

# ENGELBERG CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

## Ethiopian National Project: Youth Centers – Third Evaluation Study, 2012

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## Executive Summary

Youth centers are part of the holistic support offered by the Ethiopian National Project (ENP) to Ethiopian-Israeli youth to help advance them in all areas of life, restrict risk behaviors and avert deterioration. Designed for youth aged 13 to 18, the centers are meant to offer: a pleasant place for organized afternoon recreation; an attentive ear, support and personal reinforcement through self-empowerment, the development of knowledge and skills in a variety of areas, and educational activity. In 2012, there were 20 youth centers at 19 localities countrywide with a total registration of some 1,800 youth.

Also in 2012, the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute conducted an evaluation study of the youth centers that takes its place beside two earlier ones, in 2006 and 2008. The study goal was to provide feedback to the Ethiopian National Project, to the Ethiopian-Israeli community and to center implementers in order to strengthen and further develop the program. Data were collected from 18<sup>1</sup> directors and 267 youth at 5 selected centers.<sup>2</sup> At three centers, there was a qualitative in-depth study including interviews with representatives of the implementing agency, center directors, and a focus group of youth participants. Three of the five centers<sup>3</sup> in the study took part in all three surveys and the multi-year comparisons presented in this report relate to these.

## Findings

### *A. Youth Characteristics*

- ◆ The average age of the youth was 15, most (82%) were between 13 and 17.
- ◆ Both girls and boys attend the centers though the percentage of boys is higher (66%); this characteristic has been stable over the years.
- ◆ Most of the youth attending the centers (81%) are Ethiopian-Israelis, and most (62%) are Israeli born. Only a few (4%) immigrated to Israel in the past decade (since 2002); the rest (34%) immigrated before 2002. Over the years, the percentage of native born Ethiopian-Israelis rose, reflecting the demographic changes of the population.
- ◆ Over the years, the percentage of non-Ethiopian Israeli youth attending the centers rose (from 2% to 4% in 2006 and 2008, up to 15% in 2012).
- ◆ Like the rest of the Ethiopian-Israeli population, center youth reported characteristics of a low socioeconomic status: 15% were single-parent families, and 12% had no breadwinner. Furthermore, about half (53%) of the families had at least five children.

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<sup>1</sup> Two additional centers that opened mid-year were omitted from the study.

<sup>2</sup> Gadera, Bet Shemesh, Kiryat Bialik, Beersheba, Lod. The questionnaires were administered at the centers in the form of time sampling – i.e., to all youth attending the centers in the week of the study. Four youngsters refused to answer the questions.

<sup>3</sup> Beersheba, Gadera and Lod. These three centers participated in the program from the beginning, in 2005, and in the studies conducted in 2006 and 2008 as well as the present one.

- ◆ Scholastic performance: the overriding majority (94%) of center youth attend school. In general, most reported a positive attitude towards school and teachers, saying that they felt good at school. Nevertheless, there are still scholastic difficulties, reflected in: the high percentage of students failing certain subjects (44% reported failing at least one subject on their previous report cards), their frequent absences (45% reported at least one day's absence from school for reasons other than illness or holidays), and the assessment of their ability to perform scholastic tasks (42% noted at least one difficulty in three of the scholastic tasks mentioned to them). Scholastic characteristics are also reflected by the sum total of behaviors that indicate a latent risk of dropout. An analysis of the summary measure showed that about a quarter (23%) of the youth manifested characteristics related to latent dropout: boys more so (27%) than girls (15%).

The analysis of differences between the three surveys at the three older centers showed a decrease over time in a youth's sense of alienation from school and an increase in the percentage reporting both a sense of belonging to school (from 68% in 2006 and 2008 to 81% in 2012), and the feeling that the teachers treated them fairly (from 45% in 2006 to 64% in 2008 and 70% in 2012).

- ◆ Risk behaviors: many of the center youth, particularly the boys, reported that they had engaged in risk behavior or had been exposed to risk situations: 43% –drank alcohol (“more than a sip”); 32% – had gotten drunk at some time; 31% – smoked; 7% – used drugs. As noted, more boys than girls attend the centers. Distinguishing between girls and boys, we found, for the most part, a higher percentage of center boys reporting risk behaviors than boys in the general Hebrew-speaking education system.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, a lower percentage of center girls reported risk behaviors than girls in the general Hebrew-speaking education system (the cited behaviors were the same).

The percentage of center youth reporting violence was particularly high. Despite the decrease over time in the percentage of youth involved in fights, the rate was still significantly high compared with that reported in the general Hebrew-speaking education system. Among boys, 23% of the center youth reported involvement in at least three fights in the past year vs. 10% of the boys in the general Hebrew-speaking education system.

- ◆ Envisaging the future: almost all the youth reported that they intended to do either army service or National Service (90% of the boys, 98% of the girls). Forty-one percent of the youth noted that they believed they would acquire higher education (college or university) in the future. The percentage of girls so persuaded was significantly higher than that of the boys (59% vs. 32%).

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<sup>4</sup> According to the health survey, *Health Behavior in School-Age Children*, mental/emotional and social wellbeing, and patterns of risk behavior in school students, conducted in Israel from 1994 as part of an international survey. The study was headed by Dr. Yossi Harel-Fish of the Bar-Ilan School of Education in conjunction with the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute and the funding of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Israel Anti-Drug Authority. In 2010 the sample numbered 3,800 students at Hebrew-speaking schools in grades 8, 10, 11 and 12.

## ***B. Youth Participation in the Centers***

- ◆ The youth centers are open in the afternoon, most of them – for five days a week and six hours a day on average. The youth reported average attendance at the centers of 3 days a week for 3 hours a day.
- ◆ Center directors noted that about 50% of the registered youth attend regularly, at least once a week. The rest, including youth living in boarding schools, attend occasionally or mainly during school vacation.
- ◆ Most youth (70%) had not previously attended a center or taken part in other extracurricular activities; for a similar percentage (74%), the centers are the only framework of afterschool activity in which they participated in 2012.
- ◆ Center attendance attests to stability and continuity: most youth (71%) noted that they had been attending the centers for more than a year.

## ***C. Center Activity***

- ◆ According to the reports of both the directors and youth, most of the centers offer a normative framework in which to spend free time. In addition, all the centers offer a wide range of activities, mainly in the following areas: courses and hobbies, personal growth and leadership workshops, and special social activities. About half of the centers also offer external activities (such as excursions, theater, sports days etc.). A few centers hold structured activity with the parents.
- ◆ About a quarter (24%) of the youth said they participated in leadership groups that are partners to the center work. An additional 9% said they would be interested in joining such a group.
- ◆ The youth reported attending the centers mainly to spend their free time (57%), to be with friends (55%), but also for center activities (44%) and to talk with counselors (27%).
- ◆ As said, over time, more non-Ethiopian Israeli youth began to attend the centers. The Ethiopian-Israeli youngsters were asked if they would prefer separate or mixed activities with the non-Ethiopian-Israeli youth. Slightly less than half of the Ethiopian-Israeli youth (43%) noted a preference for joint activities. A similar percentage (42%) said that they had no preference. Compared with the previous studies, the percentage of youth interested in separate activities for Ethiopian-Israeli youth decreased – from 22% in 2006 to 10% in 2008 and 8% in 2012.
- ◆ In choosing activities, center directors are guided mainly by the youth's desires and needs, and by content they consider important to the youngsters. All the centers had a joint "think tank" comprised of center youth and staff. About half (51%) of the youth reported that the counselors involved them to a large or very large extent in decisions about center activities; an additional 21% reported moderate involvement.
- ◆ Collaboration with other services: All the directors reported collaboration with community services as needed. Mainly, center staff held regular meetings with youth centers or other youth clubs (53% of the centers), the Kiddum Noar Youth Advancement Program, and the

Israel Corporation of Community Centers (47% of the centers in both cases). Over the years, the local authorities became more engaged in center activities; in 2012, some two-thirds of the centers (67%) enjoyed funding from the local authority vs. only 39% in 2008. Most communities with active youth centers have also a scholastic assistance program, and it too is implemented by the ENP for the same population. However, the interviews with directors revealed that not all the centers maintain ongoing contact with the scholastic assistance program in their communities.

- ◆ Center staff: center staff consists of a fulltime director and part-time or volunteer counselors (including young people doing pre-military service, as well as soldiers). On average, half (51%) the center staff stem from Ethiopia in keeping with the concept that they serve as role models for the youth.

#### ***D. Satisfaction with the Centers and Implementation Challenges***

- ◆ Most of the youth are satisfied with the time they spend at the centers (83%). They feel that they do things there that interest (78%) and are important to them (73%). As one youngster noted: *“It’s an excellent center, whoever enters doesn’t want to leave.”*
- ◆ The role of the counselors in center activity is significant. Most of the youth (82%) felt that the counselors understand them. More than half (58%) felt that the counselors relate to them personally to a large or very large extent; an additional 22% cited a moderate extent. In the interviews, the youth spoke of the great importance of their talks with the counselors: *“The talks with the counselors really help;” “They listen to you, treat you as an equal”; “They’re always interested in what’s going on with you.” “We especially like the counselors”; They listen and are nice.”*
- ◆ The ongoing operation of the youth centers demands concerted effort. Challenges arise that warrant consideration. The following challenges were noted in the interviews with implementing agencies, center directors and youth:
  - The need for a broader response – On weekends, there is no suitable activity for youth; there is also a sense that the offerings during vacation are inadequate, in terms of both opening hours and size of manpower.
  - Greater parental involvement – Implementers and directors noted the great importance of involving parents in center activity. But in practice, the directors reported problems in enlisting parents; there were hardly any joint activities with parents.
  - Inclusion of non-Ethiopian/Israeli youth attending the centers – Over time, two parallel processes developed: non-Ethiopian/Israeli youth began attending the centers, and fewer non-Ethiopian/Israeli youth today are interested in separate activities. The inclusion of non-Ethiopian/Israeli youth attending the centers naturally should thus be investigated though not at the expense of specific activities for Ethiopian/Israeli youth: it may be necessary to raise more funds to respond to the needs of the additional youth. On the other hand, thought should be given to integrating specific activity for Ethiopian-Israeli youth (e.g., on the question of cultural identity) and simultaneous activity for all the youth.

- Coping with risk behaviors – Most center youth are not characterized by risk behaviors nor does their behavior deviate from that of the general population of Jewish youth in Israel. Nevertheless, two areas showed significant gaps between the groups: fighting and truancy. The centers face a significant challenge in terms of coping properly with these two circumstances.
- Increasing cooperation with additional services in the locality – particularly with the local authority, with other bodies addressing youth activities, and with the ENP scholastic assistance program.

### ***E. The Perceived Contributions of the Centers***

- ◆ 80% of the youth noted that because of the centers, to a large or very large extent, they have somewhere to go to in their free time; an additional 10% cited the extent as moderate.
- ◆ 65% noted that the centers contribute to a large or very large extent to their self-confidence and broaden their social circle (56% noted that they had made new friends at the centers).
- ◆ In keeping with center goals, particularly through structured activities in personal growth and leadership workshops, the centers contribute to self-empowerment. As said, about a quarter of the youth participate in leadership groups through the centers. These were highly valuable, as seen from the participants' responses: *"The group gave me a lot of knowledge, opening up life paths for me"*; *"I matured and became more responsible"*; *"It's fulfilling"*; *"It contributed in terms of behavior, confidence and ways of thinking"*; *"I feel a sense of belonging and that I have an impact."* Another activity that greatly enhances youth self-empowerment is participating in the activities of a youth movement. More than a third of the youth attending the centers are also active in a youth movement: 30% as young participants and another 7% as counselors, comparable to the general participation rates of youth in Hebrew-speaking schools (HBSC 2010). Most of those participating (56%) joined a youth movement through friends although about a fifth (19%) noted that they had joined through the centers they attend. This impact marks a significant contribution of the centers to the empowerment of youth and their integration into the general responses offered at a locality.
- ◆ The youth mentioned the contribution of the centers in providing an "attentive ear"; most (70%) said they felt (to a very large, large or moderate extent) that they could turn to the center with a problem; 68% said that they are helped at the center (to a very large, large or moderate extent) to see or think about life differently. This contribution was meaningful as part of the general emotional response offered by the centers, especially as part of the significant relationship that the youth form with counselors, their envisaging the future, and constructing positive attitudes and perceptions.
- ◆ Note that although center activity focuses on the youth attending, the interviews disclosed a significant contribution to the Ethiopian-Israeli directors who manage the centers. Their work at the centers is a significant part of realizing their own picture of the future and of personal empowerment: *"Every day I go to sleep feeling that I accomplished something today, that I*

*put something into a child's head," "I chose a life path for myself, I hope that the children too will choose their own ways".*

**In conclusion,** the evaluation study showed that the youth centers play an important part in the general package of services offered by the ENP to Ethiopian Israelis: they meet the goal of providing a high-standard, normative response to the needs of youth to fill their free time. They also provide opportunities for personal growth, a stronger social circle, self-empowerment and enrichment. Moreover, they are a focus of leadership activity; leadership groups formed at all the centers and are involved in center work, affording participants experiences that foster empowerment and responsibility.

The centers play a highly important role in the lives of the youth. For most of the youth, they are their only framework of afterschool activity. Furthermore, most of the youth have been attending the centers for more than a year, attesting to their stability and diligence, and to their satisfaction with center activities. The work of the center counselors and the nature of their relationships with the youth are of great importance: there, the youth are able to find an attentive ear, to receive help in solving their problems, to form a significant relationship with an adult, to receive guidance and assistance in constructing a picture of the future. Most of the youth are very satisfied with center activities and greatly appreciate their contribution to their lives. Challenges of implementation were also cited in the study, and these should be given consideration in order to reinforce the ability of the center to contribute to the participating youth.