

### **If Not Now, Then When?**

It was just two days after Christmas 2006 and only four days after the end of Chanukah. While children around the world were busy playing with their great new toys, Israel's National Council for the Child presented the Prime Minister with an entirely different picture. According to its 2006 report, an astonishing 35 percent of children in Israel lived under the poverty line the previous year.

Though the issue is nationwide, this problem is most acute in Israel's Ethiopian population. Among immigrant populations, studies show that Ethiopians have the highest poverty rate, lowest employment rate, highest increase in criminal and criminal-youth records, and the lowest average number of years of education.

Israel La'ad was founded in 2004 with the goal of addressing the special needs of the underprivileged in Israeli society. Israel La'ad provides financial assistance to feed the hungry, educational support and social services to underprivileged youth. With such high poverty levels and related social problems on the rise, the need has never been greater for the services of Israel La'ad.

Our current work is focused primarily in three towns: Gadera, Katzrin and most recently Kiryat Ekron. All three towns have large Ethiopian populations whose youth benefit directly from our projects.

The challenges ahead are great but I am proud of the impact Israel La'ad is making daily on individual lives. I hope to use this newsletter to keep you updated regularly of the work Israel La'ad is doing to meet the changing needs of Israel's underprivileged populations.

Ra'anán Levy  
Founder and Chairman, Israel La'ad

## **A Consistent Message Empowers Youth in Gadera**

In Gadera, the Israel La'ad team is now in its third year and they have a formula for success in their challenge to help underprivileged youth. Their goal is to build self-reliant leaders and they do this by delivering a clear message to the 15 underprivileged teens they see each week. The message goes something like this: Be proud of who you are, work hard for what you want and don't underestimate how far you could go.

“In Gadera, the Ethiopians get everything free from the Municipality,” explains Israel La'ad Bike Guide Ilan Olman. “This is not a way to solve their deep rooted problems. “They need to feel like they deserve better than this – and in order to deserve, you must earn. Not everything needs to be given to them for free.”

Olman, a cycling coach, has been leading Gadera's aptly named “Ride for Pride” program for two years now and is very realistic about the challenges ahead. “We bike. They don't like riding hard because it hurts. But I try to push them a bit more, to work as a team, to help each other. I show them how riding can be a way to fulfill their destiny, but that it takes hard work to get there.”

It sounds like something most teens would not relate to but Olman and the rest of the Gadera team are consistent with their message: life is a struggle but its worth it.

The consistent message is working. The fourteen and fifteen-year-olds are learning that they shouldn't live down to the expectations of a society that pities them. They believe in themselves and know that by working hard, they can accomplish things. But the message goes even further.

“We teach that giving feels better than getting,” says Gadera Afternoon Learning Center Coordinator Liat Vab-Bengal. “We tell them ‘You are just like any other youth and you can give and get just like they do.’

“Recently, the group went on behalf of Israel La'ad to give bikes to sick children at Kaplan Hospital. The kids felt so good to be on the giving end,” says Vab-Bengal. “Now, three of our youth are taking a leadership training course and one of our boys is on Gadera's Youth Council. Its prestigious because he was elected there by his Israeli peers.”

Talk about results!