



# Project Proposal

## Bringing Ethiopian Jews Home to Israel: From Aliyah to Absorption

January 2020



## Supporting the Project

For 2,500 years, Ethiopian Jews have yearned to return to Zion. A generous donation of \$50,000 will support the aliyah and integration of Ethiopian new immigrants in Israel. Your generous gift will fund the entire absorption process beginning with absorption centre housing as well as education and enrichment programmes that facilitate their successful integration into Israeli society.

In honour of your generous donation, you will be honoured with a sign prominently displayed at a Jewish Agency Absorption Centre and you will receive ongoing reports about the progress and impact of these vital programmes.

As Keren Hayesod marks its Centennial of historic and unwavering support for Israel and the Jewish People, it is more committed than ever to facilitating the successful aliyah and absorption of Ethiopian Jews. Together with the Jewish Agency, Keren Hayesod-UIA, has been bringing Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia to Israel since 1977 and continues through today.

Currently, there are more than 156,000 Ethiopian Jews in Israel, with over 40% born in Israel to Ethiopian immigrant parents. Ethiopian Jews, both native-born as well as



new immigrants, face tremendous challenges as they struggle to integrate into Israeli society. While the historic return to their Jewish homeland is a dream come true, many Ethiopian immigrants are unfamiliar with the Hebrew language, Israeli culture and its social norms. In fact, the absorption of Ethiopian immigrants into Israeli society is among the most difficult of any immigrant group, especially in the areas of education, placement in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) as well as employment opportunities.

The Jewish Agency for Israel and Keren Hayesod-UIA are committed to facilitating the absorption of Ethiopian immigrants into Israeli society and working to ensure that these new Israeli citizens have a strong foundation to build a new life in the country.

## Keren Hayesod's Response to Facilitating the Absorption Ethiopian Immigrants

**Your generous support is requested to support two key initiatives that help to achieve this goal:**

- **Absorption Centres** - temporary housing which provide a soft landing and supportive framework, tailored to the needs of new immigrants.
- **Ethiopian National Project (ENP)** - a collaborate initiative uniting global Jewry, the Government of Israel and the Ethiopian-Israeli community in its mission to advance the integration of Ethiopian-Israelis into Israeli society.

## Absorption Centres: Easing The Transition Into Israeli Society

Jewish Agency absorption centres are currently home to some 4,200 new immigrants from all over the world. This figure includes 2,620 new immigrants from Ethiopia. Far more than just roofs over their heads, absorption centres focus on facilitating the arrival of each new immigrant as well as their successful transition into Israeli society and move to permanent housing.

Typically, new immigrants live in absorption centres for approximately six months; however, Ethiopian immigrants reside at absorption centres for two years on average,

living in one of The Jewish Agency's 14 absorption centres that cater to the specific needs of Ethiopian immigrants. Strategic efforts on behalf of the Ethiopian Jewish community focus on strengthening and empowering them through initiatives that concentrate on fostering their successful integration and upward socio-economic mobility. Special emphasis is placed on the next generation and closing developmental gaps as it is through children's innate ability to quickly adapt to new situations that the Ethiopian community has the greatest chance to successfully integrate into Israeli society.



During their first month in Israel, Ethiopian immigrants undergo medical exams, register for health care providers, enrol their children in school and day care centres, open bank accounts and start to familiarize themselves with their new surroundings. Families that have school age children receive assistance to enrol them in appropriate schools based on their ages. Preschool and kindergarten age children attend educational frameworks at their absorption centres and older children attend local elementary, middle and high schools. With their children in school, adults can focus their attention on attending intensive Hebrew language *ulpan*s to learn and improve their Hebrew.

In addition to learning Hebrew, Ethiopian new immigrants also participate in important workshops such as: learning about their legal rights and obligations, cooking and food preparation, basic hygiene, preparation for school (how their children should behave, what school supplies they should bring), and proper financial management. An Amharic speaking counsellor accompanies the new immigrants and provides them with information about vocational training programmes and employment seminars geared to prepare Ethiopian new immigrants to join the work force. Usually new immigrant parents do not work during the first year so they can focus totally on learning Hebrew and how to function in Israel society in order to be able to make the successful transition to permanent housing.

At absorption centres, Ethiopian new immigrants also enjoy communal Jewish holiday celebrations, excursions, courses and field trips that teach them about Judaism, Zionism and life in Israel. Topics range from ensuring successful recruitment and service in the IDF, alcohol and drug-abuse prevention, encouraging young adults to pursue higher education and vocational training. Many absorption centres have programmes that involve volunteers from the local community and focus on bridging the cultural and social gaps between new immigrants and veteran Israelis.

## The Ethiopian National Project (ENP)

Despite the best efforts of numerous organizations committed to the successful integration and absorption of Ethiopian immigrants, building a life in their ancestral homeland presents several real and critical challenges for many Ethiopian immigrants. The Ethiopian immigrant community continues to be marginalized by inopportunities and social isolation. Typically arriving with limited education, few adaptable job skills, and significant disparities in social and cultural norms, more than 75% of immigrants live in poverty and suffer from the side effects that come with that reality. Only 38% of Ethiopian youth in Israel are eligible for high school diplomas and the unemployment rate among young adults is close to 20%. The Ethiopian community also has higher rates of homicide, crime and domestic violence than other new immigrant communities in Israel.

In response to this harsh reality, the Ethiopian National Project (ENP) was created to address the Ethiopian community's greatest needs, in partnership with those who care most about the community, with the full and active involvement of Ethiopian-Israelis. A partnership between the Jewish Federations of North America, the Government of Israel, representatives of Ethiopian Jewish community organizations, the Jewish Agency for Israel, JDC-Israel and Keren Hayesod-UIA, no other initiative so fully involves the community at every stage of planning, implementation and evaluation.

**The ENP's holistic approach focuses on facilitating the maximum integration of Ethiopian-Israelis in five key areas: education, army placement, vocational training, leadership development.**

**Education** - a child's performance in elementary, junior and senior high school plays a critical role in his/her life path. Yet most Ethiopian-Israeli schoolchildren miss out on a plethora of opportunities and do not reach the highest tracks in school or the IDF. In fact, only 40% of Ethiopian-Israeli 12th graders reach matriculation at a level that will enable them to enter university in contrast to 62% of their Israeli peers. ENP provides Ethiopian-Israeli youth with intensive after-school scholastic assistance to improve their academic performance while working to strengthen their self-esteem and leadership skills by addressing obstacles to social integration and personal development. Participants also receive a hot lunch, which helps to ensure that they attend tutoring sessions focused and ready to learn.

**Post-High School and IDF Placement:** quality and meaningful post-high school placement can be life-changing and aid in future career paths, while poor placements can decrease motivation and result in disrupted or incomplete national service. Many Ethiopian immigrant parents and their children are unaware of the processes and opportunities that are available to them. By informing them about the range of possibilities while helping parents understand the process, Ethiopian Israelis will have a better chance for the best possible placements and ultimately increase the number of Ethiopian immigrant who successfully complete their IDF service, especially in elite units such as cyber and intelligence.

**Vocational training:** Although the ENP has many programmes for school-age children and youth to graduate high school with full matriculation, vocational training can be a lifeline for those who have not attained a high school matriculation certificate or who entered college in a field that does not easily lend to job placement. The ENP provides targeted vocational training to 20 to 35 year-olds to help Ethiopian-Israelis in this age bracket attain quality employment in a range of respected professions, such as practical engineering and more.

**Higher Education Scholarships** - financial challenges are a major obstacle for Ethiopian-Israelis who are qualified to enter college or university but do not have the financial means to do so. ENP grants scholarships to Ethiopian young adults who require financial assistance to enable them to enter and remain in higher education. Scholarship recipients "give back" by volunteering in ENP

programmes, serving as role models for those young people who also aspire to reach college and university.

**Leadership Training** - a community is as strong as its leadership. Without question, there is a dearth of Ethiopian-Israeli representation in Israeli society. The ENP has a Leadership Development Programme to train Ethiopian-Israeli activists and grassroots leaders who works to increase the involvement of Ethiopian-Israelis in their absorption process- helping to catalyse a change from within.

**Two Keren-Hayesod-supported initiatives on behalf of Ethiopian immigrants – Absorption Centres and the Ethiopian National Project – seek to provide them with the comprehensive assistance they need to transition from the rural villages of Ethiopia and successfully integrate into Israeli society. These stories highlight the stories of two Ethiopian immigrant families. There are many more Ethiopian immigrants like them who require your support.**

## Personal Stories

**The Gavara Family**- made aliyah from Gondar in June 2017. The parents Kabao and Almax have four children: Chalcho, age 12, Tigist, age 9, Lyuv, age 4 and Esther, age 2. Before their aliyah, Kabao worked in agriculture and Almax was a school teacher.

After their arrival, the Gavara family settled at the Cheruv Absorption Centre in Beersheva. Two weeks after they arrived, the Gavara's children began school. The two older children attend elementary schools and the two younger ones are in early childhood frameworks. While their children are in school, the Gavara's attend an intensive Hebrew language course at the absorption centre. As part of the course, the Gavara's visited Sde Boker where they learned about David Ben Gurion and went hiking in the desert. The Gavara's hope to purchase an apartment in the city of Beersheva. The parents are very interested in learning and are highly motivated to find gainful employment which they consider a major step in successfully integrating into Israeli society.



**Sefitu** - and her family of seven fulfilled their family's generations-long dream of returning to Jerusalem when she was seven years old, in 2004. Sefitu, which means "plenty" in Amharic, was born in a small village in the Wollo region of Ethiopia. Growing up, Sefitu's job was to draw water from a well.

After they made aliyah, Sefitu and her family were placed in the absorption centre in Beersheva, where they lived for almost two years until they purchased a small apartment in the same city. Once they moved from the absorption centre, Sefitu entered third grade, side by side with her other Israeli peers, though she never went to school in Ethiopia.

The quantum leap from drawing river in a well at the age of seven to drawing blood at 19 as a National Service Volunteer at Soroka Hospital was made possible thanks to Sefitu's involvement



in the ENP's SPACE (School Performance and Community Empowerment) Scholastic Assistance Programme. From 7th to 12th grades, it provided Sefitu with all the after-school supplementary support she needed to succeed in school. Three of Sefitu's also participated in the programme.

In 10th grade, Sefitu decided that she wanted to become a doctor. I love to help people, and want to make people feel better. I also want to give back all I have received, and know I can make a difference. ENP helped me believe I can do whatever I set my mind on doing. And that's what I'm doing today as I study pharmacology at Ben Gurion University."

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