



Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute
The Engelberg Center for Children and Youth



The Ethiopian National Project

The Ethiopian National Project: Youth Centers 2008 Second Evaluation Report Executive Summary

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The study was initiated and funded by
the Ethiopian National Project

The Ethiopian National Project is a partnership of the
United Jewish Communities-Federations of North America (UJC),
the Government of Israel, representatives of Ethiopian Jewish
Community Organizations, the Jewish Agency for Israel,
the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Israel,
and Keren Hayesod.





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- ♦ Connie and Bert Rabinowitz Fund for Creative Breakthrough Research
- ♦ Marshall Weinberg Fund for Professional Collaboration and Development

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all those who assisted in the study and made it possible:

Dr. Negist Mengesha, Director of the Ethiopian National Project, and other members of ENP staff, especially Amir Tewave and Grace Rodnitzki, and the staff of the organizations implementing the centers.

We thank all those who agreed to be interviewed for the study – the youth center directors, and the young people themselves – for their openness and cooperation.

We are grateful to our colleagues at the Institute: Dganit Levi, who conducted the 2006 evaluation study, Viachslav Konstantinov, who helped conduct the statistical analysis, Efrat Hadad, who provided assistance in conducting the interviews, and Ben Shlomi, who organized the fieldwork and the data collection. Our thanks to Revital Aviv-Matok, who helped draft the report, Naomi Halsted who translated from the Hebrew and Leslie Klineman, who prepared it for publication. Finally, we express our appreciation to Jack Habib for his support and guidance through all stages of the study.

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Jerusalem 2008

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1. Introduction

Over the past 25 years there has been significant Ethiopian immigration to Israel, which has presented challenges for the immigrants in all spheres of life. Since the first wave of immigration from Ethiopia in 1984, many efforts and initiatives have been undertaken by the government, local authorities, and third sector organizations to support the Ethiopian population in integrating into Israeli society. These efforts have made an important contribution. However, significant gaps still remain in many areas and poverty levels among Ethiopian families are especially high.

The situation for the youth in the Ethiopian-Israeli community requires special attention. In 2006, there were about 27,000 Ethiopian-Israeli youth aged 10-19 in Israel, 12,000 of whom were born in Israel to immigrant parents, and 15,000 of whom were born in Ethiopia (Ben-Aryeh and Kimchi, 2007). The importance of education and its significant impact on the future integration of Ethiopian-Israeli youth into Israeli society is well recognized. Israeli national data indicate that there are significant gaps in the educational outcomes of Ethiopian-Israeli youth relative to the general population (Ben-Aryeh and Kimchi, 2007; Wolde, 2006; Ben-Aryeh and Chernobelsky, 2004).

There is also concern that Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers often encounter difficulties in a wide range of other areas, such as after-school activity, social and family relationships, emotional wellbeing, and exposure to high-risk situations (Lipschitz et al., 1998; Mengesha, 2004; Mengesha, 2005, Wolde, 2006; Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, 2001). The risk situations and factors that characterize youth in general also apply to immigrant youth. However, adolescent immigrants are in a double risk situation, stemming from the combination of adolescent turbulence and the crisis of the cultural transition (Herzog, 1999). The needs of Ethiopian-Israeli youth are often especially numerous - due to the multiplicity of risk factors arising from the sharp cultural transition and the socioeconomic situation of their families (Habib et al., 1998; Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, 2001; Mengesha, 2004; Dolev, 2007; Saber, 2007).

The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) is a partnership between the United Jewish Communities-Federations of North America (UJC), the Government of Israel, representatives of Ethiopian Jewish Community Organizations, the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Israel (JDC), and Keren Hayesod. This partnership is manifested in the representation of the partners in the governing bodies of the project and in the financial partnership.

The goal of ENP is to enable Ethiopian-Israeli youth to achieve their full potential, as well as increase their opportunities for social mobility and future integration into the labor market. ENP is unique in its emphasis on inclusion of members of the Ethiopian-Israeli community in all aspects of its work, including implementation, supervision, strategic planning, and decision-making.

ENP began by mapping the needs of the Ethiopian-Israeli community and the existing services (with assistance from the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute). Based on that information, a decision was made to focus on ages 13–18 through an ENP program, which was launched in 2004. The program includes a number of key components:

1. School-based after-school programs for youth that are based on a holistic approach to meeting the youth's needs and include scholastic assistance and personal support.
2. Community youth centers as well as programs for substance abuse prevention and preparation for army service.
3. A community empowerment program that focuses on training community leadership at the local and national levels.

Implementation of the program began on a small scale in 2004 and continued to expand through 2008, at the time of writing this report.

This report is about ENP Youth Centers program. The professional literature recognizes youth centers are recognized as a key way to meet the developmental needs of youth and provide informal education (Kahan-Strawczynski et al., 2000; Kahan-Strawczynski et al., 2002; Abu-Asbah et al., 2003). ENP Youth Centers are located in neighborhoods with large Ethiopian-Israeli populations and they are designed to provide a service to all Ethiopian-Israeli youths in the neighborhood, and especially youth at-risk. They are part of the holistic approach to work with Ethiopian-Israeli youth and add a further dimension to the efforts aimed at providing support in many areas of their lives. The aim is that through the provision of accessible, intensive, effective services to Ethiopian-Israeli youth, they will acquire skills and personal resources to better utilize other community programs.

The goal of the centers is to provide the youth with a positive, normative place that offers them somewhere to be and something to do during their leisure time, in an accessible, flexible, universal, and informal manner and at the same time gives them a sense of security and belonging. Furthermore, these frameworks fulfill important functions in areas such as:

- ♦ Strengthening the youths through personal and social empowerment, developing their knowledge and skills in various areas, and implementing educational activities aimed at imparting values.
- ♦ Preventing delinquency and reducing risk behaviors
- ♦ Identifying problems and referring youths with special problems to the appropriate agency

Currently, 24 centers are being operated by seven different organizations: Fidel, the Hadera Development Fund, the ALMAYA-Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews, the Gedera Community Center, WIZO, the Dror Association, and Hayut. The centers are financed by ENP and other organizations, including local authorities, various local services (such as the Youth Advancement Service, Israel Association of Community Centers etc.), the organizations operating the centers and other donors. Recently, there have been some difficulties in ensuring the current level of funding for the youth centers. ENP, together with the municipalities and other partners, are working to ensure continued financing for the centers.

1.1 The Study

In 2005, the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute began evaluating ENP program, focusing on the program's main elements. The goals of the evaluation are to strengthen implementation of the program and to serve as the basis for further development of it.

The study reported here examined the implementation of the youth centers and addressed the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the youth who attend the centers?
2. What activities take place at the centers?
3. How satisfied are the youth and the counselors with the centers and how do they perceive the centers' contributions?
4. What are the difficulties involved in implementing the program?

A survey of 7 youth centers was conducted in 2006. In light of the significantly increased number of centers across the country and program developments an additional survey was conducted in 2008, which examined 14 youth centers.

The current report presents the main findings from the 2008 survey, making two key comparisons. The first comparison is with data from the survey conducted in May 2006 (Cohen-Navot, 2008) – in order to examine changes over time in the characteristics of the youth attending the centers and their perceptions of the program. The second comparison is with the entire student population of the Jewish schools in Israel and is based on the findings of the 2004 HBSC study¹ – in order to examine the situation of youth attending a center, relative to the entire Jewish population in Israel.

The data collection included:

- ♦ A survey conducted in May-June 2008 among youth attending 14 youth centers that had been in continuous operation for at least a year at the time the data were collected.² For an entire week, an interviewer was present at each of the centers during all hours of activity, and questionnaires were distributed to everyone who came to the center during that week. A total of 579 youth completed the questionnaire.³
- ♦ Observations at the youth centers and structured interviews with the center directors.
- ♦ Five long-established centers were selected for an in-depth study that included additional data collection: in-depth interviews with counselors who work at the center and focus groups with youth coming to the center.

¹ Health Behavior in School-Age Children is an international survey. The Israeli survey is headed by Dr. Yossi Harel-Fish of Bar Ilan University and was administered in 2004 to a national representative sample of students in Jewish schools in grades 6, 8 and 10.

² Centers operate in the following cities: Beersheba, Netanya, Gedera, Ramle, Lod, Kiryat Gat, Rehovot, Ashdod, Pardes Hanna, Kiryat Bialik, Hadera (4 centers).

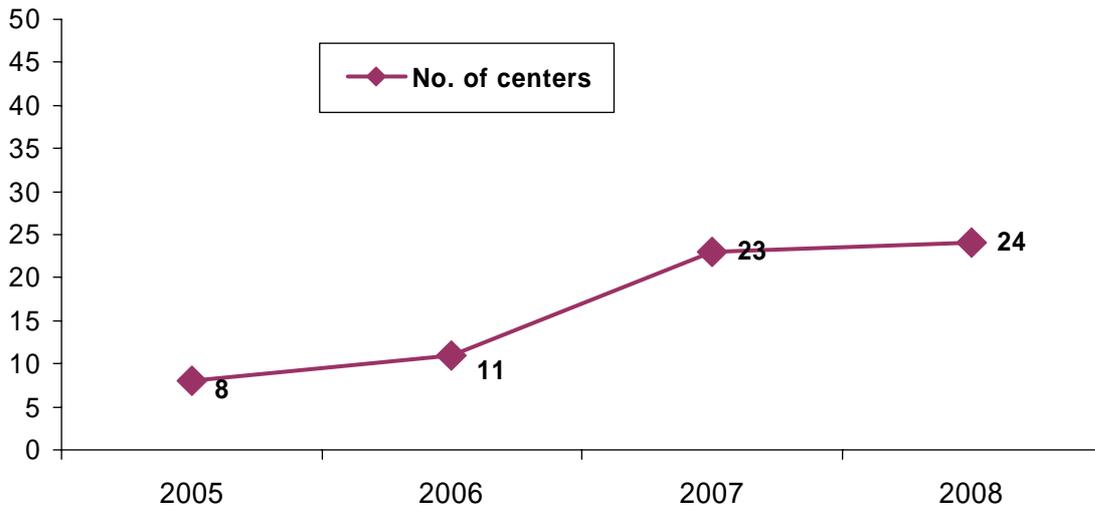
³ About 14% of the youth who came to the centers refused to complete the questionnaire. Refusal rates were similar at all of the centers.

- ♦ In-depth interviews with ENP staff and the staff of the organizations operating the centers and observations of the youth center, steering committees and youth committee.

2. Deployment of the Youth Centers

In 2005 ENP began operating eight youth centers. The program was expanded over the years and by 2008 24 youth centers were in operation and the number of participants in all of the centers reached approximately 2,500 (Mengesha, 2008).⁴

Figure 1: Expansion of the Youth Centers, 2005-2008



3. Characteristics of the Youth Who Come to the Centers

The youth centers are intended for Ethiopian-Israeli youth, and, indeed, the vast majority (91%) of those who come are of Ethiopian origin (they or their parents were born in Ethiopia). Among the Ethiopian-Israeli youth, the majority of those coming to the center (70%) were born in Israel. The average age is 15, and more boys (60%) than girls (40%) come to the center.

The youth come from families characterized by low socioeconomic status. In comparison to 2006 (see appendix A1), there has been an increase in the percentage of families with two breadwinners (from 39% of the families in 2006 to 58% of the families in 2008). Nevertheless, the socioeconomic status of the youth's families is still considerably lower than that of the overall population of students in the Jewish education system. For example, the 2004 survey of all students in the Jewish education system found that 58% reported the mother's education to be

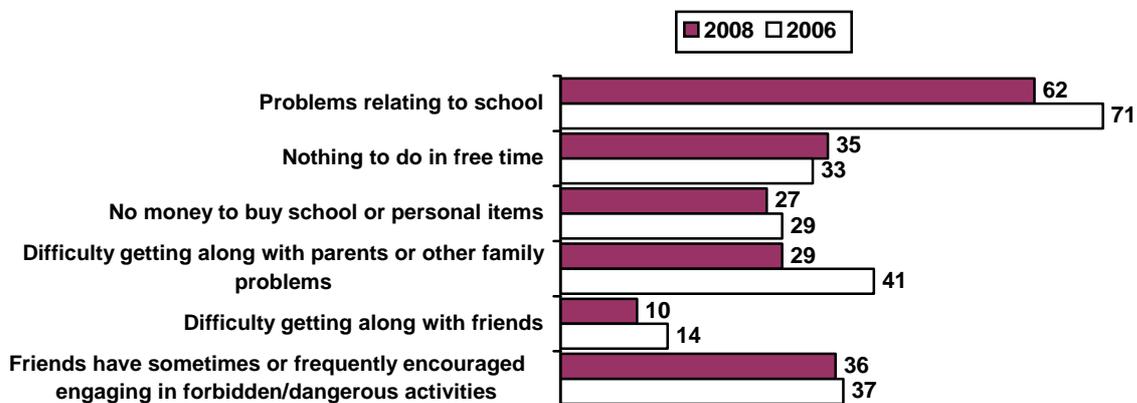
⁴ The number of participants does not reflect the absolute number of youths attending the centers. Rather, it represents the number of participants in the centers' structured activities. Consequently, a youth may be counted twice if he or she participates in two activities. He may not be counted at all, if he or she visits the center but does not actively participate in any structured activity.

post-high school or academic, while only 12% of the youth in the centers reported this. Another example is the percentage of families with 6 or more children: 8% of the Jewish population, compared to 46% of the families of the youth attending the centers (HBSC, 2004).

The Areas in which the Youth Report Problems

An analysis of the areas in which the youth reported that they had problems shows that the problems occur mainly in relation to school and leisure time: some 62% of the youth have a problem to do with studies and 35% reported not having what to do in their leisure time. Note however that in all the areas examined, most of the youth who reported having a problem said that they had it "to a small extent" and only a few said that they had it go a great extent. Regarding the areas of school and difficulties with family, the percent of youth reporting these problems declined between 2006 and 2008. (see Figure 2. For detailed data, see Appendix A2).

Figure 2: Report of Problems (to a great or minor degree)^ by Youth Attending the Centers, 2006 and 2008 (in percentages)

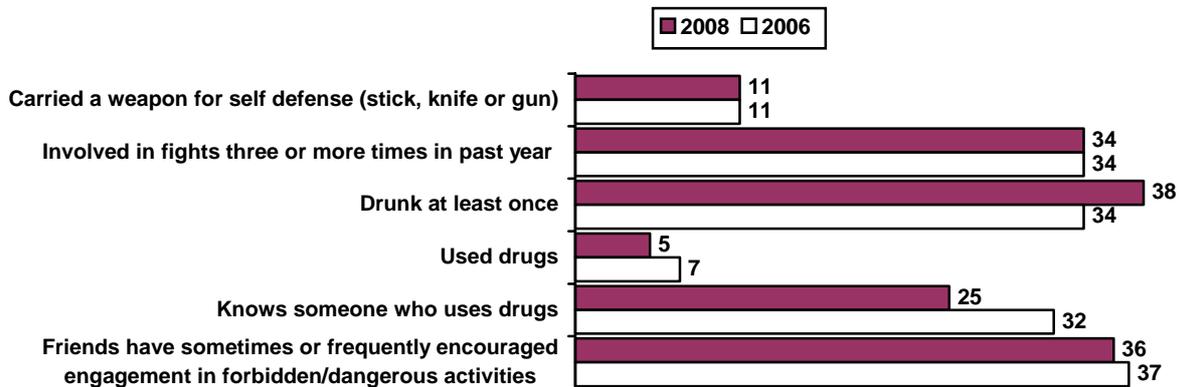


^ Additional category: Not at all

Risk Behaviors

The reports by the youth indicate that a sizeable minority of them engage in high-risk behaviors or are exposed to risk situations of some kind (see Figure 4), such as involvement in fights (34%), drunkenness (38%), and engaging in forbidden or dangerous activities with the encouragement of their friends (37%). These figures are similar to those for 2006, indicating that in 2008 the centers have to help the youth contend with similar problems to those they were tackling in 2006. Note that these measures may not be sufficiently sensitive to enable examination of subtle changes in the youths' risk behaviors over time. For all of the risk behaviors examined, reports were higher among boys than among girls, and higher among older youths (age 15 and up) than younger ones (ages 12–14).

Figure 3: Risk Behavior Reported by Youth Attending the Centers, 2006 and 2008
(in percentages)



Education

More than half (66%) of the youth attending the centers noted that they are receiving scholastic assistance (during or after school). This percentage is significantly higher than the percentage of youth who reported that they received scholastic assistance in 2006 (53%). This may be a consequence of the expansion of ENP scholastic assistance program, which provides help to most Ethiopian-Israeli students in secondary schools in those towns where the youth centers operate (for details, see Cohen-Navot et al., 2008).

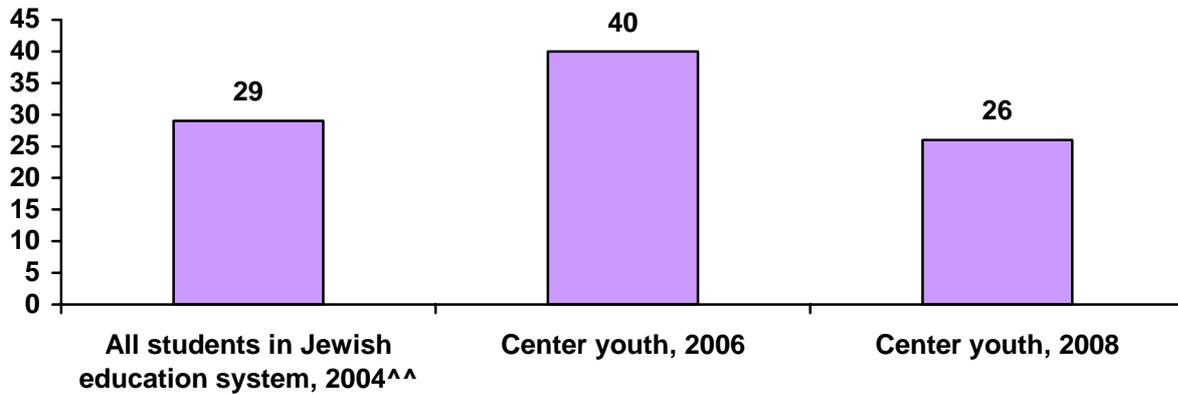
The youth centers themselves do not formally provide tutoring, but the youth do their homework at some of the centers and receive help from members of the center staff. Accordingly, a third of the youth (33%) noted that they do indeed receive some learning support at the center.

As noted, one third of the Ethiopian-Israeli youth attending the youth centers were born in Ethiopia and 10% are new immigrants who arrived within the last 10 years. Many of the youth reported that they do not understand Hebrew well enough to perform important tasks at school. For example: 43% said that they had difficulty in understanding what was said in class and 29% reported that they found it difficult to read books about the subject matter studied at school in Hebrew. However, when asked about their ability to perform certain scholastic tasks in Hebrew, participants indicated an increase (between 2006 and 2008 in their preparedness to raise hands, answer questions and talk to staff; and most believe that they can easily carry out school tasks in Hebrew.. This may be an outcome of the centers' efforts to increase self-confidence among participants. (see Table A3).

In order to learn about the students' school experience, they were asked about their feelings and attitudes toward school. Seventy-one percent of the youth attending the centers expressed positive feelings towards their school experience and less than a third (29%) reported feeling alienated

from their school⁵. This is a significantly lower percent than in 2006 (40%), so it appears that the youth's sense of belonging to their school may have increased during this period.

Figure 4: Alienation from School[^] Among Those Attending Youth Centers in 2006, in 2008, and All Students in the Jewish Education System, Ages 12-16 (Percent)



^{^^} HBSC figures, 2004

Alongside the positive attitudes expressed with regard to the school experience, it is important to note that over half (56%) of the students reported that they had failed at least one subject in school and 4% reported that they had dropped out of school altogether. These data did not change significantly between the two years of the study.

4. Activities at the Centers

All of the centers that participated in the study are open 4–5 times a week, in the afternoon and evening hours, between 4 to 7 hours each day. The centers are not open during weekends. The findings indicate that the youth who come to the centers tend to do so frequently, an average of 3.6 times a week, and they spend a lot of time there: an average of 3.4 hours each time. Most (69%) of those who visited the center in 2008 have been attending for over a year, which indicates perseverance over time.

Further, most (73%) of the youth do not attend any other service for youth after school and a similar percentage (68%) have not previously participated in any other service for youth for leisure activity and informal education. These data reflect the youth centers' significant role in creating new opportunities for the target population.

⁵ **The measure of alienation from school** includes at least two of the following five factors: 1) Does not like school at all; "Strongly disagrees" or "Disagrees" with the following statements: 2) The rules at my school are fair; 3) I feel a part of my school; 4) My teachers treat me fairly; 5) My teachers are interested in me as a person.

The reports of the center directors reveal that each of the centers offers activities in the following areas:

1. ***A facility in which to spend leisure time:*** Reflecting the principle that the youth center should be an inviting place where youth can come in the afternoon, most of the centers make sure they maintain "free space" for unstructured activities – including an area to sit and drink, a television room, a computer room, table games, ping-pong, snooker, a library – and a place to do homework (with help from staff). These activities are open to all those who come to the center every day of the week and they help to create a normative setting for afternoon leisure time and to prevent the youth from wandering around the neighborhood. To quote one participant: "This center prevents hanging out in the streets among teenagers who could otherwise get into trouble."
2. ***Informal education and activities:*** Young people participate in informal education and enrichment activities that are provided by a professional instructor, usually someone contracted from outside the center's staff. The activities include: sports, art, computers, music, thinking games, hiking and camping, and more often such areas of interest would not otherwise be accessible to the youth. All of the activities take place in small groups, which meet once or twice a week.
3. ***Personal development and leadership development workshops:*** These activities include workshops or interest groups and are mostly provided by the center staff. They serve to further the youth's development in various areas - by strengthening their self confidence, shaping their personal identity, preparing them for the future. The activities take place in a format similar to that of an extracurricular activity. The number of participants is limited and the sessions are held once or twice a week. These activities differ from one center to another and may include: learning about the Ethiopian community's heritage, Amharic, workshops for enhancing self-confidence and leadership abilities, discussions and encounters with older members of the Ethiopian-Israeli community who can serve as "role models", discussions on current events and culture, and discussions about inter-personal relationships and sexuality. Some of the centers offer additional ENP programs: preparation for army service for eleventh and twelfth graders and an alcohol and drug abuse prevention program.
4. ***Special social activities:*** Special social activities are organized for all the young people who come to the center. They usually take place several times during the year. These activities including special events on holidays, parties, movies, cultural evenings, sports days, etc. They play an important role in establishing social cohesion and a sense of belonging to the center.
5. ***Day outings:*** Nearly all of the center directors reported organizing outings, some intended for all of the youth who come to the centers and others just for certain groups (e.g., those belonging to a particular age group or participants in the leadership training group). These outings are organized during the school vacations, and they include: hikes, museum visits, visits to institutions of higher learning, performances, and volunteer activity in the community (such as distributing *mishlohei manot* – gifts of food for the Purim holiday – and painting houses).

6. **Activities with parents:** Directors of about half the centers noted that structured activities are held with the youth's parents. These activities are an important part of the overall program and the purpose is to enlist the parents for joint work with the youth. The activities that are held with the parents are wide-ranging and vary between the centers. There are discussions with the parents about issues related to the youth as adolescents, there are joint activities such as decorating the center for the holidays, or parents may simply come to volunteer at the center. At one of the centers, a parents committee has recently begun operating. At some of the centers there is no structured activity with the parents, but there is an "open door" policy – the parents can come to visit the center at any time and meetings with parents are held as needed.

Identifying Youth at Risk

In accordance with ENP's principles, the youth centers also assist in identifying youth at risk, and referring them for treatment by the relevant professionals. For the most part, identifying youth at risk is done by the following means: personal talks with the youths, reports by youths from other family members or from other youths at the center, and the staff's personal impressions. The main agencies, to which the youth are referred, according to the directors of the centers, are the social services, school educational counselors, and the Youth Advancement Service of the Ministry of Education.

Although most of the directors reported that many of the youth in the centers are in need of professional treatment, in fact not all are referred to professionals outside the center. The interviews with the directors provided several explanations for this:

- ◆ Lack of professional knowledge among the directors with regard to community services, and lack of time to deal with referrals
- ◆ Disinclination on the part of the youth to go to treatment. As is typical for teenagers, the youth attending the centers are often not interested in being treated by professionals.
- ◆ Some of the youth attending the centers are already treated by professionals outside of the center, usually at the municipal social services. Sometimes the youth were referred to the center by their social worker.

In those cases where there is a professional, such as a social worker, working with the center, this was very helpful to the staff of the center and allowed them to provide better responses to the needs of these youth.

Cooperation

The youth center directors report that all of the centers cooperate with community services as needed, including the Ministry of Education's Dropout Prevention Service and Youth Advancement Service, local social service departments, the Ministry of Social Affairs' Youth Probation Service and Child and Youth Service, schools, community centers, other youth clubs, and the police. However, it should be noted that most of the centers do not hold meetings on a regular basis.

Steering committees for the centers operate in each of the cities and are headed by the city's Youth Advancement Service director or the head of the Absorption Division. Members of the committees include representatives of ENP, the head of the organization that operates the youth center, heads of programs implemented at the youth center, and the youth center's own staff. Some of the committees also include representatives of the youth who come to the center. The committees review what is happening at the center and discuss key problems and possible solutions.

Over the years, cooperation has been established in some of the communities with the professionals at the municipality responsible for youth activities in the town, based on the belief that the youth center is an integral part of planning municipal activities. For example, one of the implementing organizations noted:

"In the past, no one at the municipality would consult with us regarding youth activities. Today, we are invited to brainstorming sessions, which makes it possible to address the needs of our Ethiopian-Israeli youth. We don't just want to come and take part in programs that are happening, but rather we want to be partners in the actual work."

As noted, the youth centers primarily serve Ethiopian-Israeli youth. An important issue is how the youth centers can serve as a platform for also promoting greater utilization of general community services and joint activities with non-Ethiopians. Many of the youth (38%) attending the centers expressed a desire for joint activities with non-Ethiopians (versus with Ethiopian-Israelis alone); others (47%) said that they had no preference. The percent of youth who clearly expressed a desire for activities exclusively with other Ethiopian-Israelis was 13% in the 2008 survey, a decline from 22% in 2006. Collaboration with other community services is a key strategy for achieving joint programming while preserving the special targeting of ENP to Ethiopian-Israeli youth. ENP is increasingly implementing such collaborative strategies in a growing number of centers, while enabling all center participants to acquire skills and personal resources to better utilize other community programs.

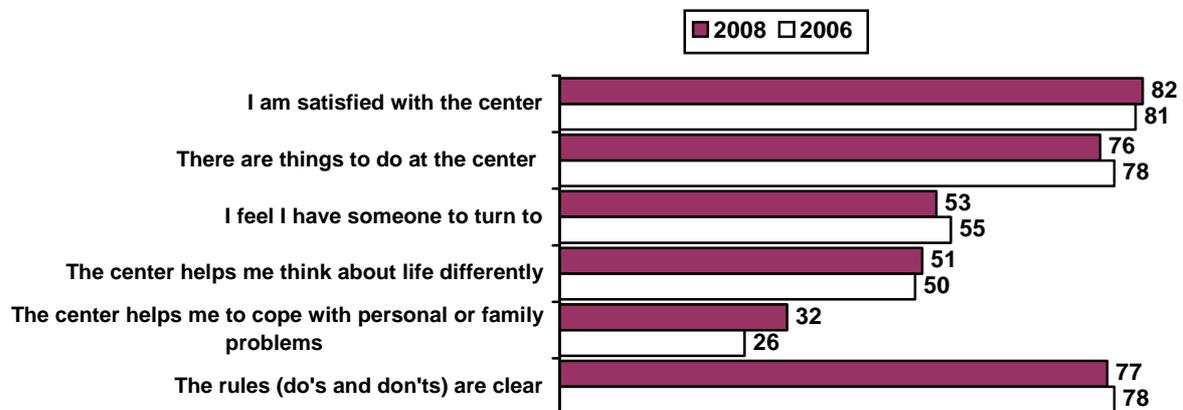
5. Feedback about the Youth Centers

The youths' evaluation of the center's activity was very positive in 2006 and remained so in the current study (see Figure 5). Seventy-four percent of all the youth who come to the centers appreciate the center's work and are satisfied with the way it is being operated to a great or very great extent.⁶ The youths reported that most of them are satisfied with the center (82%) and feel that there is something for them to do there (76%). In addition, the percent of youths who feel

⁶ **The measure of evaluation of the center** includes at least five of the following nine factors: Agree strongly or very strongly with the following statements: 1) The center helps me to cope with personal or family problems; 2) The center helps me to view and experience my life in a different way; 3) When I have a problem I feel that I have someone I can talk to; 4) The atmosphere at the center is pleasant; 5) The rules at the center are clear (do's and don'ts); 6) I am satisfied with the center; 7) I would recommend to my friends that they come to the center. Agree a little or disagree with the following statements: 8) At the center there is a sense of "chaos"; 9) I am bored at the center; I have nothing to do at the center.

that the center helps them to cope with personal or family problems has risen from 26% in 2006 to 32% in 2008.

Figure 5: Evaluation of the Centers by the Youth, 2006 and 2008. (Agree Strongly or Very Strongly) (in Percentages)



^Additional categories: Agree somewhat, Agree a little, Disagree

The two main difficulties that were brought up with regard to implementing the youth centers relate to behavioral problems and discipline among the youth and with steady attendance at programs and activities. These problems were noted by the center directors as well as by the young people themselves. Staff at the centers are trying to deal with these; however they do not always succeed.

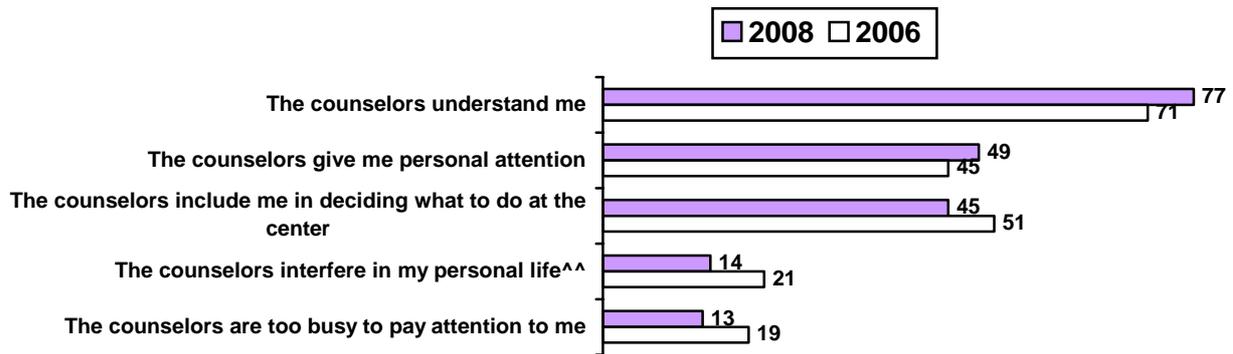
Evaluation of Counselors' Work

The center directors emphasize the importance that they give to a significant caring relationship between staff members and the youth. The staffs themselves are usually young Ethiopian Israelis whom the youth can easily approach and find a sympathetic ear and who serve as role models for the youth. The findings show that most of the youth (77%) feel that the counselors in the center understand them, and about half of the youth reported that the staff give them personal treatment and share with them decisions about the center.

The need for improving the youth's sense of support from the counselors was raised by the 2006 study, and it appears that actions were taken that contributed to strengthening the youth's feelings that they can approach the staff members at the centers to get assistance (Figure 6). In 2008 more youth felt that the counselors understand them (77% in 2008 vs. 71% in 2006), alongside fewer youth who felt that the counselors don't pay attention to them (13% in 2008 vs. 19% in 2006). As one girl noted:

“The counselors and the center director are always there for me, and I know that I have someone to turn to when there is a problem.”

**Figure 6: The Youth’s Assessment of the Counselors at the Center, 2006 and 2008
(Agree Strongly or Very Strongly[^]) (in Percentages)**



[^] Additional categories: Agree somewhat, Agree a little, Disagree

^{^^} The words ‘too much’ were included in the questionnaire in 2008

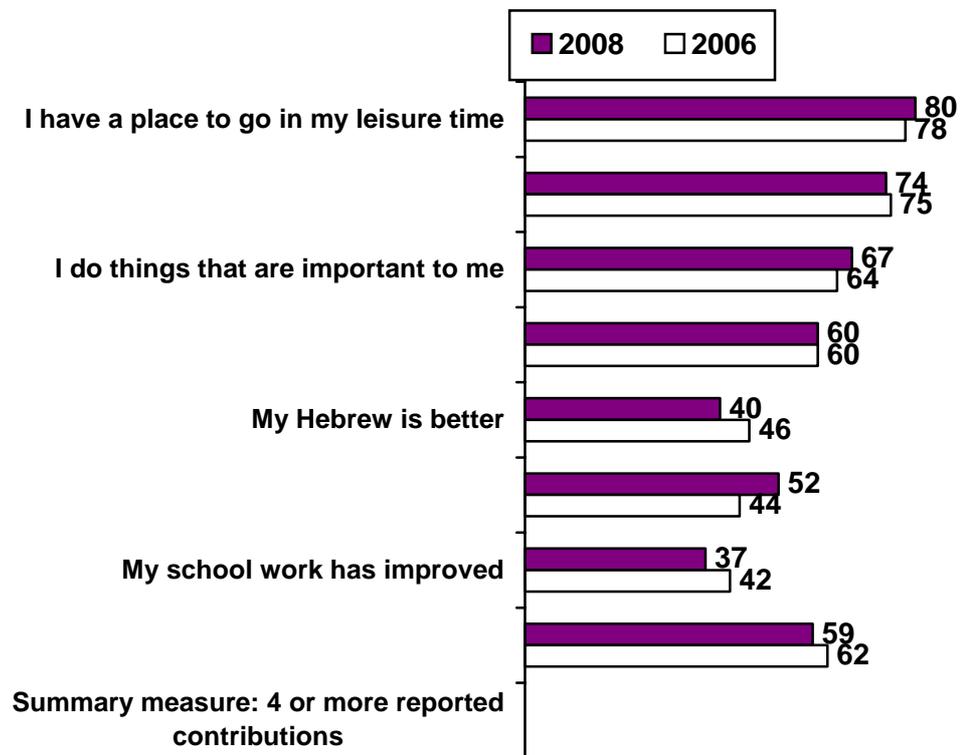
The Centers' Contribution to the Youth

The youth centers’ key contribution, as noted by the vast majority of the respondents (80%), is the feeling that the centers provide the youth with a place to be during their leisure time and a place where they can do things that interest them (74%). It appears that the youth centers are indeed successfully filling a void that is created in the afternoons, preventing boredom and loitering in the streets, and providing teenagers with enrichment, interest and positive role models.

In addition, there is general agreement among all of the youth center directors that the youth center programs provide opportunities for the youth to experience personal and group development. The youth reported a great or very great contribution in areas such as increased self-confidence (60%) and making new friends (52%). Overall, more than half of the youth (59%) feel they benefit from being at the center, in at least four different areas.⁷ The contributions felt by the youth in the current study are similar to those found in the 2006 study (see Figure 7. For detailed data, see Appendix A3).

⁷ **The summary measure of the center’s contribution** includes reports of at least four of the following seven possible contributions: Agree strongly or very strongly with the following statements: 1) I do things that interest me; 2) I have a place to go in my leisure time; 3) I meet new friends; 4) My school work has improved; 5) My Hebrew is better; 6) I am more confident; 7) I do things that are important to me.

**Figure 7: The Youth's Assessment of the Centers' Contribution in 2006 and 2008
(Agree Strongly or Very Strongly[^]) (Percent)**



[^]Additional categories: Agree somewhat, Agree a little, Disagree

In addition to the contributions noted by the youth, about a third (36%) of the youth noted that they themselves have changed as a result of their coming to the center. They expressed an awareness of personal growth in noting improved self-confidence, greater maturity, and greater capacity to plan for the future, building a picture of the future, and looking at life in a different way. To quote some of them:

- "The youth center contributes to a sense of responsibility,"*
- "It has contributed to my desire to succeed,"*
- "It has changed a lot of things in my character."*

Some also noted changes that are related to an improvement in their social situation:

- "I am more social and more open"; "I've met new people,"*
- to an improvement in schoolwork

- "I learn and am successful";*
- "I am more motivated to study and to work hard,"*

and to less loitering:

- "It means I don't hang out on the street";*
- "I used to hang out on the street and try to smoke, but I no longer do so";*
- "I spend my time here, rather than in undesirable environments."*

6. Summary

The youth centers are an important part of the holistic support provided to youth by ENP program designed to advance Ethiopian-Israeli youth in all areas of life. The youth centers began operating in 2005 and by 2008 there were 24 centers operating throughout Israel.

The youth centers provide a response to all Ethiopian-Israeli youth residing in the cities in which they operate. Most of the youth attending the centers (91%) are Ethiopian-Israelis. The average age of the youth attending the centers is 15.31. The percentage of boys attending the center (60%) is higher than that of girls (40%).

The centers offer opportunities for enrichment, recreation and support for Ethiopian-Israeli youth. Most of the youth (73%) do not attend any other after-school framework and most (68%) have never participated in such a framework previously. The youth tend to visit the centers frequently, 3.6 days a week on average, and to spend a long time there: 3.4 hours on average each time. Most (69%) of the youth who visited the centers in 2008 have been attending for over a year, which indicates perseverance over time.

The youth centers provide participants with a normative framework where they can spend the after-school hours and pass their leisure time freely, thus preventing loitering which could lead to risk behaviors. In addition, the centers offer courses and extracurricular activities, workshops for personal development and leadership development, organized social activities and outings, and informal help with homework. Some of the centers offer structured activities with the youth's parents. In addition, the centers seek to identify youth with complex problems requiring professional support, and to refer them to appropriate services.

The youth's appreciation of the centers' activities and impact on their life was high in the past, and has remained high over the years. Satisfaction with the way the centers operate is expressed in the young people's feeling that they have something to do at the centers, i.e., that the activities interest them and that they do things that are important to them. They reported that, thanks to the centers, they have a friendly, comfortable place to go after school.

A large majority of the youth reported that they feel that the counselors understand them. About half reported that the counselors relate to them personally and share with them decisions about activities at the center. In addition, many of the youth reported that they have been helped to view issues differently and to deal with their problems more appropriately, and that the youth center is a place where they can turn to a caring adult for support. This aspect of the youth centers' work has grown stronger over the years that the centers have been in operation. Many of the youths also noted that the centers have helped them to enhance their self-confidence, improve their problem-solving skills, think differently about life and widen their social circle.

Nevertheless, thought must be given to a number of issues:

- ◆ There is a need to improve registration and follow-up of youths who come to the centers, in order to improve planning and monitoring processes for individual youth, and the participants as a whole.
- ◆ Although the center directors reported that some of the youths need professional help, not all of them are, in fact, referred. More effective referral methods need to be established and links with local professional services strengthened.
- ◆ Difficulties in attendance and behavioral problems were reported by the center directors and the youths. There is a need to develop ways to better deal with these difficulties.

To conclude, it is clear that the centers play an important role in the youth's lives. The findings indicate that the centers help to improve the personal and social functioning of the youths who take part in their activities.

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Appendix

Table A1: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Youth Attending the Youth Centers, Comparison between 2006 and 2008 (Percent)

	2006	2008
No. of respondents (N)	342	577
Boys	62	60
Girls	38	40
Age:		
12-14	43	33
15-17	48	57
Ethiopian Israelis (mother's country of birth)	95	90
Born in Israel (among Ethiopian Israelis)	50	70
Single parent families	19	20
No. of children in family:		
1-3	9	14
4-5	33	38
6 or more	58	48
No. of parents employed:		
None	31	15
One	30	27
Two	39	58

Table A2: Problems Reported by Youth Attending the Youth Centers in 2006 and 2008 (Percent)

	2006			2008		
	To a Great Extent	Somewhat	Not at All	To a Great Extent	Somewhat	Not at All
Problems to do with studies or difficulties getting along with the teachers	28	43	29	16	46	38
Nothing to do in free time	9	24	67	8	27	65
No money to buy things for school or personal items	10	19	71	5	22	73
Difficulty getting along with parents or other family problems	21	21	59	10	19	71
Difficulty getting along with friends	5	9	86	4	6	90

Table A3: Ability to Perform Scholastic Tasks among Students Attending Youth Centers, 2006 and 2008 (in percentages)

	2006			2008		
	Easily	With Some Difficulty	With Great Difficulty/ Not at All	Easily	With Some Difficulty	With Great Difficulty/ Not at All
Understand what is said in class	57	34	9	83	13	4
Raise hand and answer questions in class	56	33	11	75	18	7
Read textbooks and subject-related material in Hebrew	71	19	10	79	14	7
Write a Hebrew essay in class	69	21	10	75	17	8
Do homework	61	26	13	73	19	8
Talk to school staff about diverse topics	55	19	26	68	20	13

Table A4: Youth's Reports of their Evaluation of the Centers' Contribution in 2006 and 2008 (Percent)

	2006			2008		
	Agree to a Great/ Very Great Extent	Somewhat Agree	Agree Slightly/ Not at All	Agree to a Great/ Very Great Extent	Somewhat Agree	Agree Slightly/ Not at All
I have somewhere to go in my leisure time	78	11	11	80	10	10
I do things that interest me	75	12	13	75	12	13
I do things that are important to me	64	15	21	67	15	18
I have more self-confidence	60	14	26	60	12	28
My Hebrew is better	46	5	49	40	8	52
I've met new friends	44	15	41	52	14	34
I've improved scholastically	42	16	42	37	18	45