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KEREN HAYESOD קרן היסוד  
FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

**Project Report**

# Family Matters A Violence Prevention Program for Ethiopian Immigrants



KEREN HAYESOD קרן היסוד  
ארגון חסות

A 2019 Project Report Presented to  
Sydney Women's Division



## Introduction

Keren Hayesod-UIA would like to express its deepest gratitude to the Sydney Women's Division for your support to enable 5 groups to participate in the Family Matters program. Family Matters offers individual and group counselling to Ethiopian immigrant families and addresses the cultural and social challenges they face during their first few years in Israel. In appreciation of your generous support, we are pleased to present you with the following progress report about the program and the impact of your donation.

## Ethiopian Aliyah: An Historic Opportunity

Supported by Keren Hayesod-UIA, the Jewish Agency has been bringing Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia to Israel since 1977 and continues through today. Important Aliyah (immigrant) ventures include: Operation Moses (1980-1985), which brought Jews secretly through Sudan, a Muslim country with which Israel had no diplomatic relations; Operation Solomon (1991), during which 14,310 Ethiopian Jews were secretly airlifted to Israel in only 36 hours; and Operation Dove's Wings (2011-2013), which brought 7,000



additional Ethiopians to Israel. In addition to these endeavors, on Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup> 2018, the weekly Government of Israel Cabinet meeting approved the proposal of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon, to bring to Israel approximately 1,000 members of the Falash Mura community, whose children are in Israel. Under this decision, the Interior Minister was assigned the responsibility of evaluating and approving the entry of candidates, who meet the criterion of having children who entered Israel, as per previous government decisions regarding the Falash Mura community. The new wave of Aliyah began started in February 2019 and will with 620 new Olim who came to Israel from Ethiopia in 2019.

It is difficult to imagine the challenges Ethiopian Olim (immigrants) face when they first arrive in Israel. While the historic return to their Jewish homeland is a dream come true, they are unfamiliar with the language, culture and social norms. The absorption of Ethiopian Immigrants into Israeli society is among the most difficult of any immigrant group and in one short plane ride from Ethiopia to Israel, these individuals bridge a centuries-old social and cultural gap. The Jewish Agency for Israel and Keren Hayesod-UIA facilitate the absorption of Ethiopian immigrants into Israeli society and work to ensure that these new Israeli citizens have a strong foundation to build a new life in the country.

## The Family Matters Program

Contrary to the situation in Ethiopia, Ethiopian women in Israel enjoy full equality. With this change in the family hierarchy, the phenomenon of domestic violence has become a central concern in the integration of the Ethiopian immigrants. Last year, there were an estimated 311 cases of reported domestic disputes and domestic violence among Ethiopian immigrants at Absorption Centres, some of which resulted in the removal of one family member from the home and/or referring women to battered women shelters.

Domestic violence in the Ethiopian community is a growing concern that has received wide-scale coverage in media outlets lately, following the tragic deaths of several women at the hands of their husbands. As distressing that this phenomenon is, its causes can be clearly identified. The profound cultural transition that newcomers undergo inevitably affects the family structure, as

personal and economic struggles impact family dynamics and spousal relationships. As soon as they arrive in Israel, Ethiopian women begin to study Hebrew together with men in the same class. Often, women pick up Hebrew more quickly and reposition themselves as the new family breadwinners. As the woman's role within the family expands, the man often perceives this to be an encroachment upon and dismissal of his own centrality to the family. This role reversal often generates tension between husbands and wives and parents and children, sometimes leading to violence within the family.



With the arrival of 620 new immigrants from Ethiopia in 2019, the Jewish Agency, through the support of Keren Hayesod-UIA, prepared to answer the urgent need to strengthen the relationships between couples while safeguarding the women's rights and their aspirations for advancement. The generous donation of the Sydney Women's Division enabled the Jewish Agency to begin the preparations and initial workings of the Family Matters program - a family wellness program that aims to prevent domestic violence situations within the Ethiopian family unit, reduce instances of familial violence, and promote constructive communication between Ethiopian family members. According to the schedule, the program will be taking place at the Absorption Centres and employ a culturally-sensitive and holistic approach that consists of 13 sessions for women and men separately and five sessions together as the family unit.

Issues addressed in the workshops include:

- Differences between Ethiopian and Israeli culture that necessitate a shift in behaviour
- Triggers to family violence and how to avoid them
- Financial planning and budgeting, setting priorities
- Constructive communication, positive dialogue, arguing without violence
- Support networks and where to turn for help
- Legal consequences of domestic violence and recourse for victims
- Building violence free home environments for children and the entire family

The Family Matters Program is conducted in Amharit, the native language of the Ethiopian community, through the discussions of the abovementioned curriculum, notions of self-image, relationships, and sexuality are also incorporated. Participants are exposed to simulated situations common to the Ethiopian immigrant experience and share together the various techniques, strategies, and options for solving these scenarios without violence.

## 2019 Program Report

The donation was received in July 2019, prompting the staff to begin the preparations needed to start implementing the program during December 2019. Each Absorption Centre started the program at a different date in December, according to the preparation and the activity calendar. The program's structures and schedules differ between each of the Absorption Centres, as they are catered to the specific needs of the Olim living there.

### As part of the program, each group focuses on following subjects:

- **Group and individual parental guidance session**
- **Parent-Child Therapy** – These include emotional support therapy for mothers and family counseling.
- **Family Guidance sessions** – These include sessions about cooperation between the parents, education and orientation with the norms and behaviors in Israel, and joint session for the wife and husband about domestic abuse and alcohol.
- **Afterschool play sessions for the mothers and their children** – These include mother-child afterschool classes, family fieldtrips and establishing and maintaining a family garden.
- **Staff training sessions** – Sessions that are intended for the Absorption Centre staff that are participating in the program, to provide them with the knowledge and tools to intervene during familial crisis situations and support the mothers when needed.
- **Family Emotional Support therapies** – When staff identifies a significant need in the family or that its members are in crisis, they will be able to provide them with emotional therapy in various way such as: Art Therapy, Movement Therapy, Animal Therapy, Drama Therapy, Music Therapy and more.

Since part of the program is done according to needs of mothers, the implementation differs between each Absorption Centre. The staff expects that the program will become very popular with the mothers and their children and will continue to monitor the progress of its participants to indicate the success and the further needs they could answer through the program.

## Program Examples in the Absorption Centres

The following are examples of the Family Matters program in some of the participating Absorption Centres:

### The Shoshana Absorption Centre

At the Shoshana Absorption Centre in Kiryat Gat, the staff is focusing on women's empowerment through the use of gardening. As part of this, the women participating in the program in the Absorption Centre, established and tend to their own family gardens, where they planted vegetable and flower seeds. The program uses an environment and activity the women are familiar with from their homes in Ethiopia, to encourage a dialogue between them and create a support environment for them. The women seem to be very excited about the project and the chance to do such work together. They told the staff that for them, it brings back memories from Ethiopia and that they are grateful for the opportunity to do this in their new home in Israel.



### The Ibim Absorption Centre

The staff at the Ibim Absorption Centre, located near the city of Sderot in the Gaza strip, began the program with a 10-sessions seminar for the staff about the program, preparing the and training them for it. The sessions trained the staff on the subjects of domestic abuse, marital feuds, educating children in a changing society and in the family unit.

Ethiopian Olim couples started workshop sessions with Amharic-speaking facilitators to discuss the family unit, the changes that making Aliyah bring to spouses, in parenting, and the misunderstandings and difficulties arising from moving to Israel.



The families participating also went on a family trip to strengthen the family unit and community in the Absorption Centre.



## The Kalisher Absorption Centre

Staff at the Kalisher Absorption Centre believes that in order to create a dialogue within the family, it's important to promote a positive atmosphere through a join activity. In light of this, staff initiated the program with a family trip to Eilat for the families participating. The trip enabled the families to come together for a unique experience, leaving their day to day lives and enjoying meaningful quality time together. The trip was very successful and it seems that the families who participated enjoyed it and used it to spend time together. Following the trip, the program will continue at the Absorption Centre, building on the foundations that were lay during the trip, to strengthen the family unit and the women in the family in particular.

