



# 2018 Bridges

The NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program



## You Can Be an Ambassador

We're happy to bring you the 13th issue of Bridges and hope you enjoy the stories.

You can be 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 helps these deserving teens get the education that's key to their successful futures.

If you have news to share about your own student, call Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, Ext. 230 or email: [Education@nacoelj.org](mailto:Education@nacoelj.org)

For new sponsors – and old – Karen will answer questions, and chat about the joys of sponsorship (she's been a sponsor for years).

Thanks so much for your dedication to these Ethiopian-Israeli teens!

## 36 Years and Counting...

Since 1982, NACOEJ has been providing humanitarian and educational aid to the Ethiopian-Jewish community. NACOEJ is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.



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## A Most Enjoyable Visit



*The Brams and some of their students*

On May 8, 2018, Julie and Steve Bram, who sponsor 12 students through the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program, visited the Eliezer Ben Yehuda School in Ness Ziona where some of their students study.

They chose to visit Ness Ziona because it's close to Tel Aviv, and because some of their students were available (many are in 12th grade, and it's hard to visit them at this time of year, because of Matriculation exams).

They had a delightful visit with, among others, Bat El Tebeje.

At the visit, the Brams, the students, and Leah Barkai (Israel Coordinator of the High School Sponsorship program) were joined by the school principal; Bat El's teacher (Jewish and Civic studies); Eti Habari (Olim School Coordinator); and Adaya Zarfati (NACOEJ Coordinator in Ness Ziona).

**Mr. Bram spoke emotionally about how moved he and Julie are by the Aliyah from Ethiopia. He explained they want to help the new immigrants acclimate in Israel, even though they live thousands of miles away in Los Angeles.**

Then Bat El chatted about her life. She has a sister who is also in high school, a brother in the Israel Defense Forces, and two younger siblings.

Her father works with young people in the municipality and her mother works in a home for the elderly. After graduating, Bat El said, she plans to go to the army. (Another Ethiopian-Israeli student who joined the meeting said he wanted to be a Navy Seal, which impressed everyone there.)

The Brams were happy with their meeting, and said they would go back to Los Angeles and ask their friends to help raise more funds for the high school sponsorship program.

**That is truly acting as ambassadors!**

## High School Sponsorships = Educational Excursions, Enrichment Programs and More...

Since 1997, the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program has changed the lives of thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli teens. Thanks to their sponsors – you! – they can fully participate in high-quality, local high schools.

High school tuition is covered by the government, but Israeli schools charge added fees that many Ethiopian families can't afford. Your help allows your student to get essentials like educational excursions, enrichment programs, extra study hours, fees for special programs, and the ability to take advantage of all the school's educational opportunities.

As many students say, a sponsorship lets them be **"...just like the other kids."** Your sponsorship gives these teens self-confidence and an education that's key to getting into, and succeeding in, college. And this enables them to go on to successful futures. **Thank you.**

## The “Fruits of our Labor”

*Knowing how our sponsorship support translates into concrete help for Ethiopian-Israeli high school students gives us a much better understanding of how important these sponsorships truly are.*

*This letter from the Director of the outstanding Hebrew University Secondary School gives us an insight into the “fruits of our labor”.*

**To: Ms. Leah Barkai**  
NACOEJ High School Program Coordinator

On behalf of myself, the staff, and the students’ families, I want to express my appreciation for the generous grant...you’ve transferred to Hebrew University High School for the 24 Ethiopian-Israeli students who are attending our school during the 2018 academic year.

There’s no doubt this grant the school has received from NACOEJ for years, substantially helps Ethiopian families.

It’s part of an array of scholarships we give to make it possible for their children to study at our school.

The project began with a few students. We are happy to see more students from the Ethiopian community joining us each year...I hope more...will join in the coming years.

Thank you for your devotion and for the effort you make in maintaining the connection between the students and donors. We’ll ensure the students who receive grants write to their donors.

They’ll tell them about themselves and thank them personally.

I’m grateful for the cooperation.

I hope we will continue to see the “fruits of our labor” for years to come.

Warm regards,  
Dr. Gilad Amir  
Director



*Israeli students on Poland trip* ▲

***This year, four students from the Hebrew University Secondary School were able to go on a very meaningful trip to Poland. Here is Irit Tal’s letter requesting funding, which NACOEJ sponsors helped provide:***

Dear Leah...As they do every year, 11th grade students at our school are going on a trip to Poland; as we do each year, the high school helps students who have financial...problems covering the cost of the trip.

We turn to the Ministry of Education and organizations that give aid for this purpose.

Our students receive preparation on the subject of the Holocaust at the beginning of the 11th grade. By the time of the trip, they are ready and know what to expect.

The school sees the presence of the young generation of Israelis in Poland and the understanding of the history of the Jewish people during this terrible time, as critical.

This year four students from the Ethiopian community in our school registered for the trip. They are all from poor families that cannot pay this expense.

I am turning to NACOEJ on behalf of the school and the students. I hope generous donors who understand the importance of this will donate. Thank you in advance.

Regards,  
Irit Tal  
Resource Development and External Relations

**“May you have health, success, happiness and joy.”**

**“Your contribution inspires me to study as much as I can...”**

*Following are two beautiful letters from high school students. They make so clear the importance of sponsorships that we want to share them with you. Both are sponsored by a long-time NACOEJ supporter.*



**This is Tali. I am studying at the Eliezer Ben Yehuda School in Ness Ziona. I'm in 12th grade.**

**I want to thank you on my behalf and on behalf of my parents for sponsoring me.**

**Thanks to your contribution I was able to...enjoy school activities such as our last yearly school trip, when we went to the south of Israel.**

**Over the years, I visited places I had never been before like Mount Hermon and many other beautiful places.**

**At night we stayed in tents, which gave it a bonding...atmosphere. It was a great experience that was unforgettable.**

**Last year...I finished my matriculation exams with good grades like history - 85, math - 92, and Bible - 88.**

**This year I improved my grades in math and civics. On my last math exam I got a 91 (I got an 88 on the exam before that) and in civics I got a 90 twice. On the matriculation exam I got an 85.**

**Thank you for your contribution all these years. It helped me a lot. I hope to study at the university.**

**May you have health, success, happiness and joy. May you always be able to give and contribute out of great abundance.**

**Thank you,  
Tali Tefelge Teshele and her parents**

**Thank you for the scholarship you have given me and so helped me and my family a lot.**

**I have the opportunity to make my dreams come true and to strive for big achievements.**

**I strive to learn, and knowledge is power, so with your help I can do it.**

**My family and I have a lot of expenses. The fact that you help us really makes a difference for us.**

**My parents always motivate me to study. From their perspective this is the most important thing – that we become educated and that we go as far as we can with our dreams.**

**Your contribution inspires me to study as much as I can.**

**The fact that there is someone who believes in me and in my future makes me proud and makes me want to make a difference.**

**I respect you for the decision to help children and their family who need financial aid. It shows that you have good character.**

**Therefore, I want to thank you for your generous contribution and the help you have given me and my family.**

**Thank you,  
Calanit Biadgo**



## **A Sponsored Student/A Singing Sensation!**

Earlier this year, Irit Tal of the Hebrew University High School staff wrote to Leah Barkai with exciting news.

Ethiopian-Israeli Eden Alene, who attends Hebrew University High School in Jerusalem, and is sponsored by a very generous NACOEJ donor, won the top prize in Israel's X-Factor, Israel's popular reality singing competition!

Voters in Israel crowned Eden, who is 17 years old, and being raised by a single mother, as the program's newest champion! Scan the QR code here to see a video of Eden singing, or go to the NACOEJ website: [www.nacoej.org/llol-35](http://www.nacoej.org/llol-35)

Congratulations to Eden and her delighted sponsor!



## From Leah Barkai, Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program:



Hi, my name is Leah Barkai. I have been coordinating the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship program in Israel for the past 15 years.

Since the beginning, the program has grown from 18 to 1000 students. Some years we've had as many as 1500 students sponsored.

Because of our sponsors, increasing numbers of Ethiopian-Israeli students have participated in all school activities and graduated with full matriculation.

The students graduate with skills that enable them to do prestigious jobs in the army, and then continue on to higher education. They and their families often express their deep appreciation.

I am the liaison between NACOEJ and the schools, and between the sponsors and the students. I love all parts of this job, but especially the personal side.

Sometimes very warm relations are formed. One student called her sponsors "Aunt and Uncle".

Sometimes relationships last for many years. We've had sponsors who also support siblings of their student, and sometimes also sponsor their original student in college or university.

May 8, 2018

Ms. Leah Barkai  
North American Conference  
on Ethiopian Jewry  
Agrippas 42, Room 303  
Jerusalem 94301



Dear Leah,

We are grateful to you and to NACOEJ for sponsoring seven Ethiopian students at the Tehilla-Evelina de Rothschild Secondary School.

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.

The support of NACOEJ helps ensure equal access to academic excellence.

We value our relationship with NACOEJ and are thankful for your continued commitment.

Best wishes,

Arielle Listokin  
Development Coordinator

## From Shoshana Ben-Dor, NACOEJ Israel Director:

At the recent Knesset Day dedicated to the struggle against racism, and to Ethiopian-Israeli Jewry's integration into life in Israel, I attended the Aliyah and Klitah\* Committee session.

The discussion was about youth villages and boarding schools.

I explained to the attendees that, while boarding schools have a positive role for children and youth who cannot live at home or have no family in Israel, we feel the policy to place all Ethiopian-Israeli teens in boarding schools in the 1980's through the mid-90's, was wrong.

I said this was the reason we established the NACOEJ High School Scholarship Program, which has been highly successful for the students and has kept – and continues to keep – thousands of teenagers at home.

The Knesset members agreed that home is the best place for them. I was glad this point was heard and acknowledged.

\* Immigration and Absorption

## Just the Facts

### In the 2017-2018 school year...

- **204** sponsors participated in the High School program
- **896** students were sponsored
- **52** schools in **12** Israeli cities participated
- **150** of our students graduated

**Hundreds** of students are still hoping for sponsors.

**Can you or your family or friends help out? See page 1 for contact information.**