

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

*Providing
Critical Education
and Advocacy for
Ethiopian Jews*



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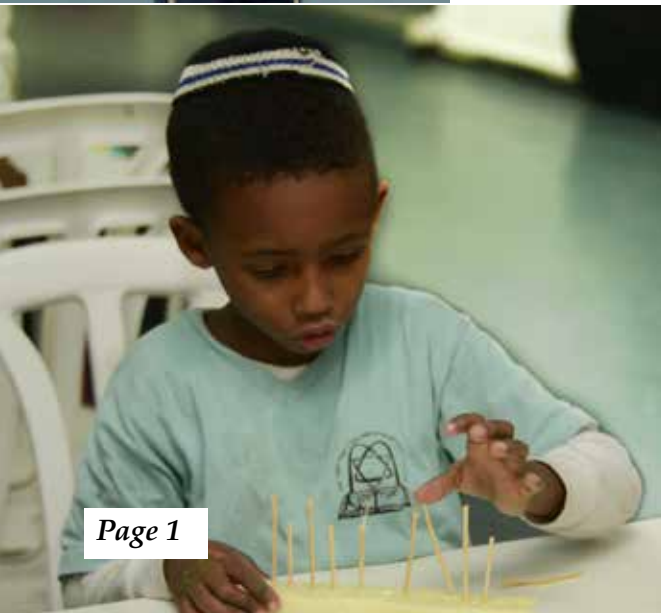
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Report covers 2015-2016 academic year and 2015 financial year.



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As 2016 draws to a close, the task of becoming both full and fulfilled members of Israeli society is still a daunting challenge for many of the 135,000 Israeli citizens of Ethiopian descent.

The good news is that through our highly acclaimed Limudiah educational programs for elementary students, and our essential support initiatives in high school and university, we are helping to give children, youth and young Ethiopian-Israeli adults the tools they need to succeed.

NACOEJ programs have proven that education can change lives for the better...

Our programs have proven that education can change lives for the better. There are now Ethiopian-Israeli doctors, lawyers, teachers, judges, diplomats, Knesset members, authors, scientists, filmmakers, etc., as well as thousands of fulfilled and contributing members of Israel's middle class, in whatever field they choose.

Unfortunately, because of a lack of sufficient funding, there are still far too many students who cannot yet take advantage of our programs. Because we dare not disappoint these bright, eager young people, we must strive to expand.

There is also another compelling reason why we cannot simply rest on our laurels.

Close to 9500 Jews are still waiting to make Aliyah from Ethiopia...

There are close to 9500 Jews still waiting to make Aliyah from Ethiopia. Current Israeli government policy has changed from total acceptance to bringing only 1300 over the next few years. There is no provision for the rest, who are in desperate poverty, as well as in life-threatening danger from violent local uprisings in Gondar.

With your generous assistance, NACOEJ has been raising funds to help feed these Jews (especially children) on a limited basis, until the government of Israel ultimately brings them home. In Ethiopia, which has also recently experienced famine, food costs are exorbitant, and among landless and unemployed Jews, families often go hungry.

We are committed by the first mandate of our Mission Statement (below) to working as your agents with the goal of sustaining these Jews, until they can realize their dream of reaching Israel, where the great majority already have close family members.

Through NACOEJ, your generosity can make all the difference for Ethiopian Jews, in both Israel and Ethiopia, who are seeking nothing more than their birthright: a good life in their true Homeland. We cannot do our share without you, and are infinitely grateful for your partnership.

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.**


Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein, President


Barbara Ribakove Gordon, Founder and Executive Director



NACOEJ/LIMUDIAH INTENSIVE EDUCATION FOR ETHIOPIAN-ISRAELI SCHOOL CHILDREN

The NACOEJ Limudiah Program works with Ethiopian-Israeli children in grades 1-6, providing up to 10 hours a week of assistance in reading, math, and study skills, plus enrichment in arts and crafts and music. The Program:

- Begins in first grade so children achieve early academic success.
- Works in the children's schools, so our teachers can work closely with home room 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 issues of poverty, that challenge Ethiopian-Israeli children.
- Starts each afternoon session with a nourishing hot lunch, crucial for children from impoverished homes.
- Builds in constant evaluation and tailors approaches to meet the needs of each student.

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

This year the Israeli government mandated that all programs for Ethiopians taking place in government facilities be integrated by as many as 25% non-Ethiopians. The Limudiah Programs take place in schools, so we are included in that mandate. This complicates our Program, but represents a positive step toward integration of Ethiopian Israelis in Israel. We laid down specific rules for this transition: we would take non-Ethiopian children who needed academic help, but not children who would seriously disrupt our classes, nor children who really needed Special Education or other intervention rather than strictly academic assistance. The integration is popular within the Ethiopian community and has worked well this first year.

2015-2016 Limudiah Programs:

- 718 students ■ 16 schools ■ 7 communities:

Kiryat Ekron

Ohel Meir School: 38 students (Grades 1-6)

Lod

HaMaapilim School: 26 students (Grades 1-5)

Noam HaMeiri School: 46 students (Grades 1-6)

Rambam School: 52 students (Grades 1-5)

Ness Ziona

Reut Religious Elementary School: 24 students (Grades 1-6)

Ramla

Bar Ilan School: 37 students (Grades 1-4)

Harin School: 46 students (Grades 1-4)

Maanit School: 32 students (Grades 1-4)

Rishon LeZion

Sinai School: 98 students (Grades 1-6)

Yeshurun National Religious School: 68 students (Grades 1-6)

Rehovot

Maalot Meshulun School: 90 students (Grades 1-5)

Tachemoni School: 54 students (Grades 1-6)

Yavne

Abir Yaacov School: 33 students (Grades 1-3)

Yechidani School: 48 students (Grades 1-2)

Ulpana School: 26 students (Grades 7-9)

(NACOEJ undertook to teach these older girls in response to a plea from the school's principal, who knew of our regular Limudiah Program.)

Back-to-School Summer Program

The NACOEJ Back-to-School summer program provides Ethiopian-Israeli children with several weeks of fun including games, sports, outdoor activities, arts and crafts and music. These are paired with math, reading, science and English so that the children are well-prepared to begin the new school year. The program makes a real difference for these needy children who otherwise would have no break during the summer.

Special thanks to the Samis Foundation and the Croland family for sponsoring the 2016 summer program in Lod and Rehovot.



NACOEJ/EDWARD G. VICTOR HIGH SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

High School Sponsorships = School Trips, Extra Study Hours and More...

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.

The Israeli government covers basic high school tuition, but local schools charge added fees which many Ethiopian-Israeli families cannot afford. Sponsorships enable students to participate in all the school's educational opportunities, including school trips, and extra study hours. Many Ethiopian-Israeli high school students say a NACOEJ sponsorship makes them feel "...just like the other kids".

The partnership of NACOEJ sponsors and Ethiopian-Israeli high school students gives students self-confidence and an education that is key to getting into – and succeeding in – college. This enables them to go on to successful futures.



▲ Sponsors Herbert and Abby Bixhorn visiting their high school student, Kudis Avraham. With them is Iris Greenberg (left), advisor and vice principal.

In the 2015-2016 School Year...

- 255 sponsors participated in the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program.
- 1085 students were sponsored.
- 65 schools in 18 Israeli cities had sponsored students.
- 172 of our students graduated.
- Hundreds of students are still hoping for sponsors.

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

AAS Sponsors = The Keys to Success

Since 1987, the NACOEJ/Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program (AAS) (originally named for the late Vidal Sassoon), has provided thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli young people with the financial support needed to complete their college degrees.

The Israeli government covers college tuition, but students must pay for living expenses including rent, food, transport, textbooks, and more.

In most cases their families cannot help. Too often students have had to drop out of school and end up with low-paying, unskilled jobs.



An AAS sponsorship makes the difference in a student's ability to stay in school, earn a degree, enter a profession, and break out of poverty.

In the 2015-2016 School Year...

- 113 AAS sponsors helped support 350 students in 5 universities and 30 academic colleges, including 10 nursing schools and 8 engineering schools.
- 126 sponsored students graduated in their fields of study this year.
- 25 sponsored students were studying for advanced degrees.
- 4 sponsored students received Master's Degrees. 3 more will finish Master's Degrees soon.
- 210 students are waiting for sponsors so they don't have to drop out of school.

◀ Nagosa family: Dasa (top left) was sponsored by the Wigutoff family

OTHER ESSENTIAL NACOEJ PROGRAMS

Mitzvah Projects/Twinning

For donors of all ages who want a hands-on way to help Ethiopian Jews in Israel: birthdays, weddings, and Bar/Bat Mitzvah are all popular occasions for participants to craft their own special project (see nacoej.org/mitzvah-projects). For their Bar/Bat Mitzvah, many young people also choose to "twin" with an Ethiopian-Israeli boy or girl.



Zachary Berg found out about NACOEJ through his synagogue, and decided to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah in a meaningful way raising money for the Limudiah Program. He was also happy

to twin with eighth-grader Idan Wondemagen, with whom he has been exchanging letters, and he hopes to meet him in Israel soon. So far, he has raised over \$40,000 by including a personal note about NACOEJ in his Bar Mitzvah invitation! The whole family learned about Ethiopian Jews as a result of Zach's experience.



Barney's Books:

Developed and sponsored by the Gottsteins, sponsors of the college program, Barney's Books provides gifts of children's books for AAS students to read to their younger siblings or to their own children.

CULTURAL PRESERVATION

In keeping with NACOEJ's fourth mission – to preserve and teach the unique and ancient culture of Ethiopian Jews – we've been very busy this year.

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

In the tent, Shoshana Ben Dor, our Israel Director, and a researcher of Ethiopian-Jewish culture and holidays, teaches about the Sigd and its liturgy, using the original Ge`ez, with transcription into Hebrew letters, and translation into Hebrew. (Ethiopian-Jewish prayers are written in Ge`ez, the ancient Ethiopic language, not commonly understood by Ethiopians.)

Shoshana has translated the prayers into Hebrew and last year added prayers asking for forgiveness and mercy, some of which are also in the Astaseryo (Yom Kippur) liturgy. The teaching tent allows the meanings, rituals, and liturgy of the Sigd to be studied and remembered by a new generation of Ethiopians born in Israel, and introduces them to non-Ethiopian Israelis.

Also, as part of our on-going efforts on this issue, our Israel staff attended a meeting of the Immigration and Absorption Committee in the Knesset. The goal was to call upon the Ministry of Religious Affairs to give full salaries to both Ethiopian-Israeli rabbis and kessoch (Ethiopian-Jewish religious leaders).

At present, the Ministry of Religious Affairs refuses to recognize any of the kessoch ordained in Israel. Many of them are friends and teachers of Shoshana and her defense of their rights was applauded.

Finally, NACOEJ has for years pursued the goal of ensuring that the study materials that the Ministry of Education will use to teach about the Beta Israel community, its history, culture, and customs, will be complete and accurate.

As part of the Ministry's new policy, these subjects will now be incorporated into the regular school curriculum. The Israel staff read through many of the existing books that were produced for the Ministry with chapters or paragraphs on Ethiopian Jewry. These included many inaccuracies and paternalistic or judgmental comments accompanying the information. There were many flaws in the telling of Ethiopian-Jewish history, including the way in which the Aliyah was portrayed. The religious life too was portrayed in limited and inaccurate fashion. Others in the Ethiopian-Israeli community made similar criticisms to the Ministry.

As a result of these efforts, the Ministry has created a special committee of experts that will rewrite all subject matter on Ethiopian Jews to appear in curricula for various age groups. Shoshana was appointed as a member of this special committee.

In the last few years there have been major changes in Israeli policy relating to work with the Ethiopian-Israeli community. NACOEJ continually adapts and responds to what is taking place within the community and the government.

Changes in 2015 included implementation of the recommendations made by a special committee established in the Prime Minister's office in July, 2015, following public demonstrations by the community.

NACOEJ staff participated in 26 sessions of Knesset committees...

Community members act as watchdogs to ensure that the policy is carried out. NACOEJ staff, led by Shoshana Ben Dor, NACOEJ Israel Director, and Yaron Yehias, Israel Public Relations, has participated in, and continues to participate in, Knesset committees and public forums related to policy, as well as speaking on behalf of our own programs. NACOEJ staff participated in 26 sessions of Knesset committees: 16 of the Aliyah and Klitah (immigration and absorption) Committee, 6 of the Education Committee, and 4 of the Knesset Comptroller's Committee. We have also been appointed to a special committee of the National Civil Service Commission. Our participation ensures that the Ethiopian community's concerns are addressed, particularly in education.

Two of our major issues in 2015 were promoting Ethiopian Israelis' access to higher education and to equal opportunities in employment.

A position paper prepared by NACOEJ showed that the policy of the Council is clearly preferable...

At present, tuition for most Ethiopian-Israeli college students is paid through the Student Authority of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption. However, most student issues are handled by the Council for Higher Education, including special policies for such groups as Haredim and Arabs.

A position paper prepared by NACOEJ showed that the policy of the Council is clearly preferable, supporting a call for a change in government policy that would turn Ethiopian matters over to the Council.

In creating equal opportunities in the job market we have two goals:

- Monitoring the implementation of an existing government policy mandating that Ethiopian Israelis be employed in all ministries, government companies, and statutory bodies, in professional or student positions, in the same percentage (1.7%) as the community in the population. We expect to set up a program making full monitoring possible.
- Publicizing positions available to Ethiopian Israelis so that they can apply. We currently maintain contacts with companies working for the government, to make their job openings known to the Ethiopian-Israeli community.

Shoshana appeared in a film shown as part of the public ceremony launching the new national Ethiopian-Jewish Heritage Center...

In 2015, NACOEJ also participated in a number of related conferences and public gatherings, including Shoshana's appearance in a film shown as part of the public ceremony launching the new national Ethiopian-Jewish Heritage Center.

In another area, NACOEJ advocated for the aliyah of the 9000 members of the Ethiopian-Jewish community still in Ethiopia, at least 70% of whom have first-degree relatives already in Israel. In November 2015, the Israeli government cabinet voted unanimously to bring them, starting in March, 2016.

[Addendum: in 2016, the Israeli government reduced the number to 1300, only 63 of whom had arrived by October.]

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AND ACTIVITIES

COMBINED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION: DECEMBER 31, 2015

	Current Funds		Total
<u>ASSETS</u>	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	All Funds
Current assets:			
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 557,003	\$ 585,710	\$ 1,142,713
Investment in marketable securities	5,144	1,020,919	1,026,063
Contributions receivable	41,970	82,236	124,206
Total current assets	604,117	1,688,865	2,292,982
Furniture and equipment, net of accumulated depreciation of \$56,869	1,458		1,458
Security deposits	15,553		15,553
Total assets	\$ 621,128	\$ 1,688,865	\$ 2,309,993
<u>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</u>			
Current liabilities:			
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 305,732		\$ 305,732
Deferred public support	545,970		545,970
Total liabilities	851,702		851,702
Commitments			
Net assets:			
Unrestricted	(230,574)		(230,574)
Temporarily restricted		1,688,865	1,688,865
Total net assets	(230,574)	1,688,865	1,458,291
Total liabilities and net assets	\$ 621,128	\$ 1,688,865	\$ 2,309,993

COMBINED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES: YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2015

Support and revenue:			
Public support	\$ 694,861	\$ 1,515,278	\$ 2,210,139
Sales (net of cost of goods sold of \$3,649)	14,084		14,084
Other income	10,696		10,696
Interest income	17		17
Dividend income	87	16,797	16,884
Net realized and unrealized gain/(loss) on securities	1,734	(4,336)	(2,602)
Net assets released from restrictions - satisfaction of program restrictions	1,616,475	(1,616,475)	
Total support and revenue	2,337,954	(88,736)	2,249,218
Expenses:			
Program services:			
Assistance in Israel	1,864,160		1,864,160
Information and Education - USA	253,453		253,453
Total program services	2,117,613		2,117,613
Supporting services:			
Management and general	162,994		162,994
Fundraising	319,927		319,927
Total supporting services	482,921		482,921
Total expenses	2,600,534		2,600,534
Change in net assets	(262,580)	(88,736)	(351,316)
Net assets, beginning of year	32,006	1,777,601	1,809,607
Net assets, end of year	\$ (230,574)	\$ 1,688,865	\$ 1,458,291

DONORS

A complete list of all our donors would take up many pages, but we could not do our work without the thousands of 'small' donors who are not listed here. Please know that all of us at NACOEJ are deeply grateful for each and every gift we receive to help the Ethiopian-Jewish community. Also, we want you to know that we are very careful to keep our administrative and fundraising costs as low as possible. For every dollar you contributed in 2015, 81.4 cents went directly to help Ethiopian Jews.

\$10,000+

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