



August 21, 2011 Sunday 21 Av 5771 9:01 IST  Print  Back to original article

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## Organization helps orphaned Ethiopian families

By JEREMY SHARON  
19/08/2011

Group provides services for more than 40 Ethiopian families in which parents died and children cared for by one another, others.

The SELAH Crisis Management Center for immigrants held a two-day seminar and "healing retreat" this week for Ethiopian sibling-led families.

The crisis group is currently providing services for more than 40 families from the Ethiopian community in which the parents have died and the children are being cared for by either older siblings, grandparents or aunts and uncles.

The program, which ran on Monday and Tuesday, brought together 40 members of orphaned families in the village of Ness Amim, near Acre, and focused on providing the siblings with therapy sessions, grief counseling and support for their situation and on helping them build and reinforce a sense of belonging and identity lost through the death of their parents. A number of tours were also put on for the families in the north of the country.

"Moving to a new country is itself a crisis," said Micha Feldman, director of the Ethiopian Division at SELAH. "Tragically, a crisis can happen on top of a crisis and SELAH is there not only to show support and care, but to give these families the sense that they are not alone."

Mentamer Muluye, 23, one of the participants on the retreat, lost both of her parents while the family was waiting to immigrate to Israel from Ethiopia in 2004 and was left to care for her four younger siblings at the age of 17. SELAH helped Muluye graduate from high school and is now encouraging her to embark on a university degree course.

"Raising children after the loss of parents is a trying challenge and a huge responsibility for anyone to face," explained Dr.

Eleanor Pardess, a clinical psychologist and SELAH volunteer.

"It's especially tough for someone who is barely 20 years old, suddenly thrust into the role of parenting. In addition to dealing with the grief of their younger brothers and sisters, they, too, are mourning the loss of their parents."



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