

ANNUAL REPORT 2017



**North American
Conference on
Ethiopian Jewry**

**PROVIDING CRITICAL
EDUCATION, AID, AND
ADVOCACY FOR
ETHIOPIAN JEWS**

OUR MISSION

The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) is a 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 the absorption of Ethiopian Jews into Israeli society.
- To help preserve their unique and ancient culture.



Barbara being honored at the Knesset. Handing her the plaque is Member of Knesset Dr. Avraham Neguise.



MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Visiting the Jewish community in Gondar, Ethiopia, this past summer, my wife and I encountered Jews who had been promised entry to Israel, but who were stranded, desolate and starving while they waited in deplorable conditions.

Adults worry about themselves but their pain is sharper because they cannot feed their malnourished children. They were grateful for your gifts that enabled NACOEJ to feed the 1890 children in the summer day camp programs in Gondar and Addis Ababa. Through your generous support, we were able to provide each child with lunch each day, and some special food for families for the Holidays. Without that help some could have died in the past few months.

We accept 2 challenges on your behalf: First, we must secure funds to enable the Jewish community's survival in Ethiopia until we have convinced the Israeli Government to bring them to their Homeland. Second, we must help insure that each child who arrives from Ethiopia receives the educational support needed to help that child thrive in school. Our Limudiah programs throughout Israel have an impact. But, they exist only because you support them! Together we will expand the programs and increase the number of students who will benefit, enabling them to mature into fully contributing Israeli citizens.



Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein
President

In the 2016-2017 school year, former NACOEJ President, Joseph Feit and I were honored by the Israeli Knesset for our work in NACOEJ on behalf of Ethiopian Jews. The ceremony in the Knesset auditorium included a number of significant speakers and, most important, an audience full of Ethiopian Israelis. It was a highlight of our year.

But in the same year, a study by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute told us that Ethiopian high school students were falling seriously behind all other ethnic groups (other Jews, including the ultra-orthodox, and Arabs) in every category of education. Most damning of all, only 31% of Ethiopian high-school graduates qualified for the all-important university-level matriculation. Without that, getting into college is very difficult – and without college, a professional life in high-tech Israel is almost totally out of reach.

We should have seen it coming. Years ago, an educator told us that among Ethiopian students entering high school, “You can always tell which ones have been to a Limudiah, because they are ready. They have the tools for succeeding in high school. Many of the others don’t, and they’re so behind when they start, that it’s too late to catch up.”

The praise for the Limudiah was welcome, but today it is cold comfort. Our Limudiah classes, now integrated, are available only to hundreds of Ethiopian elementary school children, while thousands clearly need them.

Until we can prepare many more children to do well in high school, even the growing number of Ethiopian professionals in medicine, law, science, the arts, government, the military and more, will not reflect the whole Ethiopian-Israeli community, most of which still struggles.

This means that in addition to our renewed efforts to help the sick and malnourished Jewish children left behind in Ethiopia, we must work urgently to expand the Limudiah in Israel.

In Ethiopia, we are saving Jewish lives. In Israel, we must save more Jewish futures.



Barbara Ribakove
Founder and Executive Director

Report covers 2016-2017 academic year and 2016 financial year.

The Limudiah provides 10 hours a week of assistance in reading, math, and study skills to Ethiopian-Israeli children in grades 1-6. The program:



- Begins in first grade so children achieve early academic success.
- Works in the children's schools, so our teachers can work closely with home room teachers.
- Maintains small grade-level groups, ideally of no more than eight students per teacher.
- Hires skilled teachers who are sensitive to cultural and familial issues, as well as issues of poverty, that challenge Ethiopian-Israeli children.
- Starts each after-school session with a nourishing hot lunch, crucial for children from impoverished homes.
- Builds in constant evaluation and tailors approaches and materials to meet the needs of individual students.



2016-2017 Limudiah Programs:

750 students ■ 13 schools ■ 6 communities

Kiryat Ekron

Ohel Meir School: 35 students (Grades 1-6)

Lod

HaMaapilim School: 55 students (Grades 1-6)

Noam HaMeiri School: 54 students (Grades 1-6)

Rambam School: 73 students (Grades 1-6)

Ramla

Bar Ilan School: 30 students (Grades 1-4)

Harin School: 37 students (Grades 1-4)

Rishon LeZion

Sinai School: 80 students (Grades 1-6)

Yeshurun National Religious School: 54 students (Grades 1-6)

Zvulun School: 60 students (Grades 1-3)

Rehovot

Maalot Meshulun School: 124 students (Grades 1-5)

Tachemoni School: 70 students (Grades 1-6)

Yavne

Abir Yaacov School: 33 students (Grades 1-3)

Yechidani School: 45 students (Grades 1-2)

A Story That Shines a Bright Spotlight on the Limudiah

In the Ohel Meir School in Kiryat Ekron this past school year, there was a student (we'll call her Ruthie) in the 3rd grade Limudiah class, who had very serious difficulties in reading. Ruthie did well in math, but all her other subjects were negatively impacted by her inability to read.

Our Limudiah teacher, Sarah, consulted with the remedial education teacher and learned, to her great dismay, that Ruthie was going to be sent to a special education program in a different school. Sarah was determined that this should not happen, and began working intensively with Ruthie with a specially-designed program.

By mid-year, thanks to Sarah's extraordinary efforts, Ruthie had outstanding grades in math, was making progress in reading, and doing very well in her other subjects. It was clear that Ruthie would not have to go into special education after all.

But for the Limudiah, Ruthie would never have progressed as she did. Her story demonstrates one of the many ways in which the NACOEJ Limudiah program is vital to the future of Ethiopian-Israeli children.



Mitzvah Projects

For donors of all ages who want a hands-on way to help Ethiopian Israelis: birthdays, weddings and Bar/Bat Mitzvot are all popular occasions for participants to craft their own project.

While researching NACOEJ, and learning about the struggles of Ethiopian Jews in Israel, Hannah Beemer decided to help the Limudiah Program as her Bat Mitzvah Project because she felt it provides many resources that these children need.

“

This program is very important to me because there are many children my age or younger who do not receive the many educational opportunities that we sometimes take for granted.

Learning about this made me think that, if I do all I can to support this program, it can create better futures for these Ethiopian-Jewish children.

- Hannah

”



NACOEJ/EDWARD G. VICTOR HIGH SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

High School Sponsorships = School Trips, Extra Study Hours, and More...

Since 1997, this program has enabled thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers to attend high-quality, local high schools, rather than leave home and be separated from their families in state-subsidized boarding schools.

The government covers basic high school tuition, but Israeli schools charge extra compulsory fees which many Ethiopian families cannot afford. Sponsorships help students get essentials like school trips, extra study hours, fees for special programs, and more. They also help bridge the tuition gap for students attending the highest level, semi-private high schools.

Students say sponsorships let them be “...**just like the other kids**”. The partnership of NACOEJ sponsors and Ethiopian-Israeli high school students gives these teens self-confidence to go on to successful futures.



In the 2016-2017 School Year...

- 222 sponsors participated in the H.S. program.
- 835 students were sponsored.
- 50 schools in 14 Israeli cities.
- 174 of our students graduated.
- Hundreds of students are still hoping for sponsors.

NACOEJ/BARNEY & RACHEL LANDAU GOTTSTEIN COLLEGE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM (AAS)

AAS Sponsors = The Keys to Success

Since 1987, the AAS program has given thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli students the financial support needed to complete their degrees.

The Israeli government covers university tuition, but students must pay for their living expenses including rent, food, transport, textbooks and more.

(Universities are state-subsidized but colleges aren't, so their tuition is much higher; students attending colleges have a larger financial gap to overcome.)

Most of their families can't help. Often students drop out of school to take unskilled jobs to help their families. With an AAS



sponsorship, a student can stay in school, earn a degree, enter a profession, and break out of poverty.

Associated with the AAS program is **Barney's Books**, subsidized by a special grant from the Gottsteins.

It provides children's books which are given to AAS students for their own children, younger relatives, and friends, to develop an early love of reading and books.

In the 2016-2017 School Year...

- 116 AAS sponsors helped support 364 students in 5 universities and 30 academic colleges, including 10 nursing schools and 8 engineering schools.
- 118 sponsored students finished their coursework this year and graduated in their fields of study. About 126 students will finish their studies soon.
- 38 sponsored students were studying for advanced degrees.
- 2 sponsored students received Masters Degrees and 12 more will finish Masters Degrees soon.

ADVOCACY

NACOEJ staff members, including Israel Director Shoshana Ben-Dor, continue to speak out on various issues facing the Ethiopian-Israeli community.

They have attended Knesset committee meetings, primarily those monitoring the implementation of the "New Way" policy (recommendations created by 12 Ministries and government agencies and adopted by the government in 2015).

On May 16, 2017, the Knesset held the first day devoted to equality for the Ethiopian-Israeli community. It took place at the initiative of the Association of Ethiopian Jews (the former IAEJ) and was arranged through the good offices of MK Dov Hanin. The goal: to address all issues facing the Ethiopian-Israeli community, and bring policy makers together with those who live the issues in their daily lives.

Eleven Knesset committees had meetings related to specific issues concerning the Ethiopian-Israeli community's needs and integration. Each reviewed steps taken to solve problems addressed by the New Way policy, followed by reports by community activists and/or other interested parties about what they see happening in the field.

Shoshana attended three of the committee meetings: Interior (dealing with the legal status of the Qes), Education and the Committee on the Rights of Children (both dealt with various educational issues).

The committee meetings were followed by panel discussions of areas in which the community experiences and perceives discrimination, and then a plenum discussion in the full Knesset.

CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Returning to her roots as a researcher/advocate for better educational materials, Shoshana Ben-Dor has been very active in this area in the past year.

She's spent 27 years researching the history and religious culture of Ethiopian Jews. She continues to run the popular NACOEJ Teaching Tent on the Sigd holiday, teaching the liturgy of the day, which she translated from its original Ge'ez (ancient Ethiopic) text. By this year's Sigd holiday, the initial work of total collection, transcription and translation will be done.

In addition, because of dissatisfaction with study materials produced by the Ministry of Education, Shoshana was part of a special committee to critique the materials and suggest changes. She was able to

influence teaching materials in two major areas:

- Reframing the story of Ethiopian-Jewish Aliyah, including the full chronology of 40 years, not only Operations Moses and Solomon, and the active role played by the community in its own aliyah. This included a webinar for teachers.
- Convincing the Ministry Curriculum department that all materials on Ethiopian religious life had to be rewritten. The Ministry has invited Qessotch or Kahanat (Ethiopian Jewish Priests) to produce this material for students.

Not only in contact with the present generation of Kahanat in Israel, Shoshana is in contact with the families of those Kahanat who were her teachers in the 1980's.

She helped plan a program in their memory that took place on November 1, 2017. She recently donated all her taped interviews with them to the National Library.



◀ *In the Prime Minister's office, after a meeting with the Council of Kahanat. From left: Chaim Shmilla (intern PM's office), Qes Efraim Lawi, Qes Semai Elias, Gadi Yevarkan (community activist), Shoshana, Qes Zemena Melkam.*

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AND ACTIVITIES

COMBINED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION: DECEMBER 31, 2016

	Current Funds		Total All Funds
	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	
<u>ASSETS</u>			
Current assets:			
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 313,986	\$ 407,240	\$ 721,226
Investment in marketable securities	6,819	1,125,928	1,132,747
Contributions receivable	47,440	85,819	133,259
Total current assets	<u>368,245</u>	<u>1,618,987</u>	<u>1,987,232</u>
Furniture and equipment, net of accumulated depreciation of \$57,453	874		874
Security deposits	<u>15,553</u>		<u>15,553</u>
Total assets	<u>\$ 384,672</u>	<u>\$ 1,618,987</u>	<u>\$ 2,003,659</u>
<u>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</u>			
Current liabilities:			
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 307,420		\$ 307,420
Deferred public support	<u>400,128</u>		<u>400,128</u>
Total liabilities	<u>707,548</u>		<u>707,548</u>
Commitments			
Net assets:			
Unrestricted	(322,876)		(322,876)
Temporarily restricted		<u>1,618,987</u>	<u>1,618,987</u>
Total net assets	<u>(322,876)</u>	<u>1,618,987</u>	<u>1,296,111</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	<u>\$ 384,672</u>	<u>\$ 1,618,987</u>	<u>\$ 2,003,659</u>

COMBINED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES: YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2016

Support and revenue:			
Public support	\$ 876,456	\$ 1,422,659	\$ 2,299,115
Sales (net of cost of goods sold of \$1,659)	10,431		10,431
Other income	8,157		8,157
Dividend income	516	18,705	19,221
Net realized and unrealized gain/(loss) on securities	197	86,327	86,524
Net assets released from restrictions - satisfaction of program restrictions	<u>1,597,569</u>	<u>(1,597,569)</u>	
Total support and revenue	<u>2,493,326</u>	<u>(69,878)</u>	<u>2,423,448</u>
Expenses:			
Program services:			
Relief in Ethiopia	72,632		72,632
Assistance in Israel	1,839,784		1,839,784
Information and Education - USA	<u>220,406</u>		<u>220,406</u>
Total program services	<u>2,132,822</u>		<u>2,132,822</u>
Supporting services:			
Management and general	161,787		161,787
Fundraising	<u>291,019</u>		<u>291,019</u>
Total supporting services	<u>452,806</u>		<u>452,806</u>
Total expenses	<u>2,585,628</u>		<u>2,585,628</u>
Change in net assets	(92,302)	(69,878)	(162,180)
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>(230,574)</u>	<u>1,688,865</u>	<u>1,458,291</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ (322,876)</u>	<u>\$ 1,618,987</u>	<u>\$ 1,296,111</u>

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Although we don't have space to list all our thousands of loyal donors, please know that all of us at NACOEJ are deeply grateful for each and every gift we receive to help the Ethiopian-Jewish community.

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▲ Ethiopia, July 2017

▲ This past May 24 was Jerusalem Day, a day of great celebration in Israel, marking the reunification of Jerusalem. In memory of the Ethiopian Jews who died on the way to, and in, Sudan, as they struggled to reach Jerusalem, the Ethiopian-Israeli community chose this day to be also the national Memorial Day for those who perished.

So far, of the 4,000 who died during that terrible time, 2,000 have been documented. Their names are now carved into monuments at the official memorial site.

Families light candles and find names of their loved ones. They show them to children born in Israel who never knew these family members. It is a moving experience for everyone involved, as shown in the photo above.



▲ Shoshana Ben-Dor in the NACOEJ Teaching Tent in Jerusalem, Sigd 2016.