



2015 Bridges

The NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor
High School Sponsorship Program



Be an Ambassador

We're delighted to bring you the 10th issue of Bridges, created especially for you.

Besides enjoying the stories here, we hope you will also serve as an Ambassador for Ethiopian-Israeli high school students by passing this newsletter to friends and family who might want to support our students. Your endorsement will help ensure that more deserving Ethiopian teens get the good education that is the key to success in their futures.

Questions? Comments? Call Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, Ext. 230 or email her at Education@nacoelj.org. She'll answer questions, contact potential sponsors, and chat with you about the joys of high school sponsorship (she's been a sponsor for years). And if you have news to share about your sponsored student, please let her know. Thank you for your commitment to these Ethiopian-Israeli young people!

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An Ambitious Teenager Finds Us



Leah Barkai (left) and Rivka Kasai (right)

In 1997 the Kasai family left their village in Gondar, embarking on a long, difficult journey to Addis Ababa.

There they were welcomed at the NACOEJ Compound, which included a school for their children, food, adult education, employment and a synagogue for the family. Their daughter Rivka was born in Addis Ababa.

Not until Israel Independence Day in 2005 was the family able to immigrate to Israel, starting their new life in an absorption center in Safed where Rivka entered 3rd grade.

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A Special Moment

(Right) Diana Yacobi shares a special moment with one of her sponsored high school students, Leah Mekonen.

Diana and her husband Avi visited Leah and their other students at the AMIT School in Kiryat Malachi.

The connection between Diana and Leah shines through in this lovely photo and shows clearly the benefits and joys of high school sponsorship.



Photo: Win Robins

What Do High School Sponsorships Do?

Since 1997, the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program has changed the lives of thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers. Thanks to their sponsors, they can attend high-quality, local high schools rather than leave home for lower-level, state-subsidized boarding schools.

Basic high school tuition is covered by the government, but Israeli schools charge many additional fees, which most Ethiopian families cannot afford. Sponsorships from people like you allow Ethiopian students to get essentials like textbooks and supplies and to take advantage of all their school's educational opportunities.

As one student says, her sponsorship lets her be "...just like the other kids." Your partnership gives these teens self-confidence and an education that is the key to getting into, and succeeding in, college - and thereby going on to successful futures. Thank you.

What Professionals Have to Say

NACOEJ High School sponsorships are vital to enable schools to give Ethiopian-Israeli students the education they need and deserve. The schools themselves recognize this critical importance. Here is what some of them have written to us this year:

From Karen Americus, Assistant Director of Development and Programming, Israel Market, AMIT, to Leah Barkai, NACOEJ/Israel Coordinator of the High School Sponsorship Program:

We wish to express our appreciation to NACOEJ and its supporters for their continued support of students from Ethiopian backgrounds learning at AMIT Kiryat Malachi.

The scholarships that NACOEJ provided this year are enabling 11 students from difficult, low, socioeconomic backgrounds to participate fully in all educational and cultural activities...The grateful recipients are able to focus more on their studies and stay in school longer because of the financial burden you have lifted for them.

Thank you again for being a part of this effort. Together, may we continue to build Israel...one child at a time.

From Arielle Listokin, Development Coordinator, Tehilla-Evelina de Rothschild Secondary School, to Leah Barkai:

Many thanks to you and to NACOEJ for your sponsorship of four Ethiopian students...your sponsorship has a profound impact upon these students and their families. For these young women, education offers a real opportunity to rise above their circumstances and build a brighter future.

From ORT Israel to NACOEJ/Israel:

We would like to thank you from the bottom of our heart for your choice in donating to the ORT Israel network, and through it to the network's students.

We are hopeful that through your sponsorship we will be able to improve the quality of the educational work at the schools we operate...and that the fruits that this sponsorship will bring will enrich the trust you have in us.

"An Ambitious Teenager..." continued from cover

Eight years later they moved to Yokneam Illit, a northern town, where today there are about 100 Ethiopian families.

Rivka's family now includes five brothers. Her father works as a cleaner in a high-tech company while her mom stays at home to care for the children.

When Rivka recently met Leah Barkai, Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ High School Sponsorship program, at a coffee shop in Yokneam, she spoke about her clear 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 near Haifa called "Or Hadash", a 45 minute ride each way from her home. Despite the commute, she

chose this school for its high-level math program because she wants to become an accountant.

But, as she told Leah at their meeting, she needs extra help with the very high-level math courses. She found NACOEJ on the internet, and on her own, came to ask for assistance from us. Leah says she is the first high school student she has known to do this. (Usually the requests come from the schools or the parents.)

Rivka is a hard-working, conscientious young woman. She works as a cleaner during her school vacations to help her family financially. She is involved with the Bnei Akiva youth movement and finds time to volunteer in a home for the elderly.

But she is also ambitious and self-

motivated to succeed in her chosen field, clearly demonstrated by her decision to seek help on her own.

We're proud that Rivka came to NACOEJ, because it is a measure of the high esteem our educational sponsorship programs have earned – high esteem made possible by the partnership of wonderful, dedicated sponsors like you – and like William Kadish who now sponsors Rivka, enabling her to get the help she needs.

You're also our best Ambassadors for the sponsorship program! So please tell your family, your friends, your co-workers about NACOEJ. Ask them to join you in providing the educational keys to success for young, smart Ethiopian-Israelis like Rivka. So many young people like her need sponsors. Thank you – from all of us.

A Difficult Journey



Adiel Radau

Adiel Radau was born in Israel on May 31, 2000. He lives in Jerusalem and is sponsored at the ORT Givat Ram High School by long-time NACOEJ sponsors,

Steven and Julie Bram.

Adiel's family, including four generations, had to make a very difficult, hazardous, heartbreaking journey to reach the Jerusalem of their dreams.

A month before they left Ethiopia, they began preparing food for the trip. They left quietly in the dark of night, hoping the safety of darkness would protect them. They took horses and donkeys to help the very old and very young over the treacherous terrain.

On the road, Adiel's family was attacked by armed robbers who demanded their money and their belongings, taking everything they had.

The family finally reached Sudan where they were sent to a refugee camp. The conditions at the camp were horrific and many people died waiting for rescue, among them Adiel's great-grandfather.

Adiel's parents and sister survived to complete their journey to Israel, where Adiel was born and has grown up. Adiel's mother is not able to work because of an injury, and his father is a security guard. He has two sisters, the one who was born in Ethiopia, and the other who was born in Israel.

This young man, whose

favorite subjects in school are geography and English, wants to serve in the Israel Defense Forces as a combat soldier after he graduates from high school, so he can protect and defend the Israel that has opened its arms to his family – the Israel he and his family love.

He is deeply grateful for the sponsorship of the Bram family, explaining how necessary it is for himself and his family. It is you - our wonderful sponsors – who enable young people like Adiel to have a less difficult path to the future.

From: Lishi Sibohi at the Eliezer Ben Yehuda High School in Ness Ziona

Shalom, it's Lishi and I am now a student in the 10th grade at Eliezer Ben Yehuda High School in Ness Ziona. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for being so generous and giving me the sponsorship that helped me finance the tuition in the 9th grade.

In Service to Their Country



Tadesa Tefere

Tadesa Tefere was born in Ethiopia on June 7, 1999.

He was six months old when his family finally arrived in Israel after having left

their village and their farm, and then waited for many years in Addis Ababa.

Tadesa has four siblings who have all been – or currently are – in service to Israel. His sister just completed National Service. Of his three brothers, one is in the Israel Defense Forces, one is a security guard for the cabinet ministers at the Knesset, and one is a policeman.

This is a family that is giving back to

Israel in a huge way!

Tadesa's favorite subjects in school – he attends the ORT Givat Ram High School in Jerusalem – are computer sciences, math, PE, and history.

He hopes to work in the high-tech industry some day.

Tadesa also gives back to those around him by repairing computers for free.

Tadesa is sponsored by Cyrus and Judy Abbe, close friends of NACOEJ and of Ethiopian Jews. The Abbe's involvement and commitment go back many years, even before NACOEJ was born.

So here you have a young person who comes from a committed family, with sponsors who are a committed family. It is a wonderful "family" situation all around.

From: 12th Graders in the De Shalit High School in Rehovot

We the 12th grade graduates...want to express our thanks for the three years of sponsorship, which came out of care and the wish to create equal opportunities for us. With the ending of our studies [in high school] and upon our draft to the army it is important for us to say thank you for being there and helping us.

“Thanks from the bottom of my heart...”



Bernice Boltax sponsors Mihret Gemedia who is in the 9th grade at the Hebrew University High School in Jerusalem. Mihret sent a delightful, hand-written note to Bernice and we want to share some of it in its original form (right).

Bernice went to Israel in May and met Mihret. She sent this note to Karen Gens, Director of Educational Sponsorship Programs, NACOEJ New York, while she (Bernice) was still in Israel.

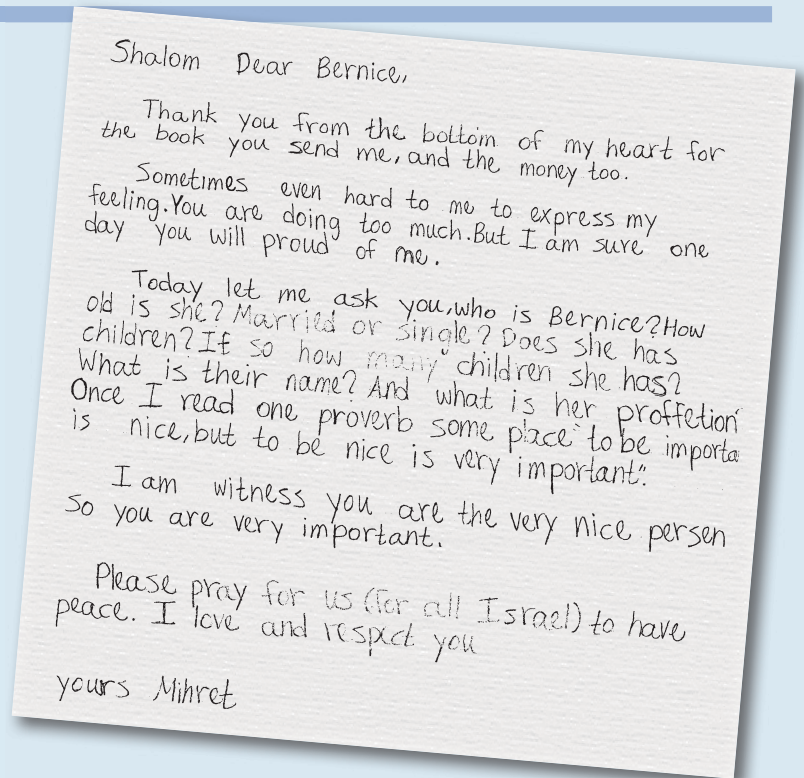
Dear Karen,

I visited Mihret Gemedia at her school, Hebrew University Secondary School, known as Leyada.

She is a conscientious and serious student. Her goal is to become a doctor. She is a poised and attractive 15-year-old.

We met for 40 minutes facilitated by Leah Barkai. I found the visit delightful.

Best regards, Bernice



Shalom Dear Bernice,

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the book you send me, and the money too.

Sometimes even hard to me to express my feeling. You are doing too much. But I am sure one day you will proud of me.

Today let me ask you, who is Bernice? How old is she? Married or single? Does she has children? If so how many children she has? What is their name? And what is her proffetion? Once I read one proverb some place "to be importa is nice, but to be nice is very important".

I am witness you are the very nice persen So you are very important.

Please pray for us (for all Israel) to have peace. I love and respect you

yours Mihret

Sponsoring a student through NACOEJ can lead to heartwarming meetings like this!

From: Yardena Tekele at the Oren Ginsburg High School in Yavne

I want to say thank you for all the help I received from you during my years of study in high school. This sponsorship helped me finish my high school studies with success.

I am happy to tell you that I graduated high school with complete matriculation certificate and I am now getting ready to join the army, the military service is very important to me... Thank you very much.

From: Shmuel Tzaga at the Oren Ginsburg High School in Yavne

I want to thank you for supporting and helping me throughout my years of study at school. This sponsorship helped me complete the 12th grade with success and with a complete matriculation certificate. I am currently waiting to be drafted to the army. ...I am supposed to join the "Amir" course. It is a course designed for Ethiopian students and at the end of the course I will be placed in a commanding role. Thank you.

Just the Facts

Did you know that in the NACOEJ High School Sponsorship Program in the 2014-2015 school year...

- **240** sponsors participated in the program.
- **1052** students were sponsored.
- **67** schools in **20** Israeli cities participated.
- **202** of our students graduated high school.

With your dedicated partnership, NACOEJ has been sponsoring Ethiopian-Israeli high school students for 19 years! There are always more students waiting to be sponsored. We need more sponsors!



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Receive breaking news about our programs and updates of interest relating to the Ethiopian-Jewish community.

Since 1982, the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) has been providing humanitarian and educational aid to the Ethiopian Jewish community in Ethiopia and Israel. NACOEJ is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.