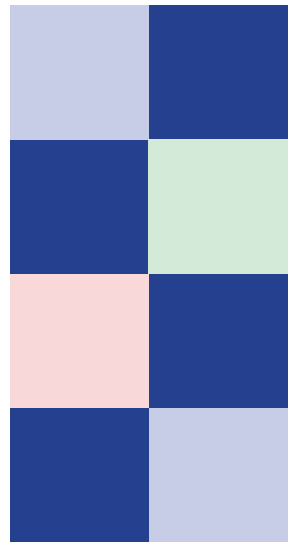
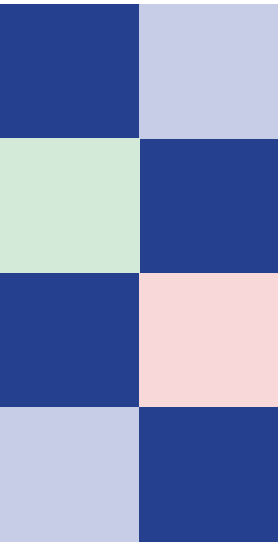


ANNUAL REPORT 2015



*Providing
Critical Education
and Advocacy for
Ethiopian Jews*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the President and the Executive Director	2
NACOEJ/Limudiah Intensive After-School Program for Ethiopian-Israeli Children	3
NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program	5
NACOEJ/Barney & Rachel Landau Gottstein College Sponsorship Program (AAS) .	6
Barney's Books, Limudiah Illit, Mitzvah Projects, Bar/Bat Mitzvah "Twinning" . . .	7
Educational Advocacy	8
Financials	9
Donors	11
Board of Directors, Staff, Volunteers	13
Mission Statement	14



Thanks to Win Robins for Limudiah and other photos.

This report covers the 2014-2015 academic year and the 2014 financial year.

On Cover (top): This past Jerusalem Day, a National Holiday in Israel (late May), Dvora Wondemagen was one of only four students in Jerusalem selected to present a gift to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. She was chosen as a high school student to represent the Ethiopian community and her high school, the Evelina DeRothschild School, in Jerusalem. Dvora Wondemagen's proud NACOEJ sponsor is Wendy Bauman.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

After Jerry participated in a meeting of the Israeli Knesset's Aliyah and Absorption Committee, where the agenda focused on the importance of successfully completing the aliyah of thousands of Jews dreaming of aliyah, but still stranded in Ethiopia, (most of them have close relatives already living in Israel, and some are related to heroes of the Israeli Defense Forces) we are optimistic that with our intense and effective advocacy, the Israeli government will finally enable their dreams to become reality. We hope it will be soon.

At the same time, however, we dare not neglect the 130,000 or more Jews of Ethiopian origin who, with our help, are already living in Israel. They still need us.

Ethiopian youth, in general, face special challenges in Israel, especially in obtaining a quality education.

Ethiopian youth, in general, face special challenges in Israel, especially in obtaining a quality education. Many elementary school children come to Israel without ever having learned how to learn. Many lack parents who can serve as academic role models or assist them with their studies in Israeli schools. At present, half of these children fail. The NACOEJ Limudiah program enables them to thrive.

Although high school tuition is covered for teenagers, compulsory fees and other necessary expenses (for textbooks, for example) are often beyond the capacity of Ethiopian families. Because we want to enable Ethiopian teenagers to blossom in high school and reach their potential, we must provide the resources they need to do so, through personal sponsorships.

Ethiopian college students also often face financial challenges in meeting basic living expenses (like food and rent!) which are not covered by grants from

the Israeli government. For them, too, our sponsors ensure that they will be able to succeed in college and become a vital part of Israeli society.

Through our assistance, we are proud to say that thousands of Ethiopian Israelis have gone on to successful careers.

Through our assistance at all three stages of education, we are proud to say, thousands of young Ethiopian-Israelis have gone on to successful careers as doctors, nurses, lawyers, scientists, teachers and more. But hundreds are still on our waiting lists, and we must not fail them.

As vital as education is, there are many other challenges. Recent demonstrations by Israeli Jews of Ethiopian origin have highlighted the pain they feel because they do not have adequate housing for their families; because they are either unemployed or underemployed; because they lack sufficient funds to feed their children; and because they suffer discrimination. We are working closely with Ethiopian-Israeli leaders and hope that with our help, commitment and partnership, the necessary solutions can be found.

We are grateful to the large number of individuals and institutions that have made it a priority to work with NACOEJ to meet the needs of Ethiopian Jews; they are acknowledged in this report. We know that without their support, our efforts in both Israel and Ethiopia could not have succeeded, and that thousands of Jews might not have lived to reach Israel and create productive, independent lives in their new home. We are grateful to all of them, and most of all to the amazing Ethiopian Jews who have given us the privilege of taking part in their historic return to the Jewish people.


Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein, President


Barbara Ribakove Gordon, Founder and Executive Director



NACOEJ/LIMUDIAH INTENSIVE AFTER-SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR ETHIOPIAN-ISRAELI SCHOOL CHILDREN

For 22 years, the NACOEJ Limudiah has been working with Ethiopian-Israeli children in grades 1-6, providing 10 hours a week of after-school assistance in reading, math, and study skills, plus enrichment in arts and crafts, music, and more.

Although the perception may be that Ethiopian Jews have been in Israel long enough to fully integrate, numerous children in the Limudiah have recently immigrated, or have arrived within the last ten years, and new Ethiopian immigrants are hoping to arrive.

And even children born in Israel are still in need of the Limudiah. Many NACOEJ students are children of parents who came to Israel as children themselves, but grew up in homes where the parents did not speak Hebrew, were illiterate, and could not help their children in school.

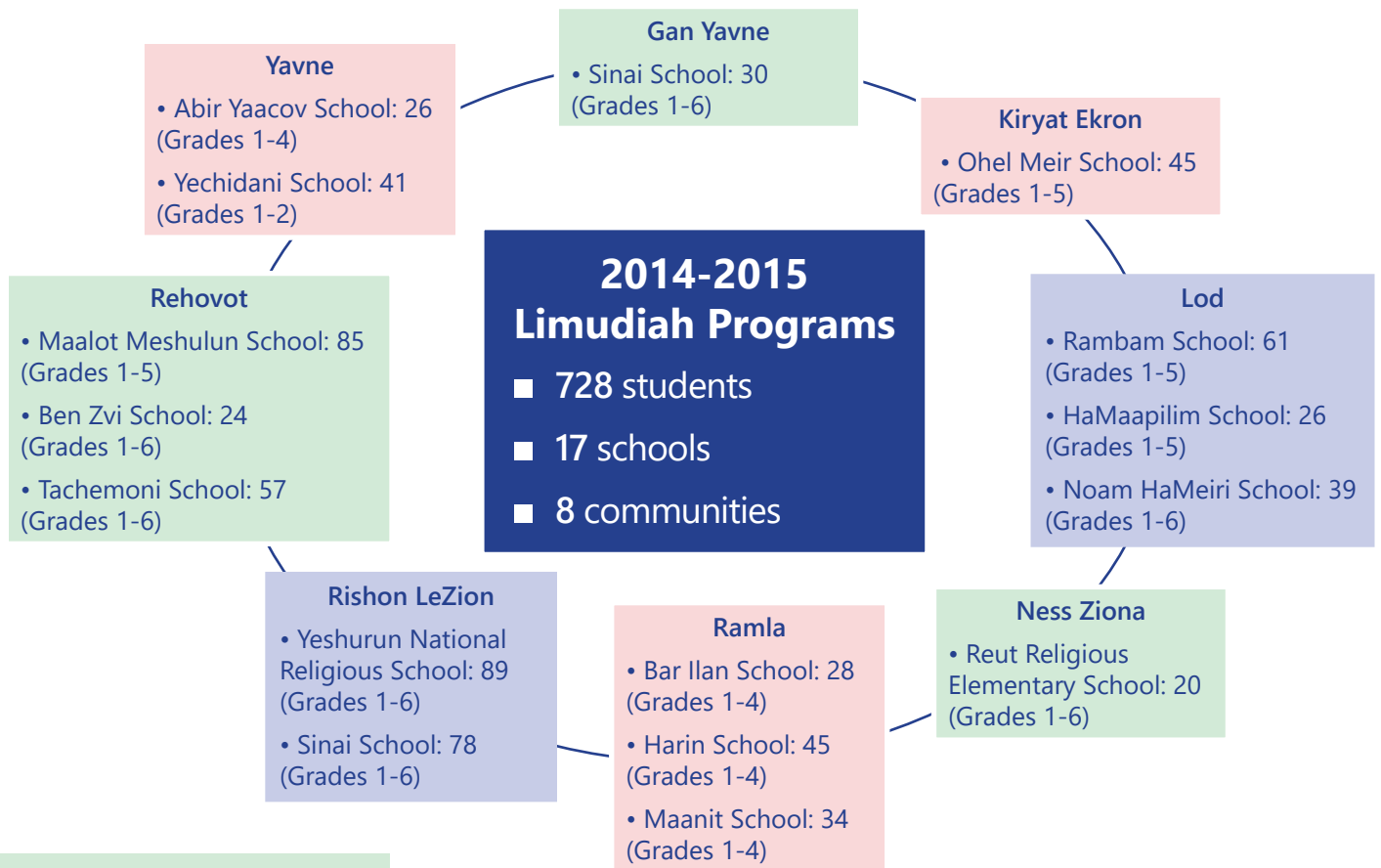
Second generation children also deal with issues that immigrant children do not: a greater generation gap, a loss of a sense of identity and community values, and disappointment that the first generation did not reach full integration.

While only 50% of Ethiopian children in Israel reach grade level, 80% of the children in Limudiah classes reach grade level or higher.

The Limudiah Program is very successful because it:

- Begins in first grade – children achieve early academic success.
- Works in the children's schools – teachers cooperate closely with home room teachers.
- Maintains small grade-level groups averaging 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 session with a nourishing hot lunch, crucial for hungry children from impoverished homes.
- Provides constant evaluation and tailors approaches to meet the needs of individual students.





"I made it clear to the municipality that no group other than NACOEJ will come into the school to work with our Ethiopian first-graders [from now on]. All of them became proficient in reading by the end of the year. That has never happened in my experience before."

Shani Barzilai, Principal,
Yechidani School, Yavne



Back-to-School Summer Program

The NACOEJ Back-to-School summer program breaks up the long summer months with math and reading, sports, music, arts and crafts, food and more. It provides learning in a fun context and helps prepare the children for their return to school. The program makes a real difference for the impoverished and at-risk children who attend.

This year, 70 children from Rehovot took part. Each day included two hours during which the children read books and participated in other activities to maintain literacy levels. Teachers also played math games with the children, which they loved. This was followed by three hours of "special" learning, like English lessons where the children were taught vocabulary using songs and arts and crafts, as well as a wide variety of sports and musical activities. On the final day, the children were taken to a well-known park in a kibbutz. They visited a pavilion that was turned into a tropical jungle, with palm trees, waterfalls, orchids, bromeliads and tropical birds, plus a model farm, an herb garden, and a garden of the seven Biblical species.

Special thanks to the Samis Foundation and the Croland family for sponsoring this program.

NACOEJ/EDWARD G. VICTOR HIGH SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

An Ambitious Teenager Finds Us

In 1997 the Kasai family left their village in Gondar, embarking on a dangerous journey to Addis Ababa. There they were welcomed at the NACOEJ Compound and found a school, food, adult education, employment, and a synagogue. Their daughter Rivka was born there. The family immigrated to Israel in 2005. When Rivka recently met Leah Barkai, Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ High School Sponsorship program, she spoke of her memories of the NACOEJ School and Synagogue in Addis Ababa, and of the meals young children ate at our Feeding Center.

Now Rivka attends a special high school that is a 45-minute ride from her home in Israel. She chose this school for its high-level math program as she

wants to become an accountant. But she told Leah she needs extra help to do well.

Rivka Kassai found NACOEJ on the internet. On her own, she came to ask for assistance. Leah says she's the first high school student to do this. (Usually requests come from schools or parents.)

Rivka works as a cleaner to help her family, takes part in the Bnei Akiva youth movement, and volunteers in a home for the elderly. She's also ambitious and motivated to succeed. We're proud Rivka came to NACOEJ. It's a measure of the high esteem this program has earned – esteem made possible by the partnership of dedicated people like William Kadish, who was Rivka's sponsor.

Why are High School Sponsorships so Important?

Since 1997, the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program has enabled thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers to fully participate in good local high

schools. The NACOEJ sponsorships, provided by friends of NACOEJ, cover nearly all the required high school fees, including books, lab fees, educational school trips, and more. This enables Ethiopian students to participate fully in the educational, cultural, and social activities in their schools.

Bright, Deserving Students Need Help

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 can also receive the support they need to move forward to success.



In the 2014-2015 School Year...

- 1,061 Ethiopian-Israeli high school students had NACOEJ sponsors.
- They were spread across 67 schools in 20 cities.
- 240 sponsors participated in the program.
- 202 of our students graduated high school.

◀ *Diana Yacobi (right), NACOEJ Board Member and High School Sponsor, with one of her students, Leah Mekonen.*

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

Yoni Reuven, a medical student at Ben-Gurion University, was sponsored by Samuel Halperin for several years through the NACOEJ Barney & Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program (AAS). When Mr. Halperin passed away, Yoni wrote to his family, which continued to sponsor him at Mr. Halperin's request. His letter expresses the warm relationship that can arise between sponsors and students.

4/20/2015: My name is Yonatan (Yoni) Reuven and I'm in my 6th year of medical school in Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (medical school in Israel includes two years of undergraduate work).

I've been in contact with Samuel Halperin for the last few years via email and I was very sad to hear about his death...His emails were always filled with hope for a better future for us. He would always encourage me to work hard...I wish I had the opportunity to meet him in person.

I am touched that you decided to continue his project with NACOEJ and want to introduce myself.

I was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and came to Israel at the age of one. After a short period in an absorption center for new immigrants in Atlit, my family settled in Jerusalem where I grew up.

After graduation, I spent a year in northern Israel in a "Mechina," volunteering and studying about leadership

and Zionism. I then served as a combat soldier in the Sayeret Matkal, [an elite IDF unit] for five years. After... the army, I decided to pursue a career in medicine... studying medicine isn't an easy task, especially when you need to worry about supporting yourself at the same time.

Samuel's support over the years has given me a sense of security – not just financial security, although that has been an enormous help, but also in the sense that he always gave me the feeling that I had someone "rooting" for me.

*I am the only Ethiopian student in my year and one of a handful across the country...sometimes it can feel very lonely...**but if someone who lives on the other side of the world believes in you, why shouldn't you believe in yourself?***

...I would be happy to send you emails I received from him. If you come to Israel, I would be honored to meet you. Sincerely, Yoni

What have AAS Sponsorships Achieved?

Since 1987 the NACOEJ college sponsorship program has provided modest monthly stipends to help cover living costs so students can complete their degrees. The government covers the first three years' college tuition for Ethiopian students. But it does not cover rent, food, transportation, books, and other necessities. Many more Ethiopian Israelis have graduated college and achieved good careers than would have without the AAS program. (AAS sponsors often even support their students through graduate school.) Today there is a huge waiting list for sponsorships for high-level students in undergraduate and graduate schools.



In the 2014-2015 School Year...

- 120 AAS sponsors helped 369 students in 6 universities and 39 academic colleges, including 16 nursing schools and 7 engineering schools.
- 37 sponsored students graduated in their fields of study.
- 28 sponsored students were studying for advanced degrees.
- 8 sponsored students received Master's degrees; 7 more students will finish their Master's degrees soon.

◀ *Guest of Honor: Dr. Charles Halasz at the wedding of his sponsored student Natan Alamo.*

ADDITIONAL ESSENTIAL PROGRAMS

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 get to keep the books.

Limudiah Illit

The Limudiah Illit is a new program serving Ethiopian-Israeli students in grades 7-12 in the Ulpana School in Yavne, a town where we already run two Limudiah programs. (Previously, NACOEJ served only elementary-school children.) The program began in response to a plea for help from the school principal: the students were entering 7th grade at a 4th grade level. In 2014/2015, students received two hours of math tutoring; two hours of Hebrew reading and comprehension tutoring; and two hours of English tutoring.

Our gratitude goes to Robert and Bernice Heilbrunn, who have committed to partially funding this program for the upcoming two years. They have done so in memory of their parents Martin Heilbrunn and Hildegarde Levy, long-time NACOEJ donors.

Mitzvah Projects

Launched in 2008, this program offers young people – and adults – a variety of projects to raise urgently-needed funds for Limudiah and other NACOEJ programs. Participants can craft their own special project (see nacoej.org/mitzvah-projects). It's a wonderful way to be hands-on in helping Ethiopian Israelis.



Forster Family

The Forster Family Kosher Food Pantry donates funds for food to orphanages and shelters in Israel. NACOEJ is the grateful recipient

of their latest act of tzedakah – donating toward our vitally important lunch program for Limudiah students.



Yael & Akiva

Yael and Akiva Rubin are twins who are "Twinning" for their B'nai Mitzvah – and also doing a Mitzvah Project for the Limudiah. They are inspired by their sister Rosa, who was

born in Ethiopia. Yael is "Twinning" with Yamit Avraham and Akiva with Yitzhak Anayau.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah "Twinning"

This program pairs American Bar/Bat Mitzvah boys and girls with Ethiopian-Israeli "Twins" in NACOEJ programs. The children become pen pals and the American youngsters provide financial assistance to their Ethiopian students' classes. The NACOEJ Jerusalem office helps families visiting Israel to meet their "Twins". "Twinning" is often paired with Mitzvah Projects.



Harli

Harli-Strauss-Cohen has been inspired by her parents, Rabbi Mark Strauss-Cohen and Marsha Strauss-Cohen, who have taught her about the importance of tzedakah and tikkun olam (repairing the world). For her Bat Mitzvah, Harli

supported the Limudiah through a Mitzvah Project and "Twinned" with Ethiopian-Israeli Linor Kobe.



Evan

Evan Siegel "Twinned" with David Kasia, and did a Mitzvah Project to support the Limudiah after learning about it from David, who studies in the Limudiah. Evan felt that this program supports not only the

children and their families, but the whole State of Israel.

EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY

Our NACOEJ staff in Israel, particularly our Israel Director (Shoshana Ben-Dor), our former spokesperson (Tamar Desta), and our new spokesperson (Yaron Yehias), have been very busy on the educational front of advocacy this past year.

NACOEJ has always viewed our programs as not only benefitting their participants, but also showcasing how well Ethiopian Israelis can do if given the proper support. The Limudiah Program also exemplifies good educational practices.

To demonstrate this, NACOEJ has been increasing direct contacts with the higher levels of the Ministry of Education, and has hosted a series of visits to our programs in Rehovot, Lod and Yavne for heads of local education departments and school supervisors. In Rishon Lezion, Directors of 'teaching basic skills and literacy' from the Ministry's Department of Elementary Education visited us, at Shoshana's initiative, and subsequently met with the Ministry's Deputy Director General and new Director of Elementary Education.

We also had to register our program on the official list of programs recognized by the Ministry in order to meet the new requirements of formalizing our work in the school system.

As a culmination of the New Way process instituted by the government about two years ago, and now incorporated into the Prime Minister's Ministerial Committee on Best Practices for the Ethiopian Community, in

which NACOEJ was involved from the beginning, a very large round-table meeting (dealing with the Ethiopian community only) was held in August with the Director General of the Education Ministry, the Assistant Director of the Prime Minister's Office for Social Issues, and invited guests. Previously, we all had received the final draft of a new proposed plan to which we had responded. Shoshana made a number of comments related to best teaching practices and teaching cultural preservation. All comments are to be incorporated into the final draft.

NACOEJ Israeli staff participate in meetings of various Knesset committees...

Shoshana has also been active with the Forum, the two-year-old coalition of about 50 Ethiopian-Israeli organizations and community activists. The Forum's major activity this past year was to formulate a Vision around which the community can rally. This involved creating and leading mini-forums of various groups: youths, parents, elders, Kessim (religious leaders), soldiers, students, participants in high-tech programs, some family groups, immigrants, educators, etc. NACOEJ organized three such mini-forums, two of Limudiah teachers and one of AAS students in Ben Gurion University. Shoshana also co-led a fourth. These mini-forums discussed various questions related to the Vision, culminating in a lively two-day seminar. When the final Vision is almost complete, we will take it

to the community for validation.

NACOEJ continues to participate in meetings of various Knesset committees, primarily Aliyah, Absorption and Diaspora, Education and the State Auditing Committees. And, since we could not ignore the recent attacks by police on innocent Ethiopian civilians, we have participated in demonstrations and commented on them on our website in the U.S. and on Facebook in Israel.

This month, Shoshana participated in the final meeting of the Inter-sector Round Table of the Ministry of Education. This round table focuses on the relationship between the Ministry of Education and the educational process for the entire population of Israel. This was the fourth and final meeting. The purpose of the initiative is to create overall means of communication and mutual learning between the three sectors: government, business and non-profit ("the third sector"), with the admission that the ministry should be in a positive relationship with the third sector.

Shoshana (on behalf of NACOEJ), spoke for the Ethiopian community...

Additionally, as the first issue to be discussed was "Equal Opportunity in Education", Shoshana (on behalf of NACOEJ), spoke for the Ethiopian community, a population that believes it does not have equal opportunities in education. She was the only person in the room representing the Ethiopian community.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY, INC. AND AFFILIATE
COMBINED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
DECEMBER 31, 2014

	<u>Current Funds</u>		Total
	<u>Unrestricted</u>	Temporarily <u>Restricted</u>	All <u>Funds</u>
<u>ASSETS</u>			
Current assets:			
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 751,391	\$ 591,253	\$ 1,342,644
Investment in marketable securities	5,722	1,008,482	1,014,204
Contributions receivable	36,838	177,866	214,704
Total current assets	<u>793,951</u>	<u>1,777,601</u>	<u>2,571,552</u>
Furniture and equipment, net of accumulated depreciation of \$55,433	2,894		2,894
Security deposits	<u>12,500</u>		<u>12,500</u>
Total assets	<u>\$ 809,345</u>	<u>\$ 1,777,601</u>	<u>\$ 2,586,946</u>
<u>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</u>			
Current liabilities:			
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 290,467		\$ 290,467
Deferred public support	486,872		486,872
Total liabilities	<u>777,339</u>		<u>777,339</u>
Commitments			
Net assets:			
Unrestricted	32,006		32,006
Temporarily restricted		1,777,601	1,777,601
Total net assets	<u>32,006</u>	<u>1,777,601</u>	<u>1,809,607</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	<u>\$ 809,345</u>	<u>\$ 1,777,601</u>	<u>\$ 2,586,946</u>

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY, INC. AND AFFILIATE
COMBINED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2014

	<u>Current Funds</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Unrestricted</u>	<u>Temporarily Restricted</u>	<u>All Funds</u>
Support and revenue:			
Public support	\$ 749,734	\$ 1,716,176	\$ 2,465,910
Sales (net of cost of goods sold of \$2,864)	13,547		13,547
Other income	11,671		11,671
Interest income		4,117	4,117
Dividend income	75	15,272	15,347
Net realized and unrealized gain/(loss) on securities	(274)	91,705	91,431
Net assets released from restrictions - satisfaction of program restrictions	<u>1,397,787</u>	<u>(1,397,787)</u>	
Total support and revenue	<u>2,172,540</u>	<u>429,483</u>	<u>2,602,023</u>
Expenses:			
Program services:			
Assistance in Israel	1,983,458		1,983,458
Information and Education - USA	<u>229,021</u>		<u>229,021</u>
Total program services	<u>2,212,479</u>		<u>2,212,479</u>
Supporting services:			
Management and general	143,292		143,292
Fundraising	<u>291,180</u>		<u>291,180</u>
Total supporting services	<u>434,472</u>		<u>434,472</u>
Total expenses	<u>2,646,951</u>		<u>2,646,951</u>
Change in net assets	(474,411)	429,483	(44,928)
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>506,417</u>	<u>1,348,118</u>	<u>1,854,535</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ 32,006</u>	<u>\$ 1,777,601</u>	<u>\$ 1,809,607</u>

DONORS

We are deeply grateful to all of our thousands of donors, many of whom we regretfully can't list for lack of space. We want you to know that your gifts are used wisely, so even a small donation goes a long way. In 2014, only 16.4% of total expenses covered both our work in America, providing important information about Ethiopian Jews in Israel and Ethiopia, and our fundraising and administrative costs. That means that for every dollar that you donated in 2014, 83.6 cents went directly to helping Ethiopian Jews.

\$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.

At Sigd: A Unique Ethiopian-Jewish Holiday



For years, NACOEJ has had a teaching tent on the Jerusalem Promenade during the Sigd, a unique Ethiopian-Jewish holiday which has become a national holiday in Israel.

Shoshana Ben-Dor, our Director in Israel, and an important scholar of Ethiopian culture and traditions, teaches about the Sigd and its liturgy.

Ethiopian-Jewish prayers are written in the ancient Ethiopian Biblical language of Ge'ez which is not commonly understood. Shoshana has translated the prayers into Hebrew to make them understandable to everyone.

It is vital that the meanings, rituals, and liturgy of the Sigd are not forgotten by a new generation of Ethiopians born in Israel. Many non-Ethiopian Israelis also come to learn about the Sigd.



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