What Do High School Sponsorships Do?

Since 1997, the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program has changed the lives of countless Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers by enabling them to attend high-quality, local high schools rather than leave home for lower-level, state-subsidized boarding schools.

While basic tuition is covered by the government, Israeli schools charge many fees, often beyond the means of Ethiopian families. Sponsorships from caring American Jews like you allow Ethiopian students to get the books and supplies they need and take advantage of all the school's normal and special educational opportunities.

As one student says, her sponsorship lets her be “…just like the other kids” (something vital to teens). Your partnership gives these teens an education that increases their chances of getting into and succeeding in college, their chances for self-sufficiency, and the opportunity to help their struggling families.

Be an Ambassador

It's our pleasure to bring you the eighth issue of Bridges, a newsletter created just for you. If you have news to share about your own sponsored students, we'd love to hear from you.

Please also become an Ambassador for our Ethiopian-Israeli high school students by passing this newsletter on to friends and family who might want to support our students. Your endorsement is vital to help more deserving Ethiopian teens get the education that will lead to a successful future.

Questions? Comments? Call Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email her at Education@nacoej.org. She’ll answer your questions, contact potential sponsors you suggest, and chat with you about the joys of high school sponsorship.

Like NACOEJ on Facebook

Receive breaking news about our programs and updates about the Ethiopian-Israeli community.

NACOEJ is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1982 and is the only major American organization committed exclusively to the welfare of Ethiopian Jews.

Just the Facts

Did you know that in the NACOEJ High School Sponsorship Program in the 2012-2013 school year…

• 220 sponsors participated in the program.
• 1,105 students were sponsored.
• 58 schools participated in the program in 39 Israeli cities.

With your dedicated partnership, NACOEJ has been sponsoring Ethiopian-Israeli high school students for 17 years!

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A Journey from Sponsor to Volunteer to Staff…

In 1997, when Karen Gens heard Barbara Ribakove Gordon speak at her Hadassah meeting, she felt an instant kinship with Ethiopian Jews. Since then she’s been a NACOEJ high school sponsor.

Today, we’re happy to tell you Karen is the Coordinator of our high school and college (AAS) sponsorship programs. Here’s her journey:

 Shortly after hearing Barbara, Karen started sponsoring Rachel Yitamenu in the high school program and visited her in Israel in 1999. She took a taxi to Rehovot where Rachel and her family lived. The driver, though impressed that she was helping a student, became “unsettled” as they entered the unfamiliar Ethiopian neighborhood.

Karen invited him to come in and be her translator. It was a huge success. The two of them visited for an hour and took many photos. The driver’s image of the Ethiopian-Israeli community changed for the better.

After sponsoring Rachel through high school, Karen sponsored many other high school students, including Rivka (Ricki) Goshu. They’ve become good friends and are in touch often on Facebook. Ricki has graduated, completed her army service, and is at Bar-Ilan University, with Karen as her AAS sponsor!
Wonderful Words…

…From High School Students to their Sponsors

The best way to feel the impact of an educational program is to hear from the recipients and the educators themselves. Here are excerpts from letters recent Ethiopian-Israeli high school graduates sent to their sponsors.

From Rachel Kesu to her sponsor: “I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your kind help during these past three years…Now I am finishing school with good grades and a better chance than my parents had… I hope I will someday have the same fortune as they did. I would like to have the same opportunities as they had. I hope you will continue to help needy children so that they can be happy and be like the rest of their friends. With love and a huge thank you…”

From Sara Chekde to her sponsor: “If it weren’t for you I would not have been able to take part in the school’s diverse activities because of inability to pay. Thank you very much and I wish you years of success and hope that you will continue to help needy children so that they can be happy and be like the rest of their friends. With love and a huge thank you…”

From Daniel Lakau, who hopes to serve in an elite combat unit in the Israel Defense Forces, to his sponsor: “I want to thank you for your sponsorship. It helped me continue without worrying about money. I think anyone who helps another is a kind person. When my mom found out that I was being sponsored [in high school], she was really appreciative and came to thank the principal and other staff.”

From Mazal Ang to her sponsor: “You helped me to study, but mainly to believe that anything is possible. That is why I’d like to thank you for being so generous and kindhearted. People who give to those they don’t know and expect nothing in return are very special. I will always remember your generosity and hope to be able to do the same for others in the future.”

From High School Students to their Sponsors

Diana Yacobi does not like to have a fuss made about her. “Focus on the students,” she says. But we caught up with her recently in Israel when she made an unexpected visit to the AMIT.

Diana sponsors ten students at AMIT through her program, and had just donated an electronics lab and a computer lab to the school. She was eager to see the progress in the labs, as well as meet her students. Because the visit was a surprise, eight of Diana’s students were away, attending special math classes to prepare for a matriculation exam. But two of her students, Ephraim Solomon and Vered Temiat, were there and were delighted to see Diana and her husband, Avraham. (Ephraim had taken the exam already and Vered felt well-prepared.)

During their meeting, Ephraim told Diana he expects to graduate with a prestigious Electronic Technician Diploma. Vered talked about the movie she’s making in the school’s award-winning Communications track.

Diana Yacobi has experienced first-hand the joy that comes from giving Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers the opportunity to attend good local high schools and prepare for college and successful futures. All of us at NACOEJ — in New York and in Israel — thank the Yacobis and each one of you reading this newsletter, for changing the lives and worlds of the students you sponsor.

Update on Tigist

As you know, Tigist Bitu, our exceptional high school runner who was headed for the Olympics, was severely injured when a young man drove a dune buggy straight into her. After leg surgery, Tigist went on a rigorous physical therapy regimen. She missed a lot of school but with the help of her sponsor and other caring people in our NACOEJ family, she now has tutors to help her catch up and also receives our assistance with the costly transportation needed to get to physical therapy. Tigist is struggling with the emotional as well as the physical outcome of all she has been through, including losing her beloved mother not long before the accident. But we hope with all our hearts that this talented young woman will be able to achieve her longed-for dream to run for Israel — despite this terrible setback. Please keep Tigist in your heart.

‘A Journey’ continued from cover

But there’s more to Karen’s story. At the end of 2009 she left her job. While looking for a new one, Karen contacted NACOEJ to ask about volunteering. Our answer was “Yes!” In 2010, Karen became a volunteer, working with Judy Dick, who then headed the sponsorship programs. When Judy took a new position elsewhere, Karen took over. She’s thrilled. We’re thrilled. Not all high school sponsors become NACOEJ staff members. But sponsoring students as Karen has — and you have — can lead to long-lasting bonds that enrich lives on both sides of the Atlantic.