Welcome...

...to the Limudiah newsletter, written by Caroline Barg, showcasing the NACOEJ (North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry) Limudiah: After-School Programs of Intensive Education for Ethiopian children in Israel.

Because you are, or can be, a deeply appreciated supporter of these vitally important educational programs for Ethiopian-Israelis, we want to give you a “bird’s eye” view of some highlights of the 2007-2008 school year. Our goal is to publish this newsletter each year with information and facts from the prior school year.

The Limudiah Program

In Israel, 70% of Ethiopian children live below the poverty line. Economic circumstances often force their families to settle in depressed neighborhoods with high crime rates and overcrowded schools.

The academic and economic futures of these deserving children are in great danger if they do not get the help they need at this age. Indeed, an uncounted number of Ethiopian elementary school children quietly drop out of their Israeli schools at young ages. Some show up in classes occasionally, others spend all their time wandering the malls or the streets. The reason for their disappearance: repeated classroom failure causing humiliation, frustration, anger and alienation. In high school the Ethiopian dropout rate is twice the national average.

The antidote: Limudiah programs enable these bright children to succeed in the early years of their education. Limudiah children stay in school, are respected by teachers and classmates, and go on to academic and social achievements that lead to bright futures.

The Limudiah programs are currently in 21 schools in eight cities in Israel. The children receive 10–12 hours of intensive educational help weekly, focusing on reading, writing, math, and basic study skills. The children meet in small groups with a ratio of one teacher to eight students, enabling them to receive essential individual attention. Included are enrichment programs in music and art.

A vital part of the program is a nourishing lunch which enables the children to concentrate and study well during the afternoon hours. These are often the most nutritious meals the children receive all day.

The highly successful NACOEJ Limudiah programs protect the children from experiencing classroom failure, preventing the anger and alienation which can lead to dropping out.

For Ethiopian-Israeli children, Limudiah is the antidote to failure.
One of the best ways to judge the success of the NACOEJ Limudiah programs is to see their effect on the progress of individual children. So, we would like you to meet:

ADAYA...a third-grader in Lod, seemed to have real potential, but her Limudiah teacher noted that, like many Ethiopian children, she was afraid to ask questions in class. (In Ethiopian culture, children do not make demands of authorities.) The Limudiah teacher used her one-on-one time with Adaya to encourage her to ask the teacher questions rather than just reply to the questions the teacher asked! Speaking to the class, the teacher often commented, “Adaya asked me a good question about...” and gradually Adaya understood that the rules were different in an Israeli school. Today she asks questions, excels in arithmetic and is at grade level in reading.

SARAH...a difficult sixth-grader in her first Limudiah class, paid no attention to her homeroom teacher’s instructions and refused to do homework even when the whole Limudiah class participated. Limudiah teachers are encouraged to find or create special materials for individual children when needed, and Sarah’s teacher brought in books and art reflecting Sarah’s few interests, to share with her. Gradually, Sarah began to put effort into her work. Her grade average in her homeroom class rose from 60 to 85.

SHLOMO...a second-grader in Gedara, couldn’t learn to read. When his Limudiah teacher brought him extra-large, brightly colored letters, his face lit up. She and Shlomo’s mother took him to an ophthalmologist who prescribed glasses. Shlomo began to read, but, a year behind his classmates, he was afraid of being laughed at in his large homeroom class. In the small, friendly Limudiah, he even read aloud — to applause. Today he is a voracious reader and an active participant in homeroom classwork.

Meet Some of the Children...
For Ethiopian-Israeli children, the summer months can be bleak and unproductive. Their parents cannot afford to send them to day camps, and in many cases they are unable to help their children with reading or any other educational skills. The result is that the children begin the new school year at a very distinct disadvantage compared to their veteran Israeli classmates, and often experience humiliating failures as they struggle to catch up.

With the generous assistance of Peachy Levy, NACOEJ runs highly successful, two week, back-to-school programs during the late summer. The programs provide the children with five and one half hours daily of in-depth reviews in reading, math, general knowledge and other study areas, balanced with games, sports and arts and crafts. The children receive a nutritious, filling mid-morning meal.

The dramatic improvement in the children’s skills as they begin the new school year is striking testimony to the value of the Back-to-School programs, especially in conjunction with the regular Limudiah classes. In the summer of 2008, we were able to run these highly successful programs in four schools in two cities and urgently need funding to be able to re-open them in additional locations next summer.

Peachy Levy with children at the Bar-Ilan School in Ramla.

**The Peachy Levy Back-to-School Program**

**Getting Kids Back on Track…**

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**Ethiopian-Israeli Children Give Back to their Homeland at an Early Age**

Shortly before Purim this past year, all the third-grade children in Limudiah programs (in 21 schools in eight cities throughout Israel), made Mishloach Manot packages filled with the traditional gifts of foods given on Purim Day, for soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces.

The children also wrote personal letters to the soldiers expressing their gratitude for everything these brave young people, including many Ethiopian soldiers, do to protect Israel and the Jewish people. The children are proud to have the opportunity to give back to Israel for all that Israel has done for them.

**BIRTHRIGHT HILLEL TEAMS UP WITH NACOEJ**

Forty college students from New York University, Columbia University and Barnard College worked with Ethiopian-Israeli children in the NACOEJ Limudiah program at the Harin School in Ramla, one of Israel’s poorest cities, as part of the Taglit-Birthright Israel: Hillel program.

In the words of one participant: “Being in a classroom full of energetic and enthusiastic children showed how important their Hebrew and English education is to them and their parents – many of whom I learned are not completely fluent or literate in either language. I was very impressed with the Limudiah teachers…”
A Nutritious Lunch Translates into a Productive Afternoon

It is a known fact that when children are hungry, they cannot concentrate on their schoolwork. The NACOEJ Limudiah provides the children with a nutritious, delicious lunch at the outset of the afternoon program so that the time they spend in class can be productive and they can accomplish as much as possible. The Limudiah lunches are often the best source of nutrition the children receive. A large percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli families live under the poverty line, making it difficult for the parents to feed their families adequately. Limudiah lunches help improve the children’s general health and are a very important component of the program.

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