



A Recipe for Success

Take talented individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, give them an improved education, blend with professional expertise, mix in some fun and social activities, and the result should be a shining success story. This is the thinking behind the Ariela Foundation - a unique new organization focused on the advancement of excellence among Israelis of Ethiopian descent / Daniel Savery

Established in 2008, Ariela is a modern non-profit organization founded on business-based principles. "Our vision is to adopt a group of kids each year and accompany them throughout a period of ten years, through middle school, high school, army service and university studies," explains Eric Goldberg, Head of the Board of Directors of Ariela. "The final goal is that our youngsters enter the job market with a higher than average salary."

Many college graduates of Ethiopian origin end up working in very low-income jobs and Ariela wants to break this cycle. "The best way out of poverty is through professional success," says Goldberg, speaking over a coffee in Tel Aviv. "It involves a lot of work and patience, but this is the only long-term solution."

Ultimately, if Barack Obama can become President of the United States, then perhaps

one day an Ethiopian child could become a leader in Israel. Although academic success is a major focus of the Ariela Foundation, Goldberg is aware that excellence can come in many shapes and forms. "There's more than one way to succeed in life," he says. "Excellence can also come in the form of sports, arts and community work. There are many ways in which someone can be outstanding at what they do."

Promoting excellence

The Ariela Foundation was named to commemorate Ariela Batia Goldberg, a two-year old girl who died in a tragic domestic accident in 2007 in Los Angeles. By early 2008, Eric Goldberg set about establishing the foundation and set up offices in the town of Ness Tziona last July, with three part-time employees.

Born in Mexico City in 1969, Goldberg has

been living in Israel since high school and has worked in a variety of business development roles. Today, he works full-time as the Post Manager of the Australian Trade Commission in Israel and manages Ariela on a volunteer basis in his spare time. He says that from the very beginning Ariela was developed as a non-profit organization based on business principles.

"We looked around and tried to find a niche market. We realized that the Ethiopian sector has more NGOs than any other sector in Israel, but we didn't see someone who was strictly dedicated to the promotion of excellence," says Goldberg. "Of all the sectors in Israeli society, the Ethiopian community is probably the weakest in terms of socio-economic standing."

The Ethiopian community in Israel consists of more than 120,000 individuals. The narrative of Ethiopian Jewry, which survived some 2,500 years in exile, is an epic tale. Although small groups of Ethiopians came to →

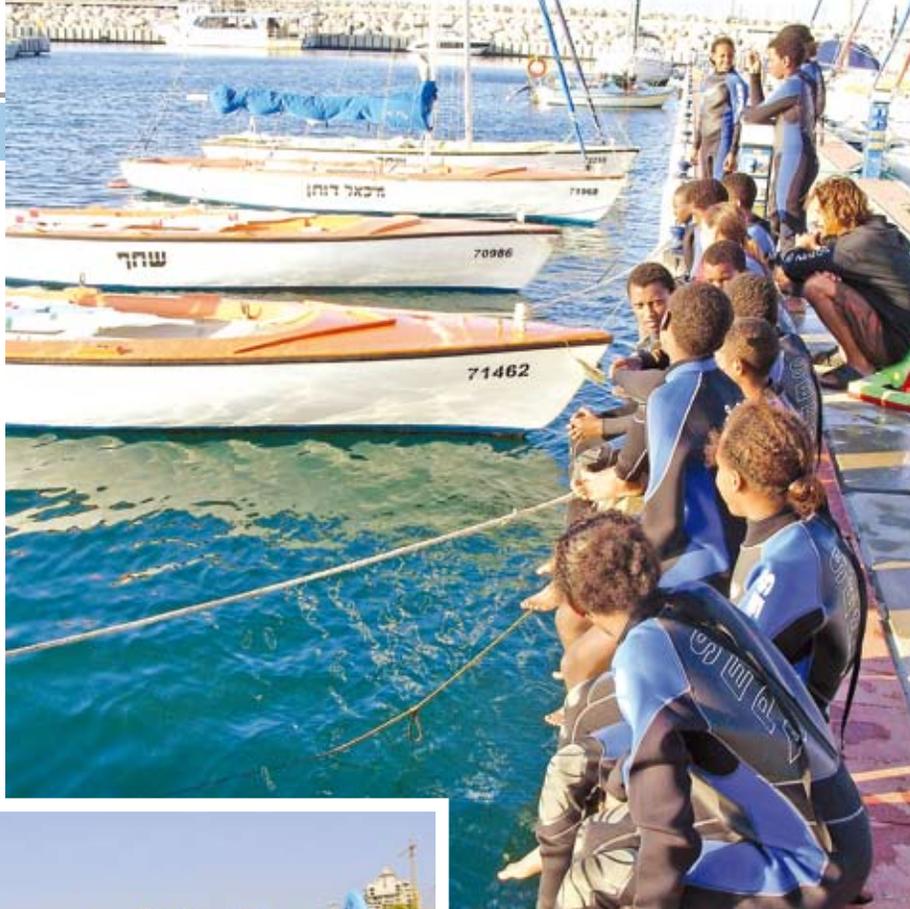
The Power of Giving

Participants in the Ariela Foundation's Star Program are enriched by a variety of water sports

← Israel in the 1950s, the majority arrived during 'Operation Moses' from Sudan in 1984 and 'Operation Solomon' in 1991. The latter operation was one of the IDF's most ambitious ever - in just 36 hours, 14,500 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel in 34 military and civilian flights.

Goldberg believes that these operations mark one of the most beautiful chapters in Jewish history. "Israel was the first case in history where African-born people were brought not as slaves but as brothers," he says proudly.

However, settling a large Ethiopian community in Israel has not been without its prob-



The kids learn basic life-skills ranging from study strategies and public speaking to using Google

lems, as Goldberg explains: "Israel has been absorbing immigrants for the last 60 years, but it seems we don't always learn from our mistakes. I think sometimes we might need a little bit more cultural sensitivity. For example, some Ethiopians who came to Israel were told to drop their old names and pick a new Hebrew name from a hat."

Self-identity is one of the key topics in Ariela's professional workshops run by professionals from the Green Institute for Advanced Psychology. "A lot of the youngsters who are born here have no connection to Ethiopian culture, but on the other hand some don't feel Israeli," says Goldberg. "Sometimes they identify more with Afro-American singers in the US. So, it's very important that they feel part of the Jewish people and part of Israel."

Optimistic about the future

At the heart of Ariela's work is the Star Program. The first Star Program kicked off in November 2008 and works in partnership with two co-sponsors: the Municipality of Ness Tziona and Ziv Neurim, an organization that runs water-sports activities. Every

Tuesday, the group of students can take part in a variety of water-based sports activities such as sailing, surfing, kayaking and diving. On Wednesdays, the kids also learn basic life-skills, ranging from study strategies and public speaking to how to do a basic search on Google. Ariela also provides tutorial lessons, to help the group with mathematics, English and language skills.

Aside from the Star Program, Ariela offers financial assistance to students on a case by case basis. For example, the foundation provides funding for outstanding students on the MOOLA Program for middle school students at Bar Ilan University. It also granted a scholarship to a gifted 14-year old boy for university-level studies and helped young students with excellent grades who could no longer afford the transportation costs to their school.

Nelson Mandela once said "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world," and Ariela puts this into practice. The foundation aims to expand the Star Program by enrolling a second group of youngsters in the third quarter of 2009. Last year's Annual Report set the fundraising target for 2009 at US\$ 350,000. That might not

be much compared to larger NGOs, but to Ariela's students it means the world. "We're not a huge organization; we're a high-quality, boutique NGO," Goldberg says.

Despite current financial pressures, Goldberg remains optimistic about the future. "Israel is a very tough, competitive society," he says. "But I believe it has more social mobility than most Western countries. You just have to find your way through this maze." He gives an example of one of Ariela's community coordinators, Alon Demle, who grew up as a shepherd in Ethiopia with no formal schooling, but now has a BA in English Studies from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Indeed, the real beneficiary of Ariela's long-term work is the state of Israel. "We are not doing the Ethiopians any favors when we conduct activities among them," says Goldberg. "We are serving ourselves. We are serving the whole of Israeli society." ■



For more information or to donate to Ariela, please call 08-9367030, email: admin@ariela.org.il, or visit www.ariela.org.il.