In the 2007/08 school year, The NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program sponsored:
- 1033 Ethiopian-Israeli students
- In 58 schools throughout Israel

Why the reduced numbers now, after years in which we had as many as 1500 students?
The dollar-to-shkel exchange rate is the answer — our dollars do not go as far as they used to in Israel.

In addition, we know our donors have their own personal financial stressors and concerns. Here at NACOEJ we understand setbacks, but still pray that all of our wonderful sponsors and their friends and relations will dig as deep as possible to help fund teenagers who truly will have to go without their schoolbooks and many other educational necessities unless they receive our help.

A Student Aims High

“M y name is Israela. My parents chose that name as a symbol of their arrival into the new country of Israel, of which they dreamed for many years in Ethiopia,” wrote Israela Elias, a student who will be going into the 11th grade in the Ramla-Lod High School in Lod. She recently returned from International Space Camp in Turkey — “eight years” away from her family’s Ethiopian roots.

Israela continued in her biographical statement, prepared for a potential sponsor: “My family came from Ethiopia in 1991 and I was born here [Israel] on March 7, 1992. I have 11 siblings… Both my parents are unemployed…. In the future I would like to study in the university and then get a profession and a career of my own. I would like to become independent and provide for my family.”

Israela has certainly worked hard with her family in mind. A drive for academic excellence enabled her to be chosen as one of the 16-member Israeli delegation to the International Space Camp. Youngsters were chosen based on demonstrated and tested achievement, including English and Astronomy preparedness.

Israela told her previous sponsors, “I met children of different ages who come from different places from around the world. I made many new friends… enjoyed myself and learned a lot.”

AMONG the activities which Israela excitedly wrote about was one in which they played roles as crew members on the model of the “Discovery.”

Reflecting on the model, Israela told her sponsors, “I enjoyed myself and learned a lot. As the space shuttle, the model is one of the most interesting and important projects we have done so far. It encouraged us to continue practicing our science and math skills.”

But despite her successes in high school, achievements at Space Camp, and participation, along with her brother Daniel, in the Weizmann Institute of Science’s “Budding Scientists” Program for the Scientific-Technological Advance ment of Students of Ethiopian Origin, Israela and Daniel did not have sponsors last year. Their sponsors were unable to continue due to serious illness and our thoughts remain with these generous contributors during this difficult time.

Recently, and very fortunately, new sponsors have stepped in. Israela and Daniel will surely need their new sponsors’ support as they strive for excellence.

Qualified students in the Weizmann program study science, math, and English, have personal mentoring, and attend seminars, camps, and science trips. The students attend the Weizmann Institute twice a week for four-hour sessions.

Israela and Daniel are exceptionally busy with their studies and should not be constantly distracted by worries about everyday high school costs and their family’s survival. But they do have these concerns. Sponsorships enable them to focus on fulfilling their potential and succeed.

P.S. We would greatly appreciate your passing this newsletter on to any family or friends you feel would be interested in sponsoring an Ethiopian-Israeli high school student.

LOOKING FOR YOUR FEEDBACK...

We are happy to bring you the third issue of “Bridges”, written by Lisa Gran Kovitch, especially for sponsors in the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program. We would love to have your feedback, comments, suggestions, etc. Please feel free to call us at 212-233-5200, ext. 232, or email to highschool@nacoej.org. Thanks.

Looking for your feedback...
Jason and friends with Moshe and students of the Elyashiv High School.

“My name is Moshe, and I’m 18.”

Moshe and Jason

A Cycle of Disadvantage Becomes a Circle of Inspiration

(through the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program)

Girls can dream – anywhere in the world – even in Lod, a town in central Israel where the Ethiopian community is severely underprivileged. Our sponsored high school students in Lod dream of becoming doctors, nurses, lawyers, business owners, actresses, fashion designers and songwriters — or report that they just haven’t decided yet because “there are still so many options.”

In a school located in a high-crime, Arab neighborhood — where the staff must walk the girls home in the evening, where the school is often broken into, and even basic food and clothing are hard to come by — 49 sponsored Ethiopian-Israeli students in Ulpanat Elid, a modern religious girls high school in Lod, dare to dream and believe in limitless possibilities. And the generosity of sponsorships, that an inspired high school staff helps to administer, make these dreams seem possible.

According to their principal, Rabbi Yissel Yacobi, “the stipends which the students receive are needed for their very existence and for their success, for as it is, the students leave after their studies to work for the sustenance of their families…”

The stipends pay for their books, supplies, and school trips. Without the sponsorships they could never cover their own needs. Even this urgently needed help, these young women are often working as waitresses, or in the airport, or at supermarkets and the like to help support their families.

Though the educators of Ulpanat Elid recognize the hardship these girls face, they set high standards, both academically and in regard to community service. And our 49 Ethiopian-Israeli girls, sponsored through NACOEJ, willingly accept these challenges. All of these students are studying for the highest level English and Math tests in the Bagrut (matriculation exams) so that they will be accepted by top universities.

...and their contributions to the community, through school-organized programs, are vast: collecting and delivering food packages, visiting the sick in hospitals, especially during Purim, organizing staples for delivery to Sderot (the town under constant rocket attack from Gaza), singing songs and nurturing Ethiopian little ones in nursery schools. These girls rise, despite their circumstances, above any possibility of spiritual impoverishment.

The NACOEJ High School Sponsorship Program has provided the funds that the creative and caring educators in their school need to help these students understand that the world is full of possibilities. They organize school trips to promote leadership, including one in which the girls went up to Jerusalem, equipped with materials and maps, to act as group leaders and tour guides of their teachers. Meeting these challenges has truly opened the eyes of these girls.

With the help of NACOEJ sponsorships, a vicious cycle of risk has become a rewarding circle of personal options and contributions to Israel as well. As Rabbi Yacobi says, the stipends are what enable not only the girls’ success but their very existence as part of a vibrant school community in which dreams can come true!

Thanks to the 24 sponsors of students in Ulpanat Elid!

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Jason Steinberg, of New Jersey, an undergraduate student at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania, has been deeply moved by his connection to the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program — a connection which spans generations and continents.

Jason went on his first pilgrimage to Israel in the summer of 2006 with a USY (Conservative) trip. After exploring Israel in the summer of 2006 with a USY (Conservative) trip. After exploring Israel, he joined a second trip to Israel which was sponsored by NACOEJ, a national volunteer organization. In his junior year of high school, Jason got involved with NACOEJ through the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program.

As Jason recalled, “As I visited Moshe, I thought about my relationship with him. I thought of why I made a donation to NACOEJ. I thought of my Grandfather. I thought about the way Moshe acted and who he was as a person... much of what my Grandfather represented, and has tried to instill in me, I saw in Moshe. Both of them are leaders in their own right, will be, and are, successful, and are naturally altruistic human beings.

Though the day the door opened and I was able to be paired with Moshe, I couldn’t be more proud to know such a special young man.” Letters between the two continue and a very special connection has been forged, inspired by a multi-generational commitment that has woven a thread from America to an inspirational Israeli teenager of Ethiopian heritage.

“[Moshe] had a dream.”

Jason and friends with Moshe and students of the Elyashiv High School.

“One of our students, Moshe, is motivated to succeed academically and in regard to community service. And our sponsored students, that an inspired high school staff helps to administer, make these dreams seem possible.”

Moshe, one of eight siblings, three of whom are already serving Israel, one of whom is married with children, and three of whom are still in elementary school, is motivated to succeed academically. He also aspires to serve in an intelligence unit for the Israeli Defense Forces.

Moshe is a fixed point in the bagrut (matriculation exams) so that they will be accepted by top universities. And their contributions to the community, through school-organized programs, are vast: collecting and delivering food packages, visiting the sick in hospitals, especially during Purim, organizing staples for delivery to Sderot (the town under constant rocket attack from Gaza), singing songs and nurturing Ethiopian little ones in nursery schools. These girls rise, despite their circumstances, above any possibility of spiritual impoverishment.

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Thanks to the 24 sponsors of students in Ulpanat Elid! Jason met a Moshe who carries within him just that, “the mayor.” As I watched the discord unfold in the blink of an eye, I realized how lucky I was to have had the privilege of meeting the Mayor of Ulpanat Elid, a town in central Israel where the Ethiopian community is severely underprivileged. Our sponsored high school students in Lod dream of becoming doctors, nurses, lawyers, business owners, actresses, fashion designers and songwriters — or report that they just haven’t decided yet because “there are still so many options.”

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