





# **Annual Report**

NACOEJ: Providing Critical Education, Aid, and Advocacy for Ethiopian Jews





## From the President and the Executive Director



Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein President

arlier this year, the Israeli Government proudly announced that it would finally grant permission for 1000 members of the Ethiopian Jewish community to make Aliyah. Although I applaud the announcement, I am

disappointed that no announcement was made about the fate of the remaining community members (which will total 7200) – many of whom have been waiting to move to Israel since 2003.

On a visit to Addis Ababa in July, my wife and I visited a 98 year old woman who lived alone in her small one room home without electricity or running water. She still yearns to fulfill her dream to reunite with her 75 year old son and the rest of her family who currently live in Israel. Her plight is not unique. Seventy percent of the remaining Ethiopian Jews have first degree relatives in Israel. Family separation is a cruel tragedy.

NACOEJ is working hard to stimulate the changes that will permit the completion of the Ethiopian Aliyah. But, the goal can only be achieved with your help. North American Jews must make their respectful voices heard through their local UJA-Federations and Israeli consulates. Dire living conditions and the shortage of daily food as well as medical care are painfully taking their toll on Jews in Ethiopia. If we do not provide financial support, they will continue to suffer.

Once Ethiopian immigrants arrive in Israel, significant funds will be required to absorb, educate and train them. NACOEJ educational programs can help them fashion new lives in their new land. But, without your help, these new Israelis may never reach their potential. Your gift can help them succeed.

Join me in making a difference.

his Annual Report highlights great challenges and successes in our work in Israel.

At the direction of the Israeli Ministry of Education, we closed our Limudiah programs in Rehovot. The Ministry wants NGO's to leave municipalities that don't help fund good programs.



Barbara Ribakove Founder and Executive Director

We opened two new Limudiot at the urging of school principals and municipalities, one in Bat Yam, with many new Ethiopian immigrants, and the other in impoverished Lod, where we already had three Limudiot. There we were urgently needed in a neighborhood where 80% of the children live in homes where no Hebrew is spoken.

In Bat Yam, we expected and experienced fine results. In our fourth program in Lod, at the Levi Eshkol School, our results at year's end were beyond expectations. Even among the children at remedial level, all but two achieved at least minimum class level, and others did much better.

We also piloted a Parents' Program requested by Ethiopian-Israeli parents and teachers in Ramle, where NACOEJ's first Limudiah began [see page 5]. The Parents' Program was so successful, the parents urged us to continue it. But we need more funds to do so.

At the same time, we responded to very serious hardships endured by Jews in Gondar and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, who are waiting, some for twenty years, to make aliyah. With our partner organization Struggle to Save Ethiopian Jewry, we've been funding meals for hundreds of severely malnourished children under age five, malnourished pregnant women, and modest lunches for older children in the Jewish summer day camps.

And this spring we faced the retirement of our amazing 26-year-long Director of NACOEJ-Israel and Director of Limudiot, Shoshana Ben-Dor. After interviewing many excellent candidates, we chose an outstanding Ethiopian Israeli, David Mihret.

## Thank You Shoshana!

In 1992, when we needed a new Director to represent NACOEJ in Israel, and to run our small after-school program for struggling Ethiopian school children, **Shoshana Ben-Dor** fit the bill perfectly.

She was an educator, working on a PhD in Ethiopian-Jewish traditions, knew Amharic and even ritual Ge'ez, had personal relationships with Ethiopian Israelis, and was on our staff part-time.

Over the next 26 years, Shoshana and her hand-picked, personallytrained teachers created the well-respected Limudiah Program, enabling thousands of Ethiopian children to succeed in grade school, be successful in high school, qualify for higher education, and make good lives in Israel.

On her own time, Shoshana worked with anthropologists to record Ethiopian-Jewish synagogue services, religious chants, and teachings. She established the NACOEJ Teaching Tent at the Sigd festival, and has translated the Sigd liturgy, creating the first Ge'ez/Hebrew Sigd siddur. These major achievements go far toward fulfilling NACOEJ's fourth mandate, cultural preservation.

Shoshana has spoken at Knesset committees, served on panels and committees dealing with Ethiopian issues, and is considered by many Ethiopians as one of their own. After 26 years of outstanding accomplishment, we extend to Shoshana our warmest words of praise and a heart-felt "Thank you, Shoshana!"



Shoshana Ben-Dor in a Limudiah Class

# Welcome David!



hoshana's successor, David Mihret, has had an outstanding record as Director of the Steering Committee for Ethiopian Jews in Israeli Schools, where he managed teams of 120 school counselors, academic advisors, and educational mediators in 160 schools. He has long experience with the Ministry of Education and other ministries, local authorities, and non-profits.

David was 16 when his family left Ethiopia in 1981, trying to reach Israel via the UN refugee camps in Sudan. That year, Sudanese soldiers raided their camp, and David lost three brothers and four uncles. In 1984, he and his remaining family were rescued by Mossad agents, just before Operation Moses.

David arrived in Israel at 19, never having been to school, though his father taught him to read and write Amharic. After mastering Hebrew and much of his missed education, he got into a pre-college prep course, and went on to a degree in Industrial Engineering, followed by a BA from Bar-llan University and an MA from Hebrew University. Along the way, we are happy to say, he was sponsored in our NACOEJ/Barney & Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student College Program.

David has served in the IDF, speaks two Ethiopian languages, and is now strengthening his English as our new NACOEJ-Israel Director.

# NACOEJ / Limudiah Intensive Education...



The Limudiah, which takes place during the school day or after school, 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 same schools the children attend, so our teachers can work closely with the homeroom 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 the poverty that challenges many 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 individual needs of students.

## 2017-2018 Limudiah Programs:

- 441 students
- 10 schools
- 5 communities

Bat Yam	<b>24 students</b> Harel School: 24 (grades 2-5)				
Kiryat Ekron	<b>50 students</b> Ohel Meir School: 50 (grades 1-4)				
Lod	181 students  HaMeiri School: 53 (grades 1-4)  HaMaapilim School: 45 (grades 1-3)  Levi Eshkol School: 20 (grades 4-5)  Rambam School: 63 (grades 1-4)				
Ramle	<b>30 students</b> Bar-Ilan School: 30 (grades 1-4)				
Rishon Lezion	<b>156 students</b> Sinai School: 53 (grades 1-6) Yeshurun School: 43 (grades 1-6)				

Zvulun School: 60 (grades 1-5)

# ...for Ethiopian-Israeli School Children

## Limudiah Pilot Parents' Program: Great Success!

The newest NACOEJ program, a **Limudiah Pilot Parents' Program**, was created this year to help Ethiopian-Israeli parents in their interaction with their children and the school. It was coordinated by staff at the Bar-Ilan School in Ramle, and run by an experienced educator, Ethiopian-Israeli Dr. Wuvit Worke Mengistu.

There were ten sessions, including a joint parents/children activity. Parents were of varied ages and educational levels. Two of the mothers were illiterate, one spoke mostly Amharic, and two fathers participated. All the children were Israeli-born.

The parents wanted to learn how to develop better communication with their children, how to set limits and avoid power struggles, how to support their children's studies, and about the importance of reading at home.

The parents were given "homework" and became very involved. They reported changes in their family dynamics, including their increased ability to converse with their children and spend quality time together.

One mother even said she'd been considering divorce, but the tools she acquired in the program readjusted the family dynamic and level of communication. She told us her marriage was saved by what she learned.

The **Limudiah Pilot Parents' Program** was a great success. The participating parents want it to continue. They feel they have a lot more to learn.



## NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School **Sponsorship Program**

## **High School Sponsorships = Educational** Excursions, Special Materials, **Enrichment Programs, and Much More...**

ince 1997, the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program has changed the lives of thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers.

High school tuition is covered by the government, but Israeli schools charge added fees that many Ethiopian families cannot afford.

Sponsorships enable students to participate in educational excursions, enrichment programs and extra study hours, and to take advantage of all the educational opportunities the school offers.

High school students say a sponsorship lets them be "...just like the other kids," which is vital for teenagers.

Talented and brilliant students can attend special high schools. Virtually all can get an education enabling college entry and a successful future.



#### In the 2017-2018 School Year...

- 204 sponsors participated in the High School program.
- 896 students were sponsored.
- 52 schools in 12 Israeli cities participated.
- 160 of our students graduated.
- Hundreds of deserving students are waiting for sponsors.

## NACOEJ/Barney & Rachel Landau Gottstein College Sponsorship Program (AAS)

## The Keys to Success: College and A Sponsorship

tarting in 1987, the NACOEJ/Barney & Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program has given thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli college students financial support so they can complete their degrees.

The Israeli government usually covers tuition, but students must pay for essential expenses like rent, food, transport, books and more.

Most Ethiopian families cannot help their children financially. Unassisted students often have had to drop out of school and accept lowpaying, unskilled jobs.

An AAS sponsorship helps a student stay in school, earn a degree, enter a profession, and break the cycle of poverty. Sponsorships are a perfect investment in the Ethiopian-Israeli community and in Israel itself.



#### In the 2017-2018 School Year...

- 103 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.

## **Ethiopia**



## Update from Ethiopia on the Past Year

The situation in Ethiopia today remains heart-rending with nearly 8000 Jews still waiting to make aliyah, some for 20 years or more, most with children, parents, or siblings waiting for them in Israel. NACOEJ is no longer running programs in Ethiopia, but has worked to identify – and fund – the most pressing needs.

The smallest children are suffering the most. When children under age five were evaluated by the head of a pediatric clinic in Gondar, hundreds were identified as malnourished, many severely.

For the littlest ones, age two and under, funding for nourishing meals is provided by SSEJ, (Struggle to Save Ethiopian Jewry) our sister organization. NACOEJ began fundraising to feed the three and four-year-olds. All the children now receive a banana or an orange, cooked carrots, potatoes, and eggs, a roll, milk, and fafa, a fortified porridge. The meals are served once a day, five days a week.

An American philanthropist is ensuring that children under age five also receive medical check-ups, medicines, and hospitalization when needed. Unfortunately, no funds are available for children age five and over.

We have also begun to feed malnourished pregnant Jewish women that includes ongoing evaluations by a nurse to monitor their health and that of their unborn babies.

This past summer a continuing day camp program for Jewish children ages seven through 18 was organized by volunteers from Israel and local Ethiopian Jews. Some 1280 Jewish children in Gondar and 260 in Addis Ababa enjoyed a nutritious lunch through funding from NACOEJ donors.

And, as before, we continued to provide food for Jewish families in Ethiopia for Rosh Hashanah and during the holiday seasons. ■

# Statement of Financial Position and Activities

#### **COMBINED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION: DECEMBER 31, 2017**

			Current Funds		Total	
			Jnrestricted	Temporarily	All	
	<u>ASSETS</u>		onrestricted	Restricted	Funds	
Current assets: Cash and cash equiv. Investment in marke: Contributions receive Prepaid expenses	table securities	\$ _	233,610 \$ 4,420 28,351 2,462 268,843	553,074 \$ 1,242,529 83,846 1,879,449	786,684 1,246,949 112,197 2,462 2,148,292	
Furniture and equipmer accumulated deprecing Security deposits		_	290 15,553		290 15,553	
1	Total assets	\$_	<u> 284,686</u> \$	1,879,449 \$	2,164,135	
Current liabilities: Accounts payable an Deferred public supp		\$	232,296 553,073 785,369	\$	232,296 553,073 785,369	
Commitments						
Net assets: Unrestricted Temporarily restricte	ed Total net assets	_	(500,683)	1,879,449 1,879,449	(500,683) 1,879,449 1,378,766	
١	Total liabilities and net assets	\$_	284,686 \$	1,879,449 \$	2,164,135	
COMBINED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES: YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2017						
Support and revenue: Public support Sales (net of cost of Other income Dividend income	-	\$	785,908 \$ 10,055 7,745 137	1,314,336 \$ 17,104	2,100,244 10,055 7,745 17,241	
Net realized and unr on securities Net assets released f satisfaction of pro	from restrictions -		(4,285) 1,296,696	225,718 (1,296,696)	221,433	
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	Total support and revenue	_	2,096,256	260,462	2,356,718	
Expenses: Program services: Relief in Ethiopia Assistance in Israe Information and E		_	69,904 1,584,565 191,775 1,846,244	<u>-</u>	69,904 1,584,565 191,775 1,846,244	
		_ _ _	169,780 258,039 427,819 2,274,063	- - -	169,780 258,039 427,819 2,274,063	
Change in net assets			(177,807)	260,462	82,655	
Net assets, beginning of year		_	(322,876)	1,618,987	1,296,111	
Net assets, end of year		\$ =	(500,683) \$	1,879,449 \$	1,378,766	

## **Donors**

To our 2017 donors: even though we do not have space to name all of you in this report, please know that each and every one of you is in our hearts and we are so grateful.

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We gratefully acknowledge the Isaac and Rose Feiner Fund, established by Samuel Fenner in 1999 for the benefit of the Ethiopian-Jewish community.

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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.

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# Annual Report









