal descent, living in Gondar for at least a year, and having been listed on a 1999 census.)

At this writing, no date has been set for the start of the examinations of the 3,000.

Numbers

Despite varying accounts in the press, NACOEJ has been constant in citing the numbers of the remaining community members in Gondar since February 2003, when the Israeli government unanimously decided to bring to Israel all remaining members of the Beta Israel community of Jewish maternal descent. In October 2003, NACOEJ and the United Jewish Communities (UJC), in consultation with Sallai Meridor, then Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), agreed to propose a 24,000 number to then Interior Minister Avraham Poraz. In January of 2005, in a written agreement, NACOEJ, the UJC and JAFI agreed to a revised number of 20,000, taking into account 4,000 who had made aliyah in the intervening months. (The agreement was based on Israel's promise to increase the aliyah rate from Ethiopia from 300 to 600 per month.) The 8,700 as yet unexamined in Gondar, are part of the 20,000 number agreed upon by JAFI, UJC and NACOEJ. According to the Ethiopian Jewish community, most of the 8,700 have first-degree relatives in Israel.

NACOEJ has remained committed to the number specified in the 2005 agreement. Moreover, in a 2007 binding agreement with the Ethiopian government, NACOEJ agreed to limit assistance to only the 8,700 people discussed above. Clearly, concerns over countless numbers flooding the compounds for assistance are baseless.



*Ethiopian-Israelis protest recent government decisions.
Photo credit: Avi Masfin, Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews*



Hungry Jewish children bang desperately on the door of the locked Feeding Center where they have been fed for years.

Feeding Center and Grain Distribution Programs End

Until June 30th, 2008, community members received food primarily through two programs: women and children received daily meals and take-home grain in the Feeding Center for Children Under Age Six and Pregnant and Nursing Mothers. All community members received a monthly distribution of teff grain. Most of the funding for these programs came from American Jewish federations through the Operation Promise campaign of the UJC. The UJC announced that it was unable to provide funding past May 2008. **The programs are now closed.**

Beta Israel Elementary School

The Gondar Beta Israel school, offering instruction in Jewish studies and Hebrew language, as well as daily lunches, operated until mid-August 2008. Original, non-transferable funding for the school was allocated through the UJC and intended to cover construction and much of the first year's operation (not including lunch). Inflation in Ethiopia has drastically reduced the fund's buying power. Not all funds have yet reached NACOEJ. Nonetheless, in September 2008, the new NACOEJ Beta Israel Primary School was opened. The school teaches all subjects mandated by the Ministry of Education, and is expected to provide the 920 registered children with high levels of instruction in all secular subjects, as well as Jewish studies. Current funding allows for grades 1-4 to be fully operational. If more funds become available, NACOEJ hopes to add grades 5-8.



School Lunch Program

School children in the Gondar Beta Israel School received nutritious lunches of eggs, bananas, oranges, beans, carrots, and bread all year, and will continue to do so dependent on available funding. Inflation in Ethiopia reached a high of 39.1% in May 2008, mostly due to surging food prices. As the cost of the lunch program has been hugely increased, the new NACOEJ school will only be able to provide lunches on school days in 2008-9, rather than every day of the week, as was the policy in 2007-8.



Adult Education and Religious Services

Prayer services are conducted daily in the synagogue, where adult education classes also take place for community men and women. Tallitot and tefillin are distributed and used by community members. The community mikveh continues to operate.



Matzah Baking in Ethiopia 2008

Over 200,000 matzot were prepared for the Beta Israel community of Gondar by a staff of 106 Beta Israel community members and supervised by Ethiopian-Israeli teachers who spent the Passover holiday with them. Over 6,000 community members attended the seder and enjoyed wine, eggs, potatoes, maror, fruit, and vegetables. There was even candy for the children. All funds for the matzah and Passover seder were provided by individual donors from the U.S. and Canada.



ISRAEL: *Limudiah*: Intensive After-School Education Program

Ethiopian-Israeli immigrant children, who usually come from illiterate, poverty-stricken, non-Hebrew-speaking homes, are at exceptionally high risk for classroom failure in elementary school- the crucial foundation of a child's education. Often deprived of the attention they need in the crowded public school system, these children may become frustrated, angry and alienated, which leads to "invisible" dropouts beginning at the age of eight or nine. The high-school dropout rate for Ethiopian-Israeli teens is more than double the national average. Early intervention is key to preventing a lifetime of low-paying jobs which will inevitably trap them in the cycle of poverty.

The NACOEJ *Limudiah*, which just completed its 15th year of operation, not only provides preventive intervention, but is a virtually unprecedented success story. In 2007-8, the *Limudiah* operated in 21 schools in eight cities, providing intensive academic help for 10-12 hours per week in very small classes of one teacher to eight students. The program included specialized teaching in reading, language, math, and enrichment curriculum, and provided hot lunches and all study materials. Another important element of the program is homework help, as the children usually do not receive this at home. The *Limudiah* always takes place in the students' school, a means of ensuring continuity and coordination with the home room experience. Our staff consists of accredited teachers assisted by qualified teachers' aides.

Strengths and Accomplishments

The program is nationally recognized as one of the most successful scholastic support programs for Ethiopian-Israeli pupils. Nationwide, only about 40% of Ethiopian children perform at or above grade level but about 81% of children participating in the NACOEJ *Limudiah* perform at or above grade level! The level of staff professionalism, creativity and dedication in the *Limudiah* is very high, as is the degree of coordination with the host schools and teachers. The program offers a warm and nurturing environment, where pupils enjoy participating and feel loved and encouraged.

The outstanding level of success of pupils in the *Limudiah* program, compared to national statistics, shows that the proper investment of money and professional skill makes it possible for the great majority of Ethiopian-Israeli children to succeed in the school system.



Summarizing the 2007-8 School Year

This past year, we experienced both great achievements and some challenges. In Ramla, 90% of all *Limudiah* students ended the year with class level or higher grades. The municipal educational department

told us that we were an indispensable part of that success, and Gila Arusi, the principal of the Bar Ilan school there, told us that parents made the registration of their children in the school conditional on there being a *Limudiah*.

In Ramla, where the loss of funding the previous year had forced us to cut back to serving only grades 1 and 2, we were able to return to operating the *Limudiah* for pupils in grades 1-4, thanks to an injection of new funding.

We were also able to develop some important geographic expansion. This past school year we operated *Limudiah* programs in three schools in Gedera (thanks to a grant from the UJA-New York Federation). It took time to develop the programs in a city jaded with

many unsuccessful programs for Ethiopian-Israelis. By year's end, the three schools, and the director of the city's education department, made it clear that they want the *Limudiah* to continue.

Teacher Training and Staff Innovations

In February 2007, NACOEJ provided a half-day teacher-training seminar for close to 150 *Limudiah* staff members, made possible through a special grant by the Effron family. In keeping with the national



theme of Israel's 60th anniversary, staff members learned about the historical roots of Ethiopian-Jewish Zionism, and heard moving lectures given by two Ethiopian-Israelis: a former teacher and Prisoner of Zion and a former member of the committee that worked with the Mossad in Sudan, to rescue their own community.



Children in the Rehovot Limudiah prepare Purim packages (above) and present them to Israeli soldiers (right).



2007-8 *Limudiah* Program Summary

City	# of Schools	Grades Served	# of Students	# of Staff
Ramla	3	1-4	131	17
Lod	4	1-5	187	27
Rehovot	5	1-6	260	36
Rishon Lezion	1	1-6	142	20
Kiryat Ekron	2	1-6	85	13
Nes Tziona	1	1-6	57	8
Gedera	3	1-6	103	17
Be'er Ya'akov	2	1-5	147	18
	TOTAL: 21	-----	1,112	156

Summer Programs

This past summer, the Peachy Levy Back-to-School Program opened in Lod and Nes Tziona, thanks to special grants from Peachy and Mark Levy, and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles.



Children at the Rambam School in Lod show a project they made in the Peachy Levy Back-to-School Program.

Each of these programs brought Ethiopian children back to school in August, to help them refresh skills and knowledge not used over the summer vacation, and to introduce incoming first-graders to reading and other skills. Some entering first-grade children had so many needs that, at the request of the school principal, we ran two sessions, one in July and one in August.

Challenges

In 2007-8, the dollar was reduced in value compared with the shekel. As most funds are raised in dollars, many of the *Limudiah* programs were forced to close early. An additional challenge was and continues to be finding appropriate staff. A continuing national teachers' shortage in Israel affects the ability of the general school system to find enough teachers. Finding the particularly dedicated and skilled teachers who agree to work extra

hours in a *Limudiah* after-school program thus becomes especially challenging. We use every resource available to address this issue.

The greatest challenge ahead is obtaining funds to maintain our existing programs. Due to the effects of the economic climate in the United States, we have already been informed that a number of major funders will have to cut their donations severely. We expect these losses will also affect sources of matching funds in Israel. We are responding by efforts to market the program in ways that will attract new donors.

Additional funding is currently needed in all cities in which we operate, as new students are added each year.

Prospects for 2008-9

As this report goes to print, all cities that had *Limudiah* programs in the last year will have them in the coming year. However, we will probably find it necessary to cut back the number of grades and/or schools we can serve in some locations.

As noted, we are in need of additional funds in each community if we are to complete the school year in each.



Students enjoy a meal provided by NACOEJ during the Peachy Levy Back-to-School Program.

Highlights 2007-2008

In April, all *Limudiah* programs celebrated Passover with festive model seders. A child in the Lod *Limudiah* (below) acts out the song "Who Knows One?"



In May, *Limudiah* programs in three cities welcomed the first ever Hillel-Birthright Israel volunteers. Ilana Phillips and Laura Berger, both students at NYU, help children at the Harin school in Ramla with their English (below).



NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Scholarship Program

Dropout rates among Ethiopian-Israeli high school students are more than double the national average.

For many years, most Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers were sent to state-subsidized boarding schools for high school. It was thought this would relieve impoverished families of the burdens of housing, feeding and clothing teens, increase their successful integration into Israeli society, and, through vocational training, prepare young adults to enter the work force. However, many parents increasingly feel that the boarding schools were leaving their teens qualified for only menial work. Additionally, being separated from home has interrupted intergenerational communication and undermined parental authority, resulting in high dropout rates among Ethiopian-Israeli high school students. Many teens want to live at home and attend local schools where they can befriend non-Ethiopians and gain the necessary skills to graduate high school. However, most parents cannot afford the ancillary costs to enable this reality, which include books, school supplies, transportation, lab fees and school trips.

Providing a Choice and a Chance

NACOEJ believes in the importance of a family environment and parental care for a growing adolescent. The Edward G. Victor High School Scholarship Program provides crucial funds enabling students to live at home and attend schools that will prepare them to enter university, instead of being sent to subsidized lower-level boarding schools. The opportunity to live at home and receive a higher quality education has successfully encouraged thousands of students to stay in school and prepare for a better future, while linking Ethiopian high school students in Israel with sponsors in the U.S., England and elsewhere.

Challenges

As many from the donors. Even donor of costs associated with those

as 1,500 students per year benefit sponsorships of our generous donors. Even though there is a standard cost per donor of \$350, each high school has different costs associated with individual students. There-fore, when those there is money left over from a stipend, funds are used to help other high school students on our very long waiting list. This past school year, due to the drastic drop in the dollar against the shekel, there was no money to assist additional students. Many schools called NACOEJ to complain.

The weak U.S. economy also prevented some past sponsors from renewing their sponsorships. It is NACOEJ's fervent hope that our dedicated

Galit Mesgenu, of Rehovot, shows off a letter to her sponsor Irene Pearlman

sponsors will continue to help fund these teenagers, who will otherwise have to suffer the educational and emotional distress of going to school without books and being left out of educational field trips, or being sent away to boarding schools.

In the 2007-2008 school year 1,033 students in 51 schools in 16 cities received our high school scholarships.

Our Students Excel

One of the major benefits of this program is that when Ethiopian-Israeli students are enabled to go to good local high schools, they become role models within their own communities. Below are several examples:

Rachel Samani, who just graduated from Katzir High School in Rehovot, was chosen as one of only 20 students in all of Rehovot to participate in an exclusive program combining leadership training courses with teaching children in a community center. She has three younger sisters who are currently getting a great academic start in our *Limudiah* intensive after-school program.



Avi Darsu (left) and **Beni Asnaku** (not shown) are both 12th grade students at RamLod Religious High School in Lod. They are volunteer instructors for 7th grade boys and girls in the Tzofim (Israeli Scouts) movement's local branch. Avi and Ben trained for the program when they were scholarship students in 9th grade.

Hana Tayacho (right) and **Nurit Abei** (not shown) are also students in the RamLod Religious High School in Lod. The girls volunteer with the Maccabi youth movement and are studying in a special first aid course to become volunteer first responders.



NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program

On a trip to Israel in the late eighties, NACOEJ founding president Jonathan Giesberg, of blessed memory, visited a group of Ethiopian college students in their apartment. When he opened their refrigerator, he was shocked to find it almost completely bare. He then realized that although the Israeli government was generously covering the students' tuition fees, there was no extra money for essentials like food, rent, books and transportation. Jonathan immediately phoned his family back home and asked them to help him start a scholarship program. Thus, the NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student Sponsorship (AAS) Program was born.

A college degree means the opportunity to escape from the low paying jobs that perpetuate the cycle of poverty for so many Ethiopian-Israelis. But many drop out for lack of money for basic necessities. The program eases the financial burden on Ethiopian-Israeli university students by linking them with sponsors who help pay for these essentials. With modest monthly stipends, Ethiopian-Israeli students can afford to stay in school.

In 2007-8:

- 388 students received AAS sponsorships
- AAS sponsorships went to students in six universities, nine nursing schools, five colleges and two engineering schools.
- Fields of study included: law, social work, nursing, architecture, economics, education, computer science, optometry, engineering, psychology and medicine, among others.

Changes and Challenges

Due to the rise in costs associated with running the program, the annual charge to the donor, which had remained constant since 2000, rose from \$1,080 to \$1,140.

The value of the dollar in Israel fell against the shekel, so, while students continued to receive the same dollar amount each month, the exchange rate meant that they received less than expected in shekels. The value of the dollar has begun to rise again and stipend structures may need to be changed in the future.



Our Students Excel

With the help of the Adopt-A-Student Program, students stay in college, give back to their communities and excel in the workforce. The following are just a few of our many accomplished graduates.



Ronnie Melkai (left) is a graduate of Tel Aviv University with a law degree. She is the new spokesperson for the Ministry of Welfare, the first Ethiopian immigrant to hold such a position.

Takele Mekonen (below) is a current graduate student at Tel Aviv University in the Executive Master's Program in Diplomacy and Security. He is the past director of the Fidel Association for Education and Social Integration of Ethiopian Jews in Israel. He currently coordinates a program he developed with the Ruppin Academic Center to increase the number of Ethiopian-Israelis in business and financial fields.



Aliza (Liz) Melesa (below) is a graduate of Kiryat Ono College, with a law degree. She was the student coordinator of the Tabeka organization, which provides legal support and advocacy for Ethiopian immigrants. Liz is now the newly-appointed Personal Parliamentary Advisor of the Israeli Absorption Minister.



Mitzvah Projects

As many of those preparing for their Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations are also involved in mitzvah projects, NACOEJ has created a Mitzvah Project brochure and webpage, packed with exciting examples, ideas, information and tools. People of all ages are welcome to do their own Mitzvah Project!



Bat Mitzvah girl **Matty Siegel** set up a webpage and wrote:

"There are many poor Ethiopian Jews living in Ethiopia. Seventy two dollars a year will feed one school age child a simple, nutritious meal every school day and a Saturday lunch. My goal is for us together to raise \$3,600 which will nourish 50 children for one year."*

Matty raised \$3,816! One girl, her caring family and friends, and a webpage!

Sam Swidler was so moved that \$5 could buy a mosquito net and save lives, that he chose to devote his Bar Mitzvah project to raise money for nets.

His project has raised \$2,628 so far and helped to save 525 families!



Jack Sharfstein, another Bar Mitzvah boy, was so inspired by Sam's special project that he also decided to raise money for mosquito nets for his Bar Mitzvah.

He has already raised almost \$1,000 dollars...and counting!



Even more exciting, the NACOEJ website now offers people their own personalized web pages where they can describe their projects, their reasons for doing them, and have digital thermometers measuring their progress.

These projects and more are available on the Mitzvah Project Page at <http://nacoej.org/mitzvahproject.html>.

Bar and Bat Mitzvah Twinning

This year was another successful one for the NACOEJ Bar and Bat Mitzvah Twinning Program. The Twinning Program paired 69 North American youngsters with their Ethiopian-Israeli peers, and gave them a chance to learn about each other's similarities and differences. Each twin received a special gift from the program, as did the Ethiopian-Israeli twin's class, on behalf of his/her Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Curriculum Project for Schools

This year has also seen the culmination of an Ethiopian Jewish Curriculum project five years in the making, specifically designed for educators, to enable Diaspora youth to learn about:

- the unique 2,500-year history of the Ethiopian Jewish community, called Beta Israel.
- the struggle of Ethiopian Jews to maintain their commitment to Judaism while living in isolation from other Jewish communities for centuries in Ethiopia.
- the cultural and religious practices the Beta Israel share with world Jewry, as well as their African-influenced music and dance.
- how to put Jewish values into action, and recognize that helping Ethiopian Jews is a Jewish value.

NEW!
Online Curriculum Project

The Curriculum is now fully available on the NACOEJ Website, and incorporates photographs, video clips, maps, charts and dialogues. It can all be found at http://nacoej.org/curriculum_intro.html

Many thanks to the Curriculum committee chair Eadie Shanker, the former director of CUNY's Mentoring and Pre-College Programs. The Curriculum committee included Naomi Greenberg, Grace Guy, Judith Jaffe, Lore Rasch, Niki Silberstein, and advisors Nicola DeMarco, Richard Sheftman and Sherri and Robert Steinberg.

British Friends of NACOEJ

This year has also seen a very active British Friends of NACOEJ, which has organized speaking engagements, educational outreach, and has raised funds for NACOEJ Ethiopia and Israel programs. BFN has recently received its first grant from a British foundation.



NACOEJ operates several smaller programs in Israel to positively affect as many Ethiopian-Israeli young people as possible.

NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Sports and Study Program

This past school year, the NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Sports and Study Program was carried out in cooperation with the Kiryat Ekron Community Center and the Maccabi Junior League, which operates the soccer league.



For the sports aspect of the program the youngsters were divided into three leagues: children (grades 5-6), junior youth (grades 7-9) and youth (grades 10 to army). Each group had its own coach and trained three times a week with equipment and uniforms, as well as medical and physical-training supervision. Games were played weekly. The head coach, Chaim Levy, noted that there were a number of very talented individuals among the 32 Ethiopian participants.

At the end of the year, there was a very moving final ceremony, attended by the parents. A number of people gave speeches, including the head of Maccabi Kiryat Ekron and the head coach. Each student participant



Children attend the closing ceremony of the Sports and Study Program.

and each coach was recognized with a small trophy. A number of parents expressed their satisfaction with the program and took pride in their child's achievements. It was clear that the experience had meant a lot to all the young people who trained and played together.

The academic aspect of the program was also a success. All of the Ethiopian youngsters in the children's team participated in the NACOEJ *Limudiah* programs in the Ohel Meir and Ben-Zvi schools. The junior-high group participated in programs in their schools in Rehovot. There is no junior high school or high school in Kiryat Ekron, with the exception of one girls' school, so almost all youths from Kiryat Ekron study in Rehovot. A number are in our high school scholarship programs.

The high school students participated in the programs in community centers in Rehovot. This was an exceptionally positive development because in previous years kids from Kiryat Ekron were not able to participate in after-school programs in Rehovot.

The Ethiopian junior high students and their coaches, as well as the representatives of the town's municipality (including the vice mayor),

expressed their thanks for the study aspect of the program and said what a tremendous difference it made.

Since the 32 Ethiopian students in the soccer program were scattered through five schools, keeping track of their progress was a real challenge. For that reason, the Community Center staff decided to establish a special study center in the Kiryat Ekron Community Center for the 2008-2009 school year.

In the 2008-2009 school year, the funding for this program is unfortunately being cut from \$50,000 to \$25,000. Major cutbacks in this excellent program will be necessary unless we can secure new funding.

Job Database

The computerized job database currently has 813 Ethiopian students and graduates registered. NACOEJ sends each participant job offers that we receive from different companies or from postings from the government services offices. This past year, 67 job offers were sent out.

Graduates Forum

NACOEJ has been giving academic scholarships to Ethiopian students since 1984. Since then, we have had over 2,500 academic graduates, none of whom have had a formal connection with NACOEJ after receiving their degrees. The purpose of the Graduates Forum is to strengthen the connection with students who graduated college with the help of NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student sponsorships and to create "ambassadors" for the organization. We also encourage Ethiopian-Israeli academics who did not receive NACOEJ scholarships but who are community activists working for the advancement of Ethiopians Jews in Israeli society to participate.

Activities in 2007-8:

Thirteen graduates in the Forum attended five meetings throughout the year. Three members of the Forum participated in a special Learning Day that NACOEJ created to commemorate Israel's Sixtieth Birthday from the Zionist viewpoint of Ethiopian olim. They visited and participated in a NACOEJ *Limudiah* model seder. They also met with parents at the opening of the *Limudiah* program.

In the upcoming year we hope to have Forum participants spend more time with children in the NACOEJ *Limudiah* and high-school programs, and accompany donors and other visitors who come from overseas to visit the different programs.



A child receives a trophy during the closing ceremony of the Sports and Study Program.

About People

As part of the Taglit-Birthright Israel: Hillel program, Laura Berger, of Rochester, recently volunteered with other college students at Harin School in Ramla, one of Israel's poorest cities. The group of 40 American students spent a day with impoverished Ethiopian-Israeli children through the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry in Israel (NACOEJ)



Courtesy of NACOEJ

Laura Berger (second from left), of Rochester, helps Ethiopian-Israeli children with their English.

Limudiah: Intensive After-School Education Program for Ethiopian Israeli Children.

Only about 35 percent of Ethiopian Israeli children perform at grade level. The NACOEJ Limudiah was designed 16 years ago to combat this problem by providing 10-12 hours of intensive after-school education in reading, Hebrew language, mathematics, general study skills, as well as enrichment in computers, English, arts and crafts, and music.

"I was worried at first that I wouldn't connect with the kids. It was clear from our reception that they were as excited as we were," said Berger in a press release. "It was an incredible time at the Limudiah program. It was definitely one of the most interesting parts of our trip, and one of the few that didn't feel like an average tourist experience."

For information about the

Giving Hope to Ethiopian Israeli Children

Limudiah
Ethiopia
Sheldon S. Brown
Special to the Journal
COEJ

After two days of scholarly presentations at the Lessons and Legacies Conference on the Holocaust at Yeshiva University in Jerusalem last month, my colleagues and I (educators on the Holocaust) were primed for touring We traversed the length and breadth of Israel, arriving at our last destination, Tel Aviv, and finally a day of leisure. I decided to visit my friend, Edek, who lives nearby in Rehovot.

While there, I was given an unusual opportunity to observe a special intensive After School Program for Ethiopian Israeli children called "Limudiah," which provides cultural enrichment, basic Hebrew skills, mathematics and other essential school subjects. The program's mission is to integrate Ethiopian Israeli children into Israeli society, and lead them to become productive adults in the future. Limudiah reminded me of an enrichment program for culturally deprived children in the U.S. called "Head Start," which began in the 1960s.

I found the children friendly, fun-loving and adorable. A large number were born in Israel of Ethiopian parents who immigrated to Israel after experiencing poverty, famine, illness, persecution and civil war in Ethiopia. The parents arrived in Israel on the historic 36-hour Israeli embassy in Addis Ababa. The emergency airlift of over 14,000 Ethiopian Jews was called "Operation Solomon."

About 57 percent of the parents of the Limudiah children are unemployed and live in poor neighborhoods. More than 50 percent of the Ethiopian families live below the poverty level. They have yet to assimilate into Israeli society. Generally, parents are unable to give their children help with schoolwork, since about 60 percent of the adults possess only an elementary school education.

My Limudiah guide was Shoshana, the director of the program in eight Israeli cities.



Sheldon Brown poses with a teacher and students of Limudiah.



Lunch at Limudiah.

engaging workbooks that over 90 percent of the students successfully complete, compared to 43 percent of Ethiopian nationwide.

I observed a second where the teacher asked questions about a topic. The story was about a child who did not have toys and possessions as children. Nonetheless, the student showed accomplishments, and was awarded the same prizes as all other Israeli children. The story implied that Ethiopian children were valued much as other Israeli children.

After introducing myself in Hebrew, a second grader asked me how I came to Israel from the United States.

The African Jewish Matzah Dance



By Neil Salem

My Pesach preparation, like that of so many Americans, usually involves walking to my local supermarket and loading a cart full of Manischewitz products ... you know, the chocolate-covered jellies, the matzah-pizza sauce and, of course, the kosher cheese that rarely melts. The hardest part of the process is simply choosing between the egg and onion or the butter-flavored matzah.



Asking matzah in the village of Gonder in Northern Ethiopia. (Photo by Ed Kessler)

had birds gather on the branches to witness the operation, also providing a heavy tune on the breeze. The men face each other across long, spotless tables. They count down to the start of the 18-...

return next week.

CONNECTICUT JEWISH LEDGER

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WESTPORT STUDENT ON BIRTHRIGHT TAKES TIME TO HELP ETHIOPIAN ISRAELIS

Special to the Ledger

NEW YORK, N.Y. — As the tour bus filled with some 40 excited college students from New York University, Columbia University and Barnard College pulled up to the entrance of the Harin School in Ramla, one of Israel's poorest cities, Shoshana Ben-Dor stood anxiously in the schoolyard ready to greet them. It would be the first time the director of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry in Israel (NACOEJ) would be welcoming a group of American college students to volunteer with Ethiopian-Israeli children.

The college students — among them Iana Phillips of Westport — were in Israel as part of the Taglit-Birthright Israel: Hillel program. On this day, they were taking a break from the hustle and bustle of the Old City of Jerusalem and the bikini-clad beaches of Tel Aviv to spend the day helping Ethiopian children as part of the NACOEJ Limudiah: Intensive After-School Education Program for Ethiopian-Israeli Children.

Limudiah addresses a grave issue in Israel; only about 35% of Ethiopian-Israeli children perform at grade level. Designed 16 years ago, the program combats this problem by providing 10-12 hours of intensive after-school education in reading, Hebrew language, mathematics, and general study skills, as well as enrichment in computers, English, arts and crafts, and music. Approximately 1,200 children per year in 40 elementary schools in eight Israeli cities participate in the program.



Taglit Birthright Hillel participants Iana Phillips of Westport, (left) and Laura Berger of Rochester, MN help Ethiopian-Israeli children with their English. Photo credit: NACOEJ

Like the rest of the Birthright students, Phillips was aware of the statistics and was ready to spend the day helping the Ethiopian-Israeli kids with their English.

"Before my Birthright experience, I wasn't very knowledgeable about the Ethiopian Jewish population in Israel — why they were there, and how they fit into the Israeli society," said Phillips, a student at New York University. "However, being in a classroom full of energetic and enthusiastic children showed how important their Hebrew and English education is to them and their parents, many of whom I learned are not completely fluent or literate in either language."

DECEMBER 7, 2007 TheJewishAdvocate.com

For the 8th night: give an alterna-gift

Bicycle? Trampoline? DVD? In place of an eighth night Chanukah gift, consider giving the gift of a lesson in tikun olam and honoring a child of your choice by providing schoolbooks for Ethiopian-Israeli children.

A \$56 donation to the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) will provide a year's worth of schoolbooks for two Ethiopian-Israeli children whose families can't afford to buy them. The American child of your choice will receive a personalized choice to receive a personalized 8th Night of Chanukah certificate, naming you as the donor.

The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) is a grassroots, non-profit organization founded in 1982 with four mandates: to help Ethiopian Jews survive in Ethiopia; to assist them in reaching Israel; to aid in their absorption into Israeli society; and to preserve their unique and ancient culture.

Today, NACOEJ assesses Ethiopian Jews on both sides of the Red Sea. In Ethiopia, NACOEJ funds feeding, education and religious programs for about 11,000 Jews awaiting aliyah. Programs include a Feeding Center for Children Under Age 6 and for Pregnant and Nursing Mothers, a daily School Lunch Program,

8TH NIGHT OF CHANUKAH
CERTIFICATE OF HONOR
THE NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY IS PROUD TO RECOGNIZE
FRIEND OR CHILD'S NAME HERE
FROM:
Mom and Dad

Honor one child with a gift to another

monthly food distributions to the creative community, education, employment and religious facilities.

In Israel, NACOEJ's work includes Limudiah: After-School Programs of intensive education assistance for more than 1,000 Ethiopian elementary school children; the NACOEJ-Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program to help more than 1,500 Ethiopian teens attain quality high school education; and the NACOEJ/Vidal Ses-

soon Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program that enables more than 500 Ethiopian-Israeli students to pursue university degrees. In addition, NACOEJ operates a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Tutoring Program, and a School Supplies Collection Program to provide basic, essential learning materials to underprivileged Ethiopian children.

For more information, visit www.nacoelj.org

Barbara Ribakove Gordon Honored by City Hall

January 7, 2008

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United Jewish Communities
UJA-Federation of New York
UJC of MetroWest New Jersey

Thank you!



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY, INC. AND AFFILIATES

COMBINED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
DECEMBER 31, 2007

	<u>Current Funds</u>		Total
	<u>Unrestricted</u>	Temporarily <u>Restricted</u>	All <u>Funds</u>
<u>ASSETS</u>			
Current assets:			
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 669,346	\$ 161,977	\$ 831,323
Investment in marketable securities	9,321	1,105,282	1,114,603
Contributions receivable	129,828	392,571	522,399
Total current assets	<u>808,495</u>	<u>1,659,830</u>	<u>2,468,325</u>
Security deposit	<u>11,813</u>		<u>11,813</u>
Total assets	<u>\$ 820,308</u>	<u>\$ 1,659,830</u>	<u>\$ 2,480,138</u>
<u>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</u>			
Current liabilities:			
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 417,220		\$ 417,220
Deferred public support	381,210		381,210
Total liabilities	<u>798,430</u>		<u>798,430</u>
Commitments			
Net assets:			
Unrestricted	21,878		21,878
Temporarily restricted		\$ 1,659,830	1,659,830
Total net assets	<u>21,878</u>	<u>1,659,830</u>	<u>1,681,708</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	<u>\$ 820,308</u>	<u>\$ 1,659,830</u>	<u>\$ 2,480,138</u>

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY, INC. AND AFFILIATES

COMBINED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2007

	<u>Current Funds</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Unrestricted</u>	<u>Temporarily Restricted</u>	<u>All Funds</u>
Support and revenue:			
Public support	\$ 1,167,028	\$ 2,928,717	\$ 4,095,745
Sales (net of cost of goods sold of \$8,547)	72,849		72,849
Other income	47,398		47,398
Interest income	208	14,726	14,934
Dividend income	5,074	17,950	23,024
Net realized and unrealized gain on securities	687	61,027	61,714
Net assets released from restrictions - satisfaction of program restrictions	<u>2,850,073</u>	<u>(2,850,073)</u>	
Total support and revenue	<u>4,143,317</u>	<u>172,347</u>	<u>4,315,664</u>
Expenses:			
Program services:			
Relief in Ethiopia	1,218,369		1,218,369
Assistance in Israel	2,138,141		2,138,141
Information and Education - USA	339,049		339,049
Total program services	<u>3,695,559</u>		<u>3,695,559</u>
Supporting services:			
Management and general	131,028		131,028
Fundraising	363,719		363,719
Total supporting services	<u>494,747</u>		<u>494,747</u>
Total expenses	<u>4,190,306</u>		<u>4,190,306</u>
Change in net assets	(46,989)	172,347	125,358
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>68,867</u>	<u>1,487,483</u>	<u>1,556,350</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ 21,878</u>	<u>\$ 1,659,830</u>	<u>\$ 1,681,708</u>

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* Deceased