

Leah Barkai: Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program



Leah Barkai is the Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program. This charming photo was taken when she and Yehudit Abramson (Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ/Barney and

Rachel Landau Gottstein College (AAS) Sponsorship Program) were at Haifa University to distribute books through the Barney's Books Program.

Hanny Melessa-Biadglin is the mother of the adorable baby named

Ariel who Leah is holding. Hanny is a NACOEJ AAS recipient being sponsored by the Gottsteins. She is completing a Master's degree in Gerontology.



2013 Bridges

The NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program



What Do High School Sponsorships Do?

Since 1997, the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program has changed the lives of countless Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers by enabling them to attend high-quality, local high schools rather than leave home for lower-level, state-subsidized boarding schools.

While basic tuition is covered by the

government, Israeli schools charge many fees, often beyond the means of Ethiopian families. Sponsorships from caring American Jews like you allow Ethiopian students to get the books and supplies they need and take advantage of all the school's normal and special educational opportunities.

As one student says, her sponsorship lets her be "...just like the other kids" (something vital to teens). Your partnership gives these teens an education that

increases their chances of getting into and succeeding in college, their chances for self-sufficiency, and the opportunity to help their struggling families.



Students in the NACOEJ High School Sponsorship Program

Be an Ambassador

It's our pleasure to bring you the eighth issue of Bridges, a newsletter created just for you. If you have news to share about your own sponsored students, we'd love to hear from you.

Please also become an Ambassador for our Ethiopian-Israeli high school students by passing this newsletter on to friends and family who might want to support our students. Your endorsement is vital to help more deserving Ethiopian teens get the education that will lead to a successful future.

Questions? Comments? Call Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email her at Education@nacoej.org. She'll answer your questions, contact potential sponsors you suggest, and chat with you about the joys of high school sponsorship.

A Journey from Sponsor to Volunteer to Staff...

In 1997, when Karen Gens heard Barbara Ribakove Gordon speak at her Hadassah meeting, she felt an instant kinship with Ethiopian Jews. Since then she's been a NACOEJ high school sponsor.

Today, we're happy to tell you Karen is the Coordinator of our high school and college (AAS) sponsorship programs. Here's her journey:

Shortly after hearing Barbara, Karen started sponsoring Rachel Yitamenu in the high school program and visited her in Israel in 1999. She took a taxi to Rehovot where Rachel and her family lived. The driver, though impressed that she was helping a student, became "unsettled" as they entered the unfamiliar Ethiopian neighborhood.

Karen invited him to come in and be her translator. It was a huge success. The two of them visited for an hour and took many photos. The driver's image of the Ethiopian-Israeli community changed for the better.

After sponsoring Rachel through high school, Karen sponsored many other high school students, including Rivka (Ricki) Goshu. They've become good friends and are in touch often on Facebook. Ricki has graduated, completed her army service, and is at Bar-Ilan University, with Karen as her AAS sponsor!



From left, Karen Gens, Rachel's two sisters, Rachel Yitamenu, Rachel's mother



Ricki Goshu

North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry

255 West 36th St. Suite 701
NY, NY 10018
212-233-5200 x 230
Fax: 212-233-5243
education@nacoej.org
www.nacoej.org

Just the Facts

Did you know that in the NACOEJ High School Sponsorship Program in the 2012-2013 school year...

- 220 sponsors participated in the program.
- 1,105 students were sponsored.
- 58 schools participated in the program in 19 Israeli cities.

With your dedicated partnership, NACOEJ has been sponsoring Ethiopian-Israeli high school students for 17 years!

Like NACOEJ on Facebook



Receive breaking news about our programs and updates about the Ethiopian-Israeli community.

NACOEJ is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1982 and is the only major American organization committed exclusively to the welfare of Ethiopian Jews.

Wonderful Words...

...From High School Students to their Sponsors

The best way to feel the impact of an educational program is to hear from the recipients and the educators themselves. Here are excerpts from letters recent Ethiopian-Israeli high school graduates sent to their sponsors.



From Rachel Kesu to her sponsor: *"I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your kind help*

during these past three years...Now I am finishing school with good grades and a better chance than my parents had...I hope I will someday have the chance to give back what I have so kindly been given."



From Sara Chekole to her sponsor: *"...if it weren't for you I would not have been able to take part in*

the school's diverse activities because of inability to pay... Thank you very much and I wish you years of success and hope that you will continue to help needy children so that they can be happy and be like the rest of their friends. With love and a huge thank you..."



From Daniel Lakau, who hopes to serve in an elite combat unit in the Israel Defense

Forces, to his sponsor: *"I want to thank you for your sponsorship. It helped me continue without worrying about money. I think anyone who helps another is a kind person. When my mom found out that I was being sponsored [in high school], she was really appreciative and came to thank the principal and other staff."*



From Mazal Avig to her sponsor: *"You helped me to study, but mainly to believe that*

anything is possible. That is why I'd like to thank you for being so generous and kindhearted. People who give to those they don't know and expect nothing in return are very special. I will always remember your generosity and hope to be able to do the same for others in the future."

...From Two High School Educators to NACOEJ

Here are comments from two educators involved with NACOEJ-sponsored Ethiopian-Israeli students.

From Eti Habari, Immigrant Coordinator, Eliezer Ben Yehuda High School, Nes Ziona, to Leah Barkai, Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program:

"We were overjoyed

to receive your generous support for our Ethiopian-Israeli students. Your help is as vital as water for a thirsty person for these children from disadvantaged families. Please pass our sincere thanks and wishes for good health, happiness and success to NACOEJ sponsors. May G-d answer all their prayers for their kindness and generosity."

From Dr. Gilad Amir, Principal, Hebrew University Secondary School, Jerusalem, to Leah:

"I would like to thank you and NACOEJ for your unique and vital support in the form of scholarships for Ethiopian-Israeli students. Our school receives Ethiopian-Israeli students each year and we would very much like to have

more. These are youth with great potential that often does not get realized. We would be happy to be a part of opening up new opportunities for them."

Editor's note: He means, give us more sponsors and we can bring in more brilliant students! We would love to give more students the chance to study at this exceptional school!

Very Special Students and Their Very Special Sponsor

Diana Yacobi does not like to have a fuss made about her. "Focus on the students," she says. But we caught up with her recently in Israel when she made an unexpected visit to the AMIT

Comprehensive High School in Kiryat Malachi.

She sponsors ten students at AMIT through our program, and had just donated an electronics lab and a computer lab

to the school. She was eager to see the progress in the labs, as well as meet her students.

Because the visit was a surprise, eight of Diana's students were away, attending special math classes to prepare for a matriculation exam. But two of her students, Ephraim Solomon and Vered Temiat, were there and were delighted to see Diana and her husband, Avraham. (Ephraim had taken the exam already and Vered felt well-prepared.)

During their meeting, Ephraim told Diana he expects to graduate with

a prestigious Electronic Technician Diploma. Vered talked about the movie she's making in the school's award-winning Communications track.

Diana Yacobi has experienced first-hand the joy that comes from giving Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers the opportunity to attend good local high schools and prepare for college and successful futures. All of us at NACOEJ — in New York and in Israel — thank the Yacobis and each one of you reading this newsletter, for changing the lives and worlds of the students you sponsor.



Diana Yacobi, right, with her husband and two of their students.

Update on Tigist

As you know, Tigist Bitau, our exceptional high school runner who was headed for the Olympics, was severely injured when a young man drove a dune buggy straight into her.

After leg surgery, Tigist went on a rigorous physical therapy regimen. She missed a lot of

school but with the help of her sponsor and other caring people in our NACOEJ family, she now has tutors to help her catch up and also receives our assistance with the costly transportation needed to get to physical therapy.

Tigist is struggling with the emotional as well as the

physical outcome of all she has been through, including losing her beloved mother not long before the accident. But we hope with all our hearts that this talented young woman will be able to achieve her longed-for dream to run for Israel — despite this terrible setback. Please keep Tigist in your heart.



When this photo was published in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharonot, Tigist was just out of the hospital and couldn't put weight on her wounded leg. But she was pretending to run and smiling bravely. Photo: Yariv Katz and Yuval Hen, Yediot Aharonot

'A Journey' continued from cover

But there's more to Karen's story. At the end of 2009 she left her job. While looking for a new one, Karen contacted NACOEJ to ask about volunteering.

Our answer was "Yes!" In 2010, Karen became a volunteer, working with Judy Dick, who then headed the sponsorship programs.

When Judy took a new position elsewhere, Karen took over. She's thrilled. We're thrilled. Not all high school sponsors become NACOEJ staff members.

But sponsoring students as Karen has — and you have — can lead to long-lasting bonds that enrich lives on both sides of the Atlantic.