



# JUST THE FACTS...

In the 2007/08 school year, The NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program sponsored:

- 1033 Ethiopian-Israeli students
- In 58 schools throughout Israel

Why the reduced numbers now, after years in which we had as many as 1500 students?

The dollar-to-shekel exchange rate is the answer — our dollars do not go as far as they used to in Israel.

In addition, we know our donors have their own personal financial stressors and concerns. Here at NACOEJ we understand setbacks, but still pray that all of our wonderfully generous sponsors and their friends and relations will dig as deep as possible to help fund teenagers who truly will have to go without their schoolbooks and many other educational necessities unless they receive our help.

## Sponsorships are Good for the Whole Community

How are some more of our sponsored students doing? A few shining examples help us understand the true value of your contributions to the high school program.



**RACHEL SAMANI** just graduated from the Katzir High School in Rehovot where she was sponsored by Richard and Lois Gunther of Los Angeles, CA, all the way through high school, since 7th grade. She is the oldest of five sisters, one of whom has cerebral palsy. The others study in NACOEJ's *Limudiah* after-school program, where they receive academic support and enrichment.

Rachel is looking forward to studying criminology someday. In the meantime, she is taking extra courses in leadership at her neighborhood community center, where she is learning how to teach and tell stories with moral messages so that she can help other youngsters in her town. Rachel is definitely a success story of her own!

Avi and Beni have become volunteer instructors in the Tzofim (Israeli Scouts) movement's local branch. Though all Tzofim chapters are open to any Israeli youth, the participants in this group are all from the Ethiopian-Israeli community. Their Tzofim meet for activities twice a week. Avi and Beni instruct 7th grade boys and girls. They trained for this in 9th grade. Avi and Beni are becoming fine young men who will certainly continue to make their NACOEJ supporters proud.



**HANA TAYACHO AND NURIT ABEI**, who were sponsored for the first time in the 2007-08 school year while in 10th grade, also attend the RamLod Religious High School in Lod.

Hana is sponsored by Morris and Beverly Weinstein of Rochester, NY and Nurit's sponsors, Rabbi Kenneth Chasen and Allison Lee, live in Los Angeles.

Both girls volunteer after school with the "Maccabi" youth movement. The "Maccabi" organization teaches medical courses, among them a first aid course which these girls are taking. The course has three stages and in the second one, the students will take an active part using their new



**AVI DARSU AND BENI ASNAKU** attend the RamLod Religious High School in Lod. They have both been sponsored faithfully since 9th grade by Peter Rein of St. Louis, MO and by Barbara Bernstein of Buffalo Grove, IL, respectively. Now the boys are going into their 12th and final year of high school.

skills as volunteers. Currently, they assist the "Maccabi" municipal branch doing secretarial work. It will surely be a pleasure to watch as these girls, with the support of their dedicated sponsors, continue to make their mark, perhaps in the medical world.

*Students who are enabled by sponsorships to attend high schools in their own communities (rather than being sent away to low-level boarding schools) are excelling, with appropriate mentoring and support. They are clearly serving as community role models.*



# Bridges

SUMMER 2008



## THE NACOEJ/EDWARD G. VICTOR HIGH SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

### A Student Aims High

"My name is Israela. My parents chose that name as a symbol of their arrival into the new country of Israel, of which they dreamed for many years in Ethiopia," wrote Israela Elias, a student who will be going into the 11th grade in the Ramla-Lod High School in Lod. She recently returned from International Space Camp in Turkey – "light years" away from her family's Ethiopian roots.

Israela continued in her biographical statement, prepared for a potential sponsor: "My family came from Ethiopia in 1991 and I was born here [Israel] on March 7, 1992. I have 11 siblings... Both my parents are unemployed... In the future I would like to study in the university and then get a profession and a career of my own. I would like to become independent and provide for my family."

Israela has certainly worked hard with her family in mind. A drive for academic excellence enabled her to be chosen as one of the 16-member Israeli delegation to the International Space Camp. Youngsters were chosen based on demonstrated and tested achievement, including English and Astronomy preparedness.

Israela told her previous sponsors, "I met children of different ages who come from different places from around the world. I made many new friends... enjoyed myself and learned a lot". Among the activities which Israela excitedly wrote about was one in which they played roles as crew members on the model of the "Discovery".



Israela is standing, the fifth camper from the right.

But despite her successes in high school, achievements at Space Camp, and participation, along with her brother Daniel, in the Weizmann Institute of Science's "Budding Scientists" Program for the Scientific-Technological Advancement of Students of Ethiopian Origin, Israela and Daniel did not have sponsors last year. Their sponsors were unable to continue due to serious illness and our thoughts remain with these generous contributors during this difficult time.

Recently, and very fortunately, new sponsors have stepped in. Israela and Daniel will surely need their new sponsors' support as they strive for excellence.

Qualified students in the Weizmann program study science, math, and English, have personal mentoring, and attend seminars, camps, and science trips. The students attend the Weizmann Institute twice a week for four-hour sessions.

Israela and Daniel are exceptionally busy with their studies and should not be constantly distracted by worries about everyday high school costs and their family's survival. But they do have these concerns. Sponsorships enable them to focus on fulfilling their potential and succeed.

### LOOKING FOR YOUR FEEDBACK...

We are happy to bring you the third issue of "Bridges", written by Lisa Gran Kovitch, especially for sponsors in the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program. We would love to have your feedback, comments, suggestions, etc. Please feel free to call us at 212-233-5200, ext. 232, or email to [highschool@nacoj.org](mailto:highschool@nacoj.org). Thanks.

P.S. We would greatly appreciate your passing this newsletter on to any family or friends you feel would be interested in sponsoring an Ethiopian-Israeli high school student.



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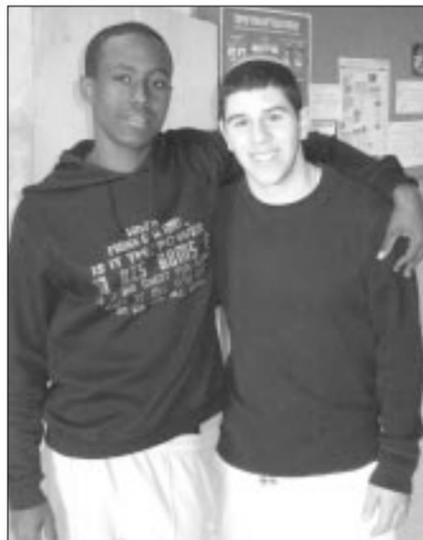


Jason and friends with Moshe and students of the Elyashiv High School.

## “Me and the Mayor”

Jason Steinberg, of New Jersey, an undergraduate student at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania, has been deeply moved by his connection to the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program – a connection which spans generations and continents.

Jason went on his first pilgrimage to Israel in the summer of 2006 with a USY (Conservative) trip. After exploring Jerusalem, hiking the Negev, relaxing in Eilat and experiencing Masada, Ein Gedi, and every major site and city south of Tel Aviv for weeks, the trip was suddenly cut short by bombings in the north due to the outbreak of the war



Moshe and Jason

with Lebanon. Thus, not having seen the northern part of the country, Jason vowed to return.

A second trip to Israel was very different. During last year’s winter break from school, Jason and two other college students, Josh and Adi, boarded a plane for Israel with plans to visit many friends and family – a more personal look at the land and people of Israel.

On the top of his to-do list was a visit with Moshe Tafera, a 17-year-old in 12th grade at Elyashiv High School in the very poor town of Lod – not the usual tourist destination. Why? Because for the last four years, Jason has been helping to sponsor Moshe’s high school education.

Jason described the start of the visit. “Sunday, December 30, 2007 was a typical sunny, blue-skied day, when we stepped out of our sherut in front of the Elyashiv School. Uncertain of how to pass through the swirling, iron gates, we asked a few students if they knew Moshe and could help us get in. ‘Moshe Tafera?’ the students questioned. ‘Of course we know Moshe. Who doesn’t know Moshe?’ “

Though the initial few moments of the meeting with Moshe were a little awkward, once the language difficulties were sorted out as to who would translate, a wonderful visit began. Moshe took his American friends on a tour of his school, introduced them to his

friends and then everyone followed Moshe to classes where they learned a little Bible, Talmud, and Math.

During each ten minute break between classes, Moshe and his friends ran over to the basketball court to play a quick game; Jason and Josh joined in.

On the court, Jason was able to have a first-hand look at Moshe’s talent as an athlete and see the respect he garnered from his peers. Moshe’s leadership was displayed during one unexpected moment when two students began throwing punches at each other and a crowd circled. Moshe quickly sprinted over to the squabble, separated the students, and instructed the surrounding bystanders to go to class. Jason learned by talking with the students that Moshe was viewed as a leader and always acted accordingly.

Jason reports, “Throughout the visit, Moshe and I became closer and closer as we hurried through every topic imaginable. We discussed family, life, sports, school, future desires and more. Although our time together was short, I got to know Moshe on that Sunday in a way that no letter could ever portray...”

Moshe, one of eight siblings, three of whom are already serving Israel, one of whom is married with children, and three of whom are still in elementary school, is motivated to succeed academically. He also aspires to serve in an intelligence unit for the Israel Defense Forces. Moshe is now participating in a program called “After Me”, which will help to prepare him physically and mentally to serve in a prestigious IDF fighting unit.

Jason met a Moshe who carries himself in a confident, mature and respectable way. Thus, says Jason, “No one would dare pick a fight with Moshe. He acted like a humble mayor, who leads by example. And I began to call him just that, “the mayor.” As I watched the discord unfold in the blink of an eye, I realized how lucky I was to be able to sponsor Moshe. He is an exceptional human being who is driven to succeed regardless of obstacles.”

Jason got involved with NACOEJ because members of his family have

## A Cycle of Disadvantage Becomes a Circle of Inspiration

(through the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program)



Rabbi Yacobi and staff with Rivka, Malka and Hanna, students of Ulpanat Eliad.

Girls can dream – anywhere in the world – even in Lod, a town in central Israel where the Ethiopian community is severely underprivileged. Our sponsored high school students in Lod dream of becoming doctors, nurses, lawyers, business owners, actresses, fashion designers and songwriters — or report that they just haven’t decided yet because “there are just so many options”.

In a school located in a high-crime, Arab neighborhood — where the staff must walk the girls home in the evening, where the school is often broken into, and even basic food and clothing are hard to come by — 49 sponsored Ethiopian-Israeli students in Ulpanat Eliad, a modern religious girls high school in Lod, dare to dream and believe in limitless possibilities. And the generosity of sponsorships, that an inspired high school staff helps to administer, make these dreams seem possible.

According to their principal, Rabbi Yossef Yacobi, “the stipends which the students receive are needed for their very existence and for their success, for as it is, the students leave after their studies to work for the sustenance of their families...”

The stipends pay for their books, supplies, and school trips. Without the sponsorships they could never cover their own needs. Even with this urgently needed help, these young women are often working as waitresses, or in the airport, or at supermarkets and the like to help support their families.

Though the educators of Ulpanat Eliad recognize the hardship these girls face, they set high standards, both academically and in regard to community service. And our

49 Ethiopian-Israeli girls, sponsored through NACOEJ, willingly accept these challenges. All of these students are studying for the highest level English and Math tests in the Bagrut (matriculation exams) so that they will be accepted by top universities.

And their contributions to the community, through school-organized programs, are vast: collecting and delivering food packages, visiting the sick in hospitals, especially during Purim, organizing staples for delivery to Sderot (the town under constant rocket attack from Gaza), singing songs and nurturing Ethiopian little ones in nursery schools. These girls rise, despite their circumstances, above any possibility of spiritual impoverishment.

The NACOEJ High School Sponsorship Program has provided the funds that the creative and caring educators in their school need to help these students understand that the world is full of possibilities. They organize school trips to promote leadership, including one in which the girls went up to Jerusalem, equipped with materials and maps, to act as group leaders and tour guides of their teachers. Meeting these challenges has truly opened the eyes of these girls.

With the help of NACOEJ sponsorships, a vicious cycle of risk has become a rewarding circle of personal options and contributions to Israel as well.

As Rabbi Yacobi says, the stipends are what enable not only the girls’ success but their very existence as part of a vibrant school community in which dreams can come true!

Thanks to the 24 sponsors of students in Ulpanat Eliad!

contributed for years. His grandfather, David Davidson, often shared stories of those he sponsored with Jason. Hearing about his grandfather’s contributions and the relationships that he developed, influenced Jason to start his own sponsorship. Upon entering high school, Jason made a deal with his grandfather – his grandfather would start him off with the first payment and then Jason would pick up the sponsorship in the second year.

As Jason recalled, “As I visited Moshe, I thought about my relationship with him. I thought of why I made a donation to NACOEJ. I thought of my Grandfather. I thought about the way Moshe acted and who he was as a person... much of what my Grandfather represented, and has tried to instill in me, I saw in Moshe. Both of them are leaders in their own respect, will be, and are, successful, and are naturally altruistic human beings.

“Throughout the day,” said Jason, “I realized how fortunate I was to be paired with Moshe. I couldn’t be more proud to know such a special young man.” Letters between the two continue and a very special connection has been forged, inspired by a multi-generational commitment that has woven a thread from America to an inspirational Israeli teenager of Ethiopian heritage.