

# ANNUAL REPORT 2014



*Providing  
Critical Education  
and Advocacy for  
Ethiopian Jews*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Messages from the President and Executive Director . . . . .</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Limudiah Intensive After-School Program for Ethiopian-Israeli Children . . . . .</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program . . . . .</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>NACOEJ/Barney &amp; Rachel Landau Gottstein College Sponsorship Program (AAS) . .</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Additional Essential Programs . . . . .</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Advocacy on Education: A Stormy Year . . . . .</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Financials . . . . .</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Donors . . . . .</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Board, Staff, Volunteers . . . . .</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Mission Statement . . . . .</b>	<b>14</b>



*Thanks to Win Robins for Limudiah and other photos.*

*This report covers the 2013-2014 academic year and the 2013 financial year.*

# MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NACOEJ's main mission in Israel is to enhance the progress of Ethiopian Jews through good education, the foundation of all success in life. Our Limudiah programs for elementary school children, and our sponsorships for high school and college students, make a huge difference!

But many needs are not being met -- in housing, employment, and other vital areas. We must press Israel's government to take further appropriate steps on behalf of Ethiopian olim. Failure to do so can create a permanent underclass.

Another vital challenge must also be met through advocacy. Most Ethiopian Jews who left their villages in Ethiopia in 2003 or 2010 have come to Israel. But some 5,000 still wait in growing despair in Gondar Province and Addis Ababa. Most have first-degree relatives in Israel. Their dream of aliyah has shaped the mission of their lives for many years.

Many of the Jews still stranded in Ethiopia were rejected without being told why. How can they respond without knowing why they were denied the right to join their families in Israel?

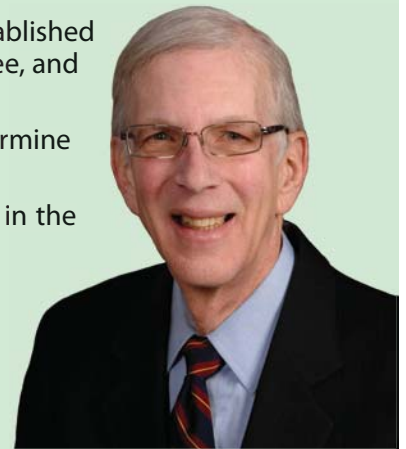
Advocacy on their behalf has already brought some results. The Israeli government has established a committee to review their cases. But so far there has been no report from the committee, and aliyah has been almost non-existent.

We must press this important committee to finish its work without further delay, and determine which of the remaining Ethiopians they approve for aliyah.

Over more than 30 years we've demonstrated that NACOEJ can make a huge difference in the lives of Ethiopian Jews. They're still counting on us, and we must not let them down now.



**Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein, President**



The title of an old Bob Dylan song -- "The Times They Are A-Changin'" -- has been running through my mind this year. We have seen so many changes, good and bad.

The bad have been dreadful, with war, death, and suffering leading the list. By comparison, the good changes may seem small -- but they are the ones that give us hope.

Top of my "good list" is opening the first-ever NACOEJ Limudiah Illit (Upper Limudiah) for middle-school students. The photo on the opposite page shows how excited the students and I were when we met, just a month into the first semester in a girls' school in Yavne. The girls said things like "For the first time, I took a math test really knowing what I was doing!"

One teacher came in on her day off, bringing her new baby, just to meet us and join the whole staff in urging us to keep Limudiah Illit going through 12th grade. Can we? I'll tell you next year!

Next on my "good list" of changes is NACOEJ Israel Director Shoshana Ben-Dor's wonderful work on preserving Ethiopian Jewish culture. This year it's a Siddur in Ge-ez and Hebrew, for the unique Ethiopian-Jewish Sigd festival, now a national Israeli holiday.

And then, increasing our close cooperation with other like-minded organizations, we introduced our NACOEJ family to beautiful gold jewelry made by Ethiopian Israelis in a special program at the Yvel Jewelry Company. In the photos opposite and on this page, I'm wearing one of their elegant pendants. It says "love" in incised Amharic letters! Working together is always good for the Jews.

For more items on my "good list", please stay in touch.



**Barbara Ribakove Gordon, Founder and Executive Director**



# LIMUDIAH INTENSIVE AFTER-SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR ETHIOPIAN-ISRAELI CHILDREN



## Unlike Other After-School Programs

The NACOEJ Limudiah works with Ethiopian-Israeli children in grades 1-6. It provides 10 weekly hours of academic assistance in reading, mathematics, and study skills, as well as enrichment in arts and crafts, music, and Israeli culture.

At least 80% of our children in NACOEJ Limudiah Programs reach class level or higher. The Limudiah Program has been so successful year after year because of the following key elements:

- Begins in first grade, empowering children to achieve early academic success, preventing frustration, failure, and subsequent dropping out.
- Works in the children's schools, ensuring close cooperation with home room teachers.
- Maintains small grade-level groups of no more than eight students to one teacher.

- Hires the best teachers who are very sensitive to cultural and familial issues, as well as poverty, that challenge Ethiopian-Israeli children.
- Starts each session with a nourishing hot lunch, crucial for hungry children from impoverished homes.
- Has built-in evaluation mechanisms: Using the students' skills at the beginning of the school year as a baseline, Limudiah teachers check improvement at mid-year and then improvement over those levels at year's end, tailoring approaches to meet the needs of individual students.

Limudiah teachers visit homes if necessary, to understand a student's lack of progress. Ongoing discussions among school administrators and faculty, as well as with municipal educational authorities, ensure input and evaluation.

## 2013-2014 Limudiah Programs

- 752 students
- 16 schools
- 8 communities:  
Gan Yavne, Kiryat Ekron,  
Lod, Nes Ziona, Ramla,  
Rishon LeZion, Rehovot  
and Yavne.

NACOEJ began the Limudiah Intensive After-School Education Program for Ethiopian-Israeli children over 20 years ago. The program is still vitally important for new immigrants who have been arriving in Israel over the last several years, and need help urgently to break out of poverty. Over half of Ethiopian immigrant children in Israel live below the poverty line (which is set very low).

Even children from families who arrived earlier often continue to need educational assistance, com-



ing from communities where little learning enrichment is available. Half of all Ethiopian-Israeli elementary school children end the school year below grade level; *this percentage increases in higher grades if there is no intervention.* Limudiah provides that intervention.

Finally, NACOEJ serves a very diverse student body, from new immigrants and others needing extreme remedial help, to those with the capacity, talent, and skills to reach above grade level, but need ongoing support to do so. Our programs are tailored to bring out the strengths in the children and to help them achieve their highest potential.



# NACOEJ / EDWARD G. VICTOR HIGH SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

## Sparks of Science/Young Researchers



*His name is Yitzhak Adhenan. He is a bright, personable Ethiopian-Israeli teenager who is clearly headed for an exceptional future.*

*Fueling his trajectory toward success are his two NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program sponsors, Eliot Abramson and the Lattman Foundation.*

*Because of these sponsors, he is able to attend a prestigious academic high school where his talents have been encouraged, showcased, and grown.*

*Yitzhak loves biology, P.E., and English. He's earned extra credits in electronics and physics. That's just the beginning.*

*He has been accepted into the prestigious Sparks of Science Program at the world-famous Weizmann Institute in Rehovot. Twice a week Yitzhak studies there until 8:00 pm. He completed his first year at Sparks with distinction and received a certificate of excellence at a ceremony for exceptional students.*

*Noting his outstanding record, Sparks of Science sent him on to a special Young Researchers Program to study human biology, physics, and more. And he was chosen to demonstrate scientific experiments at the Weizmann's yearly Festival of Science.*

*This is what the High School Sponsorship Program is all about – enabling Ethiopian-Israeli high school students to reach their highest potential.*

## The Importance of High School Sponsorships

Since 1997, the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program has enabled thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers to attend good local high schools. Basic high school tuition is covered by the Israeli government, but local schools charge additional fees that are often beyond the means of Ethiopian immigrant families.

## What is Included in NACOEJ Sponsorships

The NACOEJ sponsorships, provided by generous sponsors, cover nearly all the required high school fees, including books, school supplies, lab fees, educational school trips, uniforms and more. Thanks to this NACOEJ program, many Ethiopian students can take full advantage of all the educational, cultural, and social activities their schools offer.

## In the 2013-2014 School Year...

- 915 Ethiopian-Israeli high school students had NACOEJ sponsors.
- They were spread across 52 schools in 16 cities
- 245 sponsors participated in the program.

## The Future: How Sponsorships Help

Good high schools enable Ethiopian teens to be well-prepared for the Bagrut (matriculation exams) so they can be accepted at Israeli universities and colleges -- so they can go on to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, social

workers, dentists and more -- enabling them to break out of poverty and succeed.

## Bright, Deserving Students Need Help

But each year there are many bright, deserving students on our waiting list who do not have sponsors. It is our goal to add many more sponsors to our rolls this year so these young people will also receive the support they need to move forward to success.



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

## In Spite of the Rockets...

Marilyn Estreicher, who sponsors art student Michal Mengistu in the Bezalel College of Hebrew University through our NACOEJ/Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program, refused to leave Israel during the Gaza War despite the rockets.

She was in Tel Aviv on the phone with Yehudit Abramson, our Israel AAS Coordinator in Jerusalem, while no less than nine rockets could be heard in the skies over Tel Aviv.

Marilyn told Yehudit she was not leaving Israel. She would stay and offer moral support to the Israeli people. And, yes, she would indeed be coming to Jerusalem, then also under attack, to visit her sponsored student...which she did.

When the two met, Marilyn's visit gave great comfort to Michal, who was very worried about three of her brothers who were fighting in Gaza at the time.

Michal, who lost her mother in 1999 and became, as she called it, a "little mommy" to her siblings, wrote to Marilyn about her dream to become an artist: "I wanted to thank you for helping me fulfill the beginning of my dream. Your help is very important...I hope that in a few years I will be able to fulfill the dream of someone else..."

The warm relationship between these two women demonstrates how very special – and vital -- the College Sponsorship Program is – and how it changes the future for Ethiopian Israelis, who, without it, might not be able to attend college.



## Why an AAS Sponsorship is Critical

The first three years' college tuition for Ethiopian students is covered by the government. But rent, food, transportation, books, and other necessities are not. Most Ethiopian immigrant families cannot pay for them, so students too often drop out of college and take low-level jobs, severely limiting their ability to achieve success in the future.

## How Sponsorships Enable Ethiopian Students to Graduate

Since 1987 the NACOEJ AAS College Sponsorship program, lovingly guided for years by the late Vidal Sassoon, and now stewarded by the dedicated Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein, has enabled countless Ethiopian Israelis from impoverished, immigrant homes to graduate from college. The sponsorships (modest monthly stipends) help cover living costs so students can complete their degrees.

## The Results of AAS Sponsorships

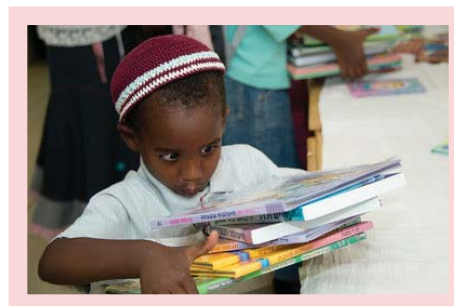
- A new generation of Ethiopian-Israeli college graduates hold respected jobs as computer

scientists, engineers, medical professionals, educators, social workers and more.

- An increasing number of Ethiopian-Israeli college graduates pursue advanced degrees. AAS sponsors can continue to support their students through graduate school.
- Warm relationships have developed between students and their sponsors, transcending miles and often lasting for years.

## Barney's Books

Developed and sponsored by the Gottsteins, Barney's Books provides beautiful children's books for AAS students to read to their own children or their young siblings. The program introduces the joy of reading into Ethiopian homes. Children keep the books.



## In the 2013-2014 School Year...

- 124 AAS sponsorships helped 369 students in 6 universities and 26 academic colleges, including 13 nursing schools and 6 engineering schools.
- 103 sponsored students graduated in their fields of study.
- 35 sponsored students were studying for advanced degrees.
- 13 sponsored students received Master's degrees.

## The Future

Despite the large number of college students that NACOEJ AAS sponsors support now, there are many more who need our help. To let bright young Ethiopian Israelis be forced to drop out of college due to financial constraints is a terrible waste of talent that Israel needs. We hope to find many more sponsors in the year to come.

# ADDITIONAL ESSENTIAL PROGRAMS

## Summer Camp & Back-to-School Program

The long summer vacation in Israeli elementary schools poses a real challenge for low-income Ethiopian families, who cannot provide their children with camp experiences or private tutoring, and who often live in slums with no safe places in which the children can run and play. Excursions to swimming pools, parks, or historic sites are equally out of reach.



This year, with rockets falling on towns in south and central Israel, crucial support from the Samis Foundation allowed NACOEJ to operate fun summer camps in two locations: Rehovot and Gan Yavne. (Rehovot is a prosperous city, but includes some of Israel's worst urban slums. And Gan Yavne was particularly hard-hit by Hamas rockets.)

The war made it difficult to plan programs, hire staff and enable the children to come. In Gan Yavne, the program took place for only five days due to constant rocket attacks. And of course there were drills, moving the children smoothly into bomb shelters. Throughout, the staff spoke with the children about their fears and feelings regarding the war, and they were encouraged to express themselves through



drawings, stories, etc. The children were resilient and said they felt safe in the school buildings and playgrounds.

Despite the war, these summer days provided the children with a safe environment, many activities, and a lot of fun: NACOEJ offered games, sports, music, arts and crafts, lunch and, when safe, trips to the zoo, as well as some enjoyable sessions of reading stories, math puzzles and English games.

In addition, with underwriting from the Croland family in memory of Robert Croland, NACOEJ operated a Back-to-School program, with learning emphasized, for Ethiopian-Israeli children in Lod, a very poor town where this program is traditionally held. Like the programs in Rehovot and Gan Yavne, this program also included arts, music and sports (as well as air raid drills).

## Bar/Bat Mitzvah Twinning Program

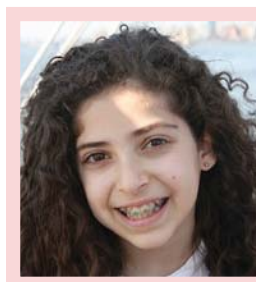
Through this program, American Bar/Bat Mitzvah girls and boys develop friendships with, and learn about, their Ethiopian-Israeli twins who are NACOEJ students in Israel.

All the children enjoy having pen pals in another country. Bar/Bat Mitzvah students also provide needed financial assistance to Ethiopian students' classrooms in Israel.

The NACOEJ office in Jerusalem helps families visiting Israel to meet their Ethiopian-Israeli twins.

## Mitzvah Projects

This program was launched in 2008. Since then, a variety of Mitzvah Projects have raised urgently needed funds for the Limudiah and other programs.



Hebrew Schools, B'nei Mitzvah (and adults of all ages) have fun doing their projects, and the result is usually a huge success for participants and those they help.

This year, Daniella Symonds, who grew up knowing about NACOEJ and its work, asked her family and friends to donate to NACOEJ in place of giving Bat Mitzvah gifts to her, with the ambitious goal of sponsoring an entire Limudiah class. As we go to press, she's near her \$18,000 goal!



# ADVOCACY ON EDUCATION: A STORMY YEAR

Shoshana Ben-Dor, Director of NACOEJ-Israel, has been active in advocacy on many of the major issues affecting Ethiopian-Israeli life, taking a leadership role in issues affecting education in early grades.

## **Saving the Steering Center for Ethiopian Jews in the Israeli School System**

The Steering Center for Ethiopian Jews was established in 1995 by the Ministry of Education as an important advisory body that would have a say regarding Ethiopian-Israeli issues. But over the years, its budget, activities, and influence were whittled down. A 2013 government bid would have eliminated it, cancelling excellent programs for helping Olim teachers, a program for outstanding students, and much more. (It would have retained community liaisons, but only as contract workers without job security.)

*In December 2013, a study-day was held for 80 activists and community educators.*

The battle to save the Steering Center began with Ethiopian leaders and community activists, including Shoshana Ben-Dor, sending letters to the Education Minister, meeting with his advisors, and lobbying the Knesset Education Committee.

In December, 2013 the Steering Committee held a study-day

for some 80 educators and community activists with the aim of defining the Ethiopian-Israeli community's own vision of its real needs. Shoshana chaired the Committee on Early Childhood and Elementary Education and helped write and edit the final document.

*Most have been in Israel for 20 to 30 years and should not be treated as immigrants...*

In August, 2014 the closure proposal was withdrawn. An important community voice and some significant programs were saved.

## **The "New Way"**

The government's current Five-Year Plan for Ethiopian Absorption is now coming to an end, amid a storm of criticism from Ethiopian Israelis and the government Comptroller's Office. They found that much allocated money had never reached its goal; almost no job training, placement programs, and mortgage programs had been implemented; and rates of success in education, income, and employment remained below national norms.

In response, the government called for a New Way Forum to recommend a new policy, employing Internet, Round Tables, and many other mechanisms. But this Forum, approved by 12 government ministries and other

bodies, placed the mechanism for change in the hands of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, angering many Ethiopians. They felt that since most had been in Israel for 20-30 years, they should not be treated as immigrants. In addition, the Ministry had been criticized for its handling of the old Five-Year Plan.

## **The "Forum for Influence"**

As an expression of dissatisfaction, a new Forum for Influence, consisting of some 25 Ethiopian-Israeli organizations, individuals, and grass-roots groups, was established to create a broad-based, inclusive vision from within the community.

Some participants in the Forum for Influence have divorced themselves entirely from the New Way process, while others, including NACOEJ, participate in both, in the hope of bringing about some widely-acceptable results.

To move things ahead, Shoshana and NACOEJ-Israel staffer and spokesperson, Tamar Desta, have also been holding individual meetings with various Ministry officials, expressing NACOEJ's willingness to help form new policies, based on our decades of experience with the Limudiah and sponsorship programs. These meetings have been very positive.

At this point, the new Forum for Influence is indeed showing some influence on the government's New Way process. It is nonetheless forging ahead with creating its own vision, which is to include grass-roots consultations. Clearly, NACOEJ activism in this crucial area must continue.

# STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY, INC. AND AFFILIATE  
 COMBINED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION  
 DECEMBER 31, 2013

	Current Funds		Total All Funds
	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	
<b>ASSETS</b>			
<b>Current assets:</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 1,210,357	\$ 81,630	\$ 1,291,987
Investment in marketable securities	8,376	1,068,872	1,077,248
Contributions receivable	51,938	197,616	249,554
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>1,270,671</b>	<b>1,348,118</b>	<b>2,618,789</b>
Furniture and equipment, net of accumulated depreciation of \$53,922	4,405		4,405
Security deposits	12,500		12,500
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>\$ 1,287,576</b>	<b>\$ 1,348,118</b>	<b>\$ 2,635,694</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>			
<b>Current liabilities:</b>			
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 348,382		\$ 348,382
Deferred public support	432,777		432,777
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>781,159</b>		<b>781,159</b>
<b>Commitments</b>			
<b>Net assets:</b>			
Unrestricted	506,417		506,417
Temporarily restricted		1,348,118	1,348,118
<b>Total net assets</b>	<b>506,417</b>	<b>1,348,118</b>	<b>1,854,535</b>
<b>Total liabilities and net assets</b>	<b>\$ 1,287,576</b>	<b>\$ 1,348,118</b>	<b>\$ 2,635,694</b>

# STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY, INC. AND AFFILIATE  
 COMBINED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES  
 YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2013

	Current Funds		Total All Funds
	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	
<b>Support and revenue:</b>			
Public support	\$ 964,691	\$ 1,904,975	\$ 2,869,666
Sales (net of cost of goods sold of \$16,568)	5,663		5,663
Other income	15,228		15,228
Interest income		7,944	7,944
Dividend income	4,168	14,164	18,332
Net realized and unrealized gain/(loss) on securities	(60)	227,807	227,747
Net assets released from restrictions - satisfaction of program restrictions	2,076,169	(2,076,169)	
<b>Total support and revenue</b>	<b>3,065,859</b>	<b>78,721</b>	<b>3,144,580</b>
<b>Expenses:</b>			
<b>Program services:</b>			
Assistance in Israel	1,765,518		1,765,518
Information and Education - USA	240,031		240,031
<b>Total program services</b>	<b>2,005,549</b>		<b>2,005,549</b>
<b>Supporting services:</b>			
Management and general	160,137		160,137
Fundraising	284,210		284,210
<b>Total supporting services</b>	<b>444,347</b>		<b>444,347</b>
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>2,449,896</b>		<b>2,449,896</b>
<b>Change in net assets</b>	<b>615,963</b>	<b>78,721</b>	<b>694,684</b>
<b>Net assets, beginning of year</b>	<b>(109,546)</b>	<b>1,269,397</b>	<b>1,159,851</b>
<b>Net assets, end of year</b>	<b>\$ 506,417</b>	<b>\$ 1,348,118</b>	<b>\$ 1,854,535</b>

# DONORS

## Thank You to ALL Our Wonderful Supporters in 2013!

NACOEJ would not have survived for over 30 years without our extraordinary community of donors, large and small, individual and institutional. You've not only donated money, but also time, energy, interest and advocacy. You've been there for Ethiopian Jews when they were in the news and when they weren't. Every single one of you is so very important to us. We wish we had room to list every 2013 donor because every gift has made a significant difference. Please know that you are all in our hearts, as we know that NACOEJ is in yours.

### \$10,000+

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# MISSION STATEMENT

## 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 preserve their unique and ancient culture.





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