



# **Building Foundations for a Strong Future:** Helping Ethiopian Children Successfully Integrate into Israeli Society

**A JEWISH AGENCY FOR ISRAEL PROPOSAL**

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**For thousands of Jews living in Ethiopia, moving to Israel is the dream of a lifetime.** However, a long and difficult adjustment period lies ahead of them. Coming from an undeveloped country, the challenge of adjusting to a new language, culture and social structure can seem insurmountable, and immigrants experience significant shock in the inter-cultural transition.

Upon their arrival in Israel, Ethiopian immigrants are given a home at absorption centers where they live for one to two years, until they feel they have acquired the tools for independent living in their new homeland. Most of the Ethiopian children have never been a part of any formalized education system, and are not equipped with adequate knowledge and skills for their studies in Israel. Many Ethiopian children lack such basic Western knowledge as how to hold a pencil or sit at a desk. Their parents are also unfamiliar with the Western society, and are thus unable to assist their children with homework or help them adapt to the new society, as they are busy with their own absorption process, studying Hebrew and Judaism. The children's success at school is a vital key in the integration of the entire Ethiopian community. The children bring Israeli culture home, and are thus able to assist their families in their integration into society.

In response, the Jewish Agency has developed YESODOT – educational programs aimed at bridging the educational gap among Ethiopian children, enhancing their Hebrew and math studies and shortening the children's absorption process in the education system. ***With your support, we would like to offer these children and youth quality educational programs, to facilitate their successful integration into Israeli society.***



## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

There are 7,000 Ethiopian immigrants currently living in 20 absorption centers throughout Israel. Of these, some 3,000 children and youth are taking part in YESODOT programs. The period when the children live in absorption centers offers a valuable window of opportunity for their advancement. Professional teachers and instructors provide the children with daily afternoon tutoring in all subjects, focusing on Hebrew reading and writing, Math and English.

The children enjoy a variety of indoor and outdoor games, take part in story hour and in a wide variety of social and cultural activities, including afternoon classes held at the absorption center or at the community center, including arts and crafts, sports, martial arts, dance, choir etc. Occasionally, special enrichment activities are held, such as plays, performances, field trips or outings to the pool.

Following are the five major YESODOT programs:

### **Ready for First Grade (ages 5-6)**

Ethiopian children arrive in Israel with minimal schooling, and no experience with a structured preschool, a concept that does not exist in Ethiopia. Their environments lack stimulation, and their cognitive and motor development are not on par with those expected of Israeli children of similar ages. The goal of this project is to prepare kindergarten age children for school in the best possible way. The children participate in classes twice a week, in groups of 10-15 children, led by a kindergarten teacher.

Classes focus on a wide range of areas including: cutting and coloring for fine motor coordination, numbers, familiarity with the literature, vocabulary, learning letters, words and phonology, and more. Learning is done via games, art, sports and group activities. In addition, children and parents participate in a course entitled, "Challenges", a computerized course that focuses on teaching first grade readiness. This course, consisting of 25



sessions, offers joint activities for parents and children, to strengthen family ties and parental authority.

### **Matzophim–(Excellence and bridging gaps)**

This past year, a complementary center was established in the absorption centers, offering the children afternoon enrichment lessons, twice a week in Hebrew and Math. The educational staff prepares a tailor-made program for each child, to enable them to reach their grade level in these subjects.

### **Tutors**

Every afternoon, a team of tutors at the absorption centers assists the children with their homework, and organizes social and educational activities for them.

The tutors, who accompany the children in these different activities, serve as supportive role models for the children.

Following the importance of the tutors to the children's everyday lives, we will focus on training the tutors to become cultural mediators, who will assist the children to develop their social skills.

### **Bar Mitzvah program**

Ethiopian families learn Judaism in an intensive program that accompanies their conversion process. Within this framework, we propose a coming of age celebration that acknowledges the transitions from childhood to adulthood along with many other transitions in their lives, such as from Ethiopia to Israel, and a new transition into Judaism. The program, which is spread over several months, emphasizes the bar mitzvah ceremony and includes Jewish learning as well as community commitment and volunteering. In the course of this year, children will gain experience in



communal involvement, will participate in pre bar-bat mitzvah programs, and the boys will receive and learn how to don *tefillin* as well as get called up to the Torah in a family celebration at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

### **Summer Camps**

Every summer, the Jewish Agency summer camps offer Ethiopian children aged 4-18 living in absorption centers throughout Israel an opportunity to acquire and develop learning skills that are necessary for their success at school.

During the summer, the children have no organized framework. In the mornings, their parents study Hebrew at the ulpan. The children remain alone, without adult supervision. This situation may lead to negative behavior and expose the children to many dangers.

The Jewish Agency summer camps provide the children with an enriching educational framework over the summer, which offers them an opportunity to strengthen their self confidence, enjoy informal educational activities and bridge scholastic and cognitive gaps.

The summer camps operate for 7 weeks, 5 hours every day. Each age group has a suitable activity program, which emphasizes educational advancement. Studies are led by professional teachers in the various fields, and the children are aided by computer programs and workbooks.

Other activities include classes in the arts, music, science, sports, as well as outings to plays and field trips.



Alongside these key programs, additional enrichment activities help to strengthen the children's Hebrew skills and expose them to school-related subjects :

❖ **My First Library**

A project to encourage reading among the children and parents in the absorption centers. The children enjoy book readings during story hour, where they are introduced to classic Israeli literature. At the end of the project, each family receives a gift of 10 books, to start their new library at home.

❖ **My Toy Box**

A project to strengthen family ties during the inter-cultural transition experienced by the Ethiopian families. The project includes guided activities for the parents and children and ideas for games they can play together. Each family receives games to play at home.

❖ **Libraries and Play Rooms**

We are currently establishing rooms at the absorption centers where the families will be able to exchange books and receive assistance on preparation of assignments for school (reference to encyclopedias, dictionaries and access to internet information sources). The rooms will also offer a collection of games and toys to be at the families' disposal, which will familiarize them with Western leisure activities.

❖ **Computer Classes**

An introductory enrichment course to teach the children how to use a computer, both at school and at home.



❖ **Extra-curricular activities**

The children take part in a wide variety of afternoon classes, including: the arts, sports, dance, martial arts and music.

## **EVALUATION**

Evaluation conducted in 16 absorption centers shows that the children's achievements in the fields of basic skills, Hebrew language reading and writing and Math improved considerably by the end of the program. The greatest advancement was observed in language acquisition.

Findings show that program components were adapted to the children's educational needs. The program eases the families' absorption process, and significantly contributes to their successful integration in the Israeli society.



**BUDGET**

Age Group	Number of Children	Cost per individual per year (\$USD) – 2 years needed	Yesodot/ Foundations Program highlights
Pre-School & Kindergarten (ages 3-6)	700	1,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> grade preparation</li> <li>• Informal play skills (including reading and writing)</li> <li>• Educational summer camp experience</li> </ul>
Elementary School (ages 6-14)	1,360	3,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic enrichment (Hebrew, English, Math)</li> <li>• Extra-curricular activities (sports, music, art, computers, etc.)</li> <li>• Bar/Bat Mitzvah program</li> <li>• Educational summer camp experience</li> </ul>
High School (ages 14-18)  These children experience a “double” crisis as they deal with the transitions of integration and the normative challenges of adolescence.	835	3,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-military preparation</li> <li>• Academic enrichment (Hebrew, English, Math)</li> <li>• Practical computer skills</li> <li>• Volunteer program and social commitment activities</li> <li>• Jewish values/ Judaism enrichment</li> </ul>

# The Jewish Agency for Israel: Who We Are & What We Do

**We are a global partnership committed to securing the future of a connected Jewish people with a strong Israel at its heart. Together, we have brought over 3 million people to Israel. Together, we strive to create an Israel of equal opportunity. Together, we are building a nation.**

For 80 years, the Jewish Agency for Israel has been working with communities around the world to facilitate the return of Jews to the Jewish homeland and to bring Israel into the lives of the next generation of Jewish leaders.

## **Our work is focused on achieving these goals through:**

**Aliyah** The return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is an integral part of what Israel stands for, and the Jewish Agency plays a dynamic and unique role in every aspect of shaping Israel's demographic and social future. We are committed to maintaining Israel as a prominent focus of Jews everywhere, and to stimulating interest in Israel as a viable living option.

**Jewish-Zionist Education** Connecting the next generation with Israel and Jewish peoplehood as a core part of Jewish identity is central to securing the Jewish future. This single action has the power to build Jewish identity even for young people not previously connected. We do this by cultivating dynamic leadership, promoting innovative training and identity programs, and tailoring educational needs to individual communities around the world.

**Partnerships with Israel** In order to create a strong Jewish future it is essential that we involve world Jewry with Israelis, making them all an active part of shaping the future character of Israeli society. Notwithstanding the miles and oceans and experiences that separate us, we are indeed one nation. And that is why we are intensifying opportunities that engage world Jewry with the people of Israel to effect transformative change, facilitating people-to-people and community-to-community opportunities, and creating new paradigms that bring philanthropists from around the world together around one common issue: building a strong future for the Jewish people.