



2020 Annual Report

NACOEJ: 38 Years of Critical Education, Aid, and Advocacy for Ethiopian Jews



Mission Statement

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 Jewish culture.



This report covers the 2019-2020 academic year and the 2019 financial year.

From the President and the Executive Director



Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein
President

The future of Ethiopian Jewry is in our hands... yours and mine!

Jews who remain stranded in Addis Ababa and Gondar depend on the commitment of North American Jews for financial support to sustain their lives until

the time that the Israeli Government grants them permission to make Aliyah.

Those who have been blessed to join their families in Israel also depend on us to nurture them as they seek the tools that will enable them to become productive citizens in their new Homeland. If NACOEJ did not exist who would do our work and who would meet their needs?

Our Limudiah program in Israeli schools provides the help that children of Ethiopian descent require to thrive. The program has been enriched over the past two years by making iPads available to students through a most generous gift of the Forster Foundation.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, these iPads are making it possible for Limudiah students to advance in their studies even when school is not in session.

Our various feeding programs help to relieve the pangs of hunger and provide the nutrients to thousands of Jews in Gondar and Addis Ababa. Without NACOEJ's help many would go to sleep hungry every night.

As my tenure as president concludes, I express gratitude to the professional staff, volunteer leadership and many donors who enable NACOEJ to achieve so much. We are blessed by your partnership and commitment to our Mission. Thank you for helping us to make a difference in the lives of Ethiopian Jews.

This has been a difficult year for NACOEJ, as for the entire world. The 2019-2020 academic year in Israel has seen rocket attacks and a surge, and then uptick, of Covid-19. The Jews in Ethiopia have had to deal with extreme poverty and malnutrition plus Covid-19 and a plague of locusts.

Before Covid-19, our Ethiopian-Israeli children needed the extra help the NACOEJ Limudiah program provided. Now, many will need this educational aid more than ever.

Many of the children come from homes below the poverty line. They had no access to computers to keep up with the on-line learning over the two months in spring that schools were closed.

As I write, schools are closed again. Though the Ministry of Education has promised to get internet access and computers to students in need of them, there is no guarantee this will happen, in which case, NACOEJ must step in for the Ethiopian children in our Limudiah classes.

In Ethiopia, NACOEJ, partnering with our sister organization, SSEJ (Struggle to Save Ethiopian Jews), is helping thousands of beleaguered Jewish men, women and children waiting – some for 20 years – to make Aliyah to Israel and rejoin their families there.

Their plight is worse because of the virus. In lockdown, no work is possible. Monetary assistance from their families in Israel is gone. (Israel has over one million newly unemployed people, many in low-wage jobs that Ethiopians often fill.) And food prices in Ethiopia are going up exponentially.

So NACOEJ has pivoted much of its efforts this past year to meeting the basic needs of this starving community of Jews in Ethiopia. Working closely with SSEJ, tons of nutritious food have been sent and all our nutrition programs increased, bringing in more malnourished women and children.

Our wonderful donors and friends have made it possible for us to save lives in Ethiopia and enhance futures in Israel. We bless and thank them with all our hearts.

P.S. We've been greatly helped by generous bequests from departed friends whose loving concern means so much today.



Barbara Ribakove
Founder and Executive Director

NACOEJ/Limudiah Intensive Education for Ethiopian-Israeli School Children

The Limudiah provides ten weekly hours of intensive education in reading, math, and study skills for Ethiopian-Israeli children in grades 1-6.

The program hires skilled, experienced teachers. It begins in first grade so children can achieve early academic success and takes place in the children's schools so our teachers can work closely with homeroom teachers. Grade-level groups have no more than eight students per teacher and materials are tailored to individual needs.

Note: This was a difficult spring in terms of operating the Limudiah programs. Israeli schools closed in mid-March. In late April, the government only allowed students in special-education programs to return to school. The rest returned in phases, starting with the youngest children.

On May 31, 2020, the final phase began, with safety procedures and practices in place. Classes continued through July, staffed by volunteers and some teachers. There was a fee for these classes that many Ethiopian families cannot afford, so in these cases, NACOEJ paid the fee. However, only 60% of eligible children attended because many parents were worried about sending them during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Back to School/Preparing for First Grade

NACOEJ ran small back-to-school programs for incoming first graders in Bat Yam and Lod to give them a head start in the fall. We've done so in the past with excellent results. The program ran for five days in August from 8AM to 1PM with each small group receiving 25 hours with professional teachers.

Parental Involvement

In July, David Mihret, NACOEJ Israel Director, took part in a Roundtable on Parenting and Family, initiated by Orly Abekasis, Knesset Minister of Community Advancement. It included experts and activists from various groups in Israeli society. Mr. Mihret represented the Ethiopian community, bringing his long experience working on this issue. The group will continue with the goal of increasing parental participation in their children's schooling. ■

2019-2020 Limudiah Programs: 328 students ■ 9 schools ■ 4 communities

Bat Yam	58 students Ben Gurion School: 16 (grades 1-2) Harel School: 24 (grades 2-5) Yitzhak Sadeh School: 18 (grades 2-4)	Lod	228 students HaMeiri School: 60 (grades 1-4) HaMa'apilim School: 42 (grades 1-3) Levi Eshkol School: 38 (grades 1-4) Rambam School: 88 (grades 1-4)
Kiryat Ekron	20 students Ohel Meir School: 20 (grades 1-3)	Rishon Lezion	22 students Yeshurun School: 22 (grades 1-5)

NACOEJ High School Sponsorship Program

This program enables Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers to attend good local high schools. Basic tuition is covered by the Israeli government but schools charge additional fees which are often beyond the means of Ethiopian families. Our sponsors help out with these fees.

She's Reaching for the Stars (NASA!)

Liav Tegenie wrote to her sponsors. We want to share her thoughts with you. She's an outstanding high school student who is striving to reach the stars!



Hi, it's Liav. I took my first Bagrut exam, on history it was straightforward and simple. I prepared and studied hard. When it came time to answer the questions, I knew the material.

I also study at a lab at the Weizmann Institute...we do neurological experiments and discover things I might want to study in the future.

I hope to study physics or science, research space flight, serve in the Israeli Air Force, become an astronaut, and work at NASA.

I like using my brain, challenging myself to learn things, and to think in different ways. I especially love physics and biology. Thank you for sponsoring me...Liav ■

Just the Facts

2019-2020 School Year

- **93** sponsors participated in the High School program
- **581** students were sponsored
- **37** schools in **11** Israeli cities participated
- **156** of our students graduated

Hundreds of students still need sponsors.

NACOEJ/Barney & Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student (AAS) College Sponsorship Program

The AAS program pairs sponsors with Ethiopian-Israeli college students, helping them pay rent, food, transportation, books and other necessities because the government only covers tuition.

"Your mother's help is a lifelong lesson..."

Tamar Wase, a student at the Jerusalem College of Technology, was sponsored by the late Alma Elias. Here is the touching condolence letter she sent to Alma's family. It shows how our sponsorships impact on both sponsors and students.



Dear Elias family...I'm so sorry for your loss. Your mother was an amazing woman. I enjoyed talking to her in our letters. I am so happy there are such good people with big hearts. It warms my heart that there are Jews in the world who care about other Jews.

I thank G'd I had the honor to know your mother. Your mother's help is a lifelong lesson, opening your heart and passing on the good. It helped me this year. For that I thank her with all my heart!

Elias family, I bless you that G'd will strengthen you and enable you to continue to do good in the world because you are very good people. With great appreciation, Tamar ■

Just the Facts

2019-2020 School Year

- **79** AAS sponsors helped support **287** students in **8** universities, **28** colleges, and **5** nursing schools. **28** additional students were sponsored together by **2** donors and **2** Israeli foundations = a total of **315** AAS students altogether.
- **27** sponsored students graduated during the first semester. **83** graduated during the second semester this summer.
- **45** sponsored students are working on advanced degrees, **42** on second degrees and **3** on third degrees.
- **2** sponsored students graduated with advanced degrees during the first semester and **11** graduated this summer (**12** finished their MA and **1** finished her Phd).



Update from Ethiopia on the Past Year

Feeding Programs:

NACOEJ and our sister organization, Struggle to Save Ethiopian Jewry (SSEJ), are helping over 14,000 internally displaced Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia, who are still waiting to make Aliyah.

We continue to provide meals for malnourished children under age five, and pregnant and nursing mothers. The data shows clearly that most of the children, who were stunted and wasted from malnutrition, have improved tremendously.

As was true last year, there have been no fatalities among children in our Feeding Program (even from malaria or other diseases) this year, as compared to the general death rate of 5.7% in Ethiopia for young children.

We provide two daily meals of scrambled eggs, potato, bread, fruit, fortified porridge, and milk. These foods, cheap compared to costs in America, are quite expensive in Ethiopia. (Because of Covid-19, instead of feeding the children at our Feeding Center, mothers now come twice a week to take the food home, staying six feet apart.)

Here is what mothers have told us about the Feeding Program:

"Our children have never got milk in life since one liter of milk is 1 US dollar which we can't afford"... "Now our children are starting to play and also get strength and becoming healthy after few months of feeding..." "Those children who were not able to stand or walk before are starting to do activities like others around them."

Coronavirus Pandemic:

The Jews in Ethiopia are facing the coronavirus, made much more threatening by harsh poverty, primitive living conditions, additional diseases, food and water shortages, a plague of locusts decimating crops, few doctors and nurses, and shortages of hospitals.

In Gondar, schools were shut, and construction projects, where Jewish men sometimes found work, were abandoned, leaving their families without income. At the same time, Covid-19 meant that their Jewish relatives in Israel were suddenly unable to send their families in Ethiopia

the small amounts of money they depended on to pay rent for their tiny hovels.

According to the "Times of Israel", 10/08/2020, severe malnutrition is rampant in the community and Covid-19 is spreading rapidly in Ethiopia, with more than 80,000 cases, and 1,255 deaths.

NACOEJ and SSEJ are struggling to do all we can to prevent the spread of the virus under very difficult conditions.

A nurse was hired and members of the community were trained to go hut to hut to teach the families proper preventative measures. They go gloved and masked and have so far reached

hundreds of families. They also check for signs of the coronavirus and pay for those who have symptoms to get whatever medical care is available.

In addition, washing stations have been installed in Gondar and 14,000 pounds of soap have been sent to Gondar and Addis Ababa.

Thousands of surgical masks and N95 masks have been sent, as well as pulse oximeters, no-touch thermometers and PPE (personal protective equipment). Tons of food have been distributed so far for the community at large in Gondar and Addis Ababa. ■

The "Manna" Came Thanks to You... Dr. Dessie's Letter

This letter was sent to NACOEJ Board Members from Dr. Masresha Dessie. A year and a half ago, he, his mother and his two brothers were allowed to make Aliyah to Israel, but Dr. Dessie's wife and daughter still wait to make Aliyah. Dr. Dessie makes clear the urgency of the work NACOEJ has been doing in Ethiopia for years and continues to do today.

September 14, 2020

Dear NACOEJ Board Members,

It is a blessing to address my warm gratitude on behalf of my community for building a vibrant Jewish future in our generation.

As a child, I had a thought that the Israeli government offered us the aid in food distribution, school and clinics* both in Gondar and Addis Ababa. Nevertheless, as I matured, I realized that the 'Manna' in the desert came thanks to you.

In our daily morning prayers, we say a verse from Psalm 124 knowing that we were not washed away by the roiling waters of history because of you. If you were not with us these last 30 plus years, we could not survive to make Aliyah.

Ethiopian Jewry has over a 2000-year history, starting from the destruction of the first Holy temple. Today I proudly say that I am one of your fruits contributing to our people because you met and continue to meet a long-lasting challenge, staying at our side until we reach the Promised Land.

You play a powerful Jewish role that can repair the world. I wish you Shana Tova U'metuka 5781 New Year for all of you from the Board Members to anyone that has donated for this blessed mission in her or his lifetime!

All the best, Masresha Dessie, M.D ■

* The clinics were run by the JDC.

Statement of Financial Position and Activities

COMBINED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION: DECEMBER 31, 2019

ASSETS	Current Funds		Total All Funds
	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 1,403,896	\$ 181,253	\$ 1,585,149
Contributions receivable	14,637	38,156	52,793
Prepaid expenses	84,282		84,282
Investments	6,050,297		6,050,297
Security deposits	15,553		15,553
Total assets	<u>\$ 7,568,665</u>	<u>\$ 219,409</u>	<u>\$ 7,788,074</u>
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS			
Liabilities:			
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 134,094		\$ 134,094
Deferred public support	181,253		181,253
Total liabilities	<u>315,347</u>		<u>315,347</u>
Net assets:			
Without donor restrictions	7,253,318		7,253,318
With donor restrictions		219,409	219,409
Total net assets	<u>7,253,318</u>	<u>219,409</u>	<u>7,472,727</u>
Total liabilities and net assets	<u>\$ 7,568,665</u>	<u>\$ 219,409</u>	<u>\$ 7,788,074</u>

COMBINED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES: YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2019

	Current Funds		Total All Funds
	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	
Revenues and Other Support:			
Public support	\$ 5,615,709	\$ 1,109,308	\$ 6,725,017
Sales (net of cost of goods sold of \$96)	3,919		3,919
Other income	4,888		4,888
Interest and dividend income	51,598		51,598
Net assets released from restrictions	2,414,725	(2,414,725)	
Total revenues and other support	<u>8,090,839</u>	<u>(1,305,417)</u>	<u>6,785,422</u>
Expenses:			
Program services:			
Relief in Ethiopia	163,107		163,107
Assistance in Israel	1,442,845		1,442,845
Information and Education - USA	201,934		201,934
Total program services	<u>1,807,886</u>		<u>1,807,886</u>
Supporting services:			
Management and general	176,884		176,884
Fundraising	271,297		271,297
Total supporting services	<u>448,181</u>		<u>448,181</u>
Total expenses	<u>2,256,067</u>		<u>2,256,067</u>
Change in net assets from operations	<u>5,834,772</u>	<u>(1,305,417)</u>	<u>4,529,355</u>
Nonoperating Activities			
Investment return, net	203,160		203,160
Total nonoperating activities	<u>203,160</u>		<u>203,160</u>
Change in net assets	6,037,932	(1,305,417)	4,732,515
Net assets, beginning of year	1,215,386	1,524,826	2,740,212
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ 7,253,318</u>	<u>\$ 219,409</u>	<u>\$ 7,472,727</u>

Donors

To our wonderful donors, we deeply appreciate your loyalty and dedication to the Ethiopian-Jewish community through good times and bad. We are profoundly grateful to each and every one of you and regret that we do not have space to name everyone. We hope that you and yours remain healthy and strong.

\$10,000+

Anonymous (2)	Sanford Goldhaber	Municipality of Lod	Morris and Sylvia Trachten
Mark L. Brecker	Deborah Joan Goldstein	Municipality of Kiryat Ekron	Family Foundation
Dorfner Foundation	Estate of Barney Gottstein	Municipality of Ramla	Batia & Howard Wiesenfeld
Betty Dyer	Marlene and Samuel Halperin	Madav IX	Tamar & Benjamin Zeltser
Jane & Jerome Epstein	Family Foundation	Shelley Paradis	
Ruth Ann Faust	David Holtz	Estate of William Rabinowitz	
Joyce Fefferman	Nathan & Helen Kohler	Barbara Ribakove	
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Albert B. Glickman Family	Susanna Levin	Alan Sieroty Charitable Fund	
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\$5,000-\$9,999

Anonymous (3)	Terry Grant	Esther Lumer	Lisa Schachner
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Arkin Foundation	C. Eugene Huppin	Steven & Laura Mayer	Johanna Steper
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Mel Garfinkel	Ellen Levitan	Family Foundation	Creve Coeur
Ben Giron	Herbert Levitt	Gloria Sankel	Geraldine Weichman

\$2,500-\$4,999

Anonymous (4)	Marsha Croland	Joan & Jack Halpern	Jacob I. Melamed
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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.

Donors

\$1,000-\$2,499

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Gertrude Abramson	Marilyn Lazarus Estreicher	Hallie & Joseph Levie	Elaine Schwartz
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