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ENGELBERG CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

## Evaluation of the PACT and PACT+ Projects to Promote Ethiopian-Israeli Children and their Parents

Summary Final Report

Jack Habib ♦ Dalia Ben-Rabi ♦ Smadar Somekh  
Viacheslav Konstantinov ♦ Matityahu Angel

The study was initiated by JDC-Israel and the Jewish Federations of Cleveland, New York, Washington, Detroit, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Palm Beach and funded with their assistance



RESEARCH REPORT

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## Executive Summary

PACT (Parents and Children Together) is a unique initiative for young Ethiopian-Israeli children intended to enhance their successful integration into the education system and Israeli society. The program was established to address the language and cultural gaps and the profound financial hardship facing the Ethiopian immigrants, which had led to considerable disparities between the scholastic performance of the Ethiopian-Israeli children and their non-Ethiopian counterparts. The project is a joint initiative of Jewish Federations of North America and JDC-Israel, in partnership with government ministries, local authorities, foundations and NGOs. The project was first implemented in Beersheva in the 1998/1999 school year and in 2000 it was extended to additional cities – Rehovot, Ramle, Afula, Hadera and Netanya. In 2012, PACT was implemented in 15 cities throughout Israel.

The project strategy was drawn up to rectify the fragmentation of multiple players in the early childhood service system, which meant that there was effectively no holistic care in the early childhood services for the Ethiopian-Israeli population. The project set itself a twofold challenge: to coordinate a fragmented system, and to cope with the unique needs of the Ethiopian-Israeli community. This project is distinguished by the holistic approach it utilizes to address these challenges.

The project is committed to: working concomitantly in different areas of the children's lives, inter-organizational cooperation, and the involvement of the Ethiopian-Israeli community. Initially, the project focused on preschoolers and their parents. In 2002/3, an additional component was added in some of the PACT cities. Known as PACT+, it provides additional support to Ethiopian-Israeli children in elementary schools. PACT thereby creates a continuum of services, which makes it possible to sustain and further the achievements of the target population.

Among the project activities:

- ◆ Increasing the integration of the children into preschool frameworks
- ◆ Providing enrichment and scholastic assistance (particularly in language and literacy) for children in preschools and elementary schools
- ◆ Working with Ethiopian-Israeli parents on parenting issues
- ◆ Developing culturally sensitive models of interventions for Ethiopian Israelis
- ◆ Training professionals working with Ethiopian-Israeli children and parents in order to enhance their awareness of the cultural characteristics of the community.

The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB) has evaluated the project since its first implementation and for ten years the Institute has examined issues of implementation and outcomes for the children (aged 3, 6 and 8) and their parents. The current report includes the main findings from the 10-year evaluation of the project in six cities. It presents the study

findings in two areas: the project outcomes for the children and their parents; and the processes of transfer of responsibility and sustainability of the project in 2009/10.

The following are among the main findings:

- ◆ The study indicates that the project has had considerable success in: expanding, diversifying and adapting a range of early childhood services for Ethiopian-Israeli children and their parents; creating mechanisms to promote inter-organizational cooperation and coordination; implementing organized processes of municipality-wide planning, resource allocation and follow-up; training professionals and raising their awareness of the unique cultural characteristics of the Ethiopian-Israeli community; strengthening the involvement of members of the community at all levels in the program.
- ◆ The findings indicate a substantial improvement in the children's scholastic performance compared with the comparison group, after controlling for the impact of changes in the characteristics of the families of the children participating in the program over the years. The improvement among the children was particularly evident among the younger groups (in preschool and first grade). The percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli first-graders who performed poorly declined by 40% in language and 55% in mathematical thinking. The percentage of students performing well in these subjects increased. These changes led to a considerable narrowing of the gaps between the Ethiopian-Israeli students and the non-Ethiopians.
- ◆ Concurrently, there was an improvement in the parents' involvement in the children's schools/preschools and in their education. In addition, the mothers' employment rate rose dramatically from 38% to 68%.
- ◆ JDC-Israel began gradually phasing out and transferring responsibility for the project to local agencies in 2006/7. The study found considerable evidence of continued implementation of the project after the phase out and the transfer of responsibility had begun. Thanks to alternative sources of funding – mainly from municipalities and the central government – the reduced financial support from the Jewish Federations of North America did not result in a decline in funding for the project as of 2011. Cooperation with government initiatives such as the National Program for Children and Youth at Risk, which was based on the principles of implementation advocated by the project, have increased the sources of funding and organizational support for the project's continuation. The study findings also point to the challenges still facing the project and all those striving to advance the Ethiopian-Israeli population. These challenges include the need for sustained efforts to close the remaining gaps between Ethiopian-Israelis and their peers; for increased support for students in the higher grades of elementary school in order to help them cope with the heavier scholastic demands; for continued support for the professionals in the cities; for the continued strengthening of partnerships between the professionals and the Ethiopian-Israeli community; and for the further dissemination of models and services developed through the project.

The study findings were discussed annually with the PACT directors and professionals at the local and national level and served as the basis for improving the project over the years. The findings are currently being used as the basis for discussions between the project management and the Ministry of Education, with regard to further partnership in implementing and strengthening the project.

## Acknowledgments

The study was conducted over a period of approximately ten years. We regret that we are therefore unable to thank personally all of the very many people who contributed to it during that time.

We are particularly grateful to the project directors at JDC-Israel and Ashalim – Rami Sulimani, director-general of Ashalim, Anat Penso, the first national director, and Riki Aridan, director of PACT Southern Region and subsequently national director – who were involved in all stages of the study. We thank the regional and local directors; the members of the Jewish Federations, in particular the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, and their representatives in Israel; the homeroom and preschool teachers who tirelessly collected data throughout the study years; the officials in the local authorities; the many professionals and Ethiopian-Israeli residents of the cities who shared their knowledge, experience and insights about the implementation of the project, along with its achievements and difficulties; and the various local and district inspectors who shared their professional knowledge with us and helped us obtain information for the study.

We also wish to thank our colleagues at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute – particularly Miriam Cohen-Navot, director of the Engelberg Center for Children and Youth – who were involved with and supported the study throughout; former staff members: Talal Dolev, former director of the Engelberg Center for Children and Youth and Chen Lifshitz, first senior researcher of the study and Tirzah Margolin; the many researchers who were involved in various parts of the study; Karen Lasky, who helped with the English versions of the annual reports; the fieldwork team, headed by Chen Tzuk-Tamir, for their dedication to the task of gathering the data; Naomi Halsted, for translating this report; Sue Bubis, for her assistance with the figures; and Leslie Klineman, for preparing the report for publication.

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction: Background to the Project</b>	1
<b>2. The Evaluation Study</b>	4
2.1 Study Method: Outcomes of the Project for the Children and their Parents	5
2.2 Study Method: Transfer of Responsibility and Sustainability of the Project	7
<b>3. Project Outcomes Regarding the Performance of the Children and the Involvement of their Parents</b>	8
3.1 First-Graders (Aged 6)	9
a. Status of 6-Year-Olds and their Families in the Baseline Year	9
(1) Characteristics of the Families of the 6-Year-Olds	9
(2) Performance of the 6-Year-Olds	10
(3) Involvement of the Parents in the Education of their Children at Age 6	11
b. Progress of Ethiopian-Israeli 6-Year-Olds and their Parents, and Reduction of the Gaps between them and Non-Ethiopians, 2006/7	11
(1) Progress of the Children	11
(2) Progress in the Involvement of the Parents of 6-Year-Olds in the Education of their Children in 2006/7	15
(3) Progress at Age 6 after "Full Exposure" from 2006/7 to 2009/10	15
3.2 Preschoolers (Aged 3)	16
a. Performance of the 3-Year-Olds and Functioning of their Parents in the Baseline Year	16
(1) Performance of the Children	16
(2) Parental Involvement	17
b. Progress of the 3-Year-Olds and their Parents and Reduced Gaps between them and Non-Ethiopians	17
(1) Children, 2006 – Four Cities	17
(2) Parents, 2006 – Four Cities	18
(3) 2009/10 – Three Cities	18
3.3 Third-Graders (Aged 8)	19
a. Performance of the 8-Year-Olds and Involvement of their Parents in 2002/3	19
b. Progress of the Ethiopian-Israeli 8-Year-Olds and their Parents by 2007/8	19
<b>4. Sustainability of the Project and Transfer of Responsibility to Local Agencies in 2009/10</b>	20
4.1 Transfer of Responsibility for the Project and Sustainability	20
a. Inter-Organizational Mechanisms	20
b. Implementation and Funding of the Programs	21
c. Principles of Implementation	22
4.2 Characteristics of the Project that Increase the Chances of Long-Term Sustainability	23

<b>5. Main Insights and Future Challenges</b>	24
5.1 Main Insights	24
5.2 Future Challenges	25
<b>Bibliography</b>	27
English Publications	27
Hebrew Publications	31
Key Reports on PACT and PACT+	34
<b>Appendix 1: Programs and Work Models Developed through PACT</b>	36
<b>Appendix 2: Cities and Age Cohorts Included in the Study Each Year</b>	38

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Families of First-Graders in the Baseline Year (Start of the Program), by Population Group (Average in Six PACT Cities and the Comparison City)	10
Figure 2: Percentage Improvement in the Performance of Ethiopian-Israeli First-Graders, Selected Indicators, 2006/2007 Compared to Baseline Year (Average in Six Cities and Comparison City, by Regression Coefficients)	12
Figure 3: Reduced Gaps between the Performance of Ethiopian-Israeli First-Graders and Non-Ethiopians, Selected Indicators, 2006/2007 vs. Baseline Year (Average in Six Cities, by Regression Coefficients)	13
Figure 4: Percentage Improvement in the Performance of Ethiopian-Israeli First-Graders in Various Years, vs. Baseline Year, Selected Indicators (Average in Six Cities, by Regression Coefficients)	14
Figure 5: Percentage of Reduced Gap between the Performance of Ethiopian-Israeli and Non-Ethiopian First-Graders, Selected Indicators, 2006/7 and 2009/10 vs. Baseline Year (Average in Four Cities, by Regression Coefficients)	16
Figure 6: Percentage of Improvement in the Performance of Ethiopian-Israeli Three-Year-Olds in Four PACT cities and in the Comparison City, and the Percentage Reduced Gap between Ethiopian-Israeli and Non-Ethiopian Children, Selected Indicators, 2005/2006 vs. Baseline Year, by Regression Coefficients	18
Figure 7: Percentage of the Funding from Non-Federation Sources in Three Cities in Selected Years	22