The Kiryat Malachi Connection

How volunteering in a small Israeli town led to new high school sponsors!

“Several years ago,” Ann Baradke writes, “I was fortunate enough to do some volunteer work in the small Israeli city of Kiryat Malachi through a program sponsored by my local Federation” (Jewish Federation of Greater Portland).

“It was one of the best experiences of my life,” she continues, “for four weeks in a town so small one can walk across it from one end to another in less than an hour.” Ann taught conversational English in one of the local high schools and worked with students from Ethiopian as well as Moroccan, Tunisian, and Iraqi backgrounds.

Kiryat Malachi is located 17 kilometers southeast of Ashdod, one of Israel’s port cities on her southern Mediterranean coastline. The town was founded in 1951 to replace a “tent city” housing Jewish refugees from Arab countries. Kiryat Malachi means “Angels Town”, and was named in honor of the Los Angeles Jewish Community which helped establish and develop it. Kiryat Malachi has remained a magnet for lower-income immigrant families. Most recently, the town has been absorbing immigrants arriving from Ethiopia, who now make up about 20% of the town’s population of 20,000.

Coincidentally, after Ann’s first experience in Kiryat Malachi, a friend who worked for the NACOEJ office in New York spoke to her about the possibility of sponsoring an Ethiopian Israeli high school student. Having such strong feelings for the people of Kiryat Malachi, Ann asked that her student be from there. At that time, there was no formal NACOEJ program in Kiryat Malachi, but the Israeli office found her a Kiryat Malachi student to sponsor anyway.

As Ann explained to NACOEJ staff, “Once I got my letter with the photo, I knew I had done the right thing. When I returned two years later for another volunteer stint, I visited the NACOEJ office in Jerusalem to see if I could set up a high school sponsorship program in the Amal High School. I also visited the Amal School, where my student was studying, to meet him, and to meet with the school principal to see if she was interested in such a program. Both NACOEJ and the school principal were very supportive, and I returned home to see what I could do. Between friends from New York (and Phoenix) and family, I managed to find five more sponsors. Then the Jewish Federation of Portland stepped in, and offered to sponsor seven more students.”

This personal connection to a special town and its students has been very satisfying to all of those involved. It has given Ann and her friends the well deserved sense that they are supporting teens who will grow up to contribute to the future of Israel. NACOEJ is proud to have been able to assist in making the Kiryat Malachi connection, and especially thrilled to work with such dedicated and committed sponsors. Perhaps more of our sponsors can encourage their local federations to participate!

A Wonderful Follow-Up

As reported in our last issue of “Bridges”, George and Judy Cohen of Rhode Island were planning a trip to Israel. Judy said, “Aside from seeing our wonderful personal family, we had one most important mission. That was to finally visit the Rata family in Ashkelon.”

This visit took place last October. “What a visit we had one Saturday evening after Shabbat,” the Cohens told NACOEJ. “It was the highlights of our trip as we got to hug and kiss all of the Rata family?”

Some five years ago, the Cohens began their connection to the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program by sponsoring Mazal, the second oldest of the Ratas. When Mazal graduated, she went into the National Service (an alternative to military service) and began working with new immigrant children, like her older sister Rivka before her. Rivka is now a student in Kiryat One College, studying Business Administration, and next year, Mazal will also begin higher education at Sapir College.

The Cohens went on to offer the same support to the Rata brothers, Yossef and David. David, who will graduate this year, has attended the ORT Gradot Ram School. He is looking forward to his service in the Israel Defense Forces. Yossef, currently in 9th grade, attends the ORT Ronson School in Ashkelon where he has begun to develop an interest in Economics and Business Administration. The Rata family has an amazing history of service to Ethiopian Jewry and the State of Israel. Rivka, Mazal, David, Yossef, and seven-year-old Sharaz have had an excellent role model in their own father who worked with Mossad agents and the Jewish Agency for Israel in the 80’s, smuggling Ethiopian Jews out of Ethiopia and Sudan into Israel. Due to the dangers involved in his work, Moges Rata had to leave for Israel before his family. But in 1991, one month before Operation Solomon, his family was able to join him in the Promised Land. Rivka and Mazal have now served Israel in the National Service, helping to assure that the Ethiopian community will flourish in their new homeland.

The Cohens feel that NACOEJ has given them a gift: the opportunity to be part of this particularly wonderful family in Israel. They are hopeful that their experience will encourage others to sponsor students through NACOEJ as well.

At NACOEJ, we believe that the Cohens and all our special high school sponsors are playing a vital role in supporting and strengthening Ethiopian Israeli teenagers and their families.

Looking for your feedback...

We are happy to bring you the second issue of “Bridges”. We would love to have your feedback, comments, suggestions, etc. Please feel free to call me at 212-233-5200, ext. 232, or email me at highschool@nacoej.org. Also, please pass our information to friends who might be interested in sponsorship. You are really an ambassador for this wonderful program. Your endorsement and encouragement will go a long way toward enabling these teens to get the education they need. Thank you so much.

Lisa Gran Kovitch
Director
NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program
Ten-Fold Growth in Only Five Years at the Alon Ginsburg School

To: Leah Barker, HS program director, Israel The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, Jerusalem

November 22, 2006
To: The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry

Chabad,
in my name and in the name of the residents and staff of Ulpanat Eliad, we would like to thank you deeply for your special support.

The reaction of the residents’ families to your help is a deep thank you for the wonderful educational opportunity you have given them.

We are happy to announce that, as in former years, the percentage of girls you have supported that have successfully passed their “Bagrut” exams is very high. In the graduating class of 2006, 25 students have graduated successfully, and 2 failed one subject only (out of a total of 6–10 subjects in which they are tested). With G-d’s help they will take another exam to correct it this year.

Their success is all your success.

Bless you for it,
Rabbi Levin Tovia
Director of Ulpanat Eliad

To: The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry

November 22, 2006
To: Leah Barker, HS program director, Israel

Shalom,
in my name and on behalf of all the students, parents, and the community of Ulpanat Eliad, we wish you a happy and successful New Year.

The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry

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