

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

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The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) was established in 2004 with the goal of enabling Ethiopian-Israeli youth to fulfill their potential and to increase their chances of social mobility and future integration into the employment market. A partnership of the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), the Government of Israel, representatives of Ethiopian Jewish community organizations, the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), JDC-Israel and Keren Hayesod (UIA), it comprises a variety of interventions. The most significant is a scholastic assistance program for students in junior high and high school and a network of youth centers.

The youth centers are designed to provide Ethiopian-Israeli youth with a place to spend afterschool hours and benefit from organized recreational activity, empowerment, educational activities, and personal support with problems they face. The purpose is to help advance them in all areas of life and reduce risk behaviors. In 2012, there were 20 youth centers at 19 localities countrywide, attended by some 1,800 youth.

In 2012, the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute conducted an evaluation study of the youth centers (earlier evaluations were in 2006 and 2008). The goal was to provide program initiators and implementers with feedback in order to strengthen the program and its future development. The study was based on questionnaires administered to 18 directors and 267 youth at five centers. At three centers, a qualitative in-depth study was conducted, including interviews with representatives of the implementing agencies, center directors, and a focus group with the participants.

The study showed that the centers play a significant role in the ENP's holistic support, serving their purpose. They provide enrichment, and an opportunity for personal growth and for a stronger social circle. At all the centers, youth leadership groups were formed and involved in center work, experiencing empowerment and responsibility. The centers are also attended by non-Ethiopian Israeli youth, their proportion increasing over time.

The centers play an important role in the life of the youth: for many, it is their only recreational framework. Moreover, most of the youth have attended for more than a year on a regular basis, which also reflects their satisfaction. This was also expressed in their reports on the centers' contribution to their lives: most noted that the centers give them a significant place to spend their free time; about half noted that because of the centers, they feel more self-confident, have made new friends, and even improved scholastically.

The study also identified several challenges in implementing the projects, such as: expanding the responses offered youth on weekends and during school vacations; increasing parental involvement, and adopting more effective ways to cope with risk behaviors.

These and other findings were presented to the parties involved in the centers' implementation and funding, serving as a basis for improving the program and its continued dissemination.

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