

NA'AMAT USA marks 10 decades of service

By Sharon Sutker McGowan

Editor's note: Given NA'AMAT USA's rich and varied history, it is impossible to recount its whole story in a few pages. But as the organization marks 100 years of supporting women, youth and families in Israel, NA'AMAT NOW looks back at some of the themes that weave through our work from the founding in 1925 to today. Note that the organization was originally called Moetzet Hapoalot in Israel and Pioneer Women in the U.S.

Overview

As women, Jews and Zionists, NA'AMAT allows members to translate their beliefs into action. When a need arises that would benefit women specifically, and Israeli society in general, NA'AMAT strives to fill it. Since the organization has been involved in every aspect of life in Israel, it is a challenge to describe it while standing on one foot.

Former national president Esther Zackler may have done it best. "We are dedicated to strengthening the state of Is-



Moetzet Hapoalot representatives sort through gifts donated by Pioneer Women in 1950.

rael; building a new society based on equality, social justice and advancing the status of women; committed to the preservation of Jewish life and culture; and concerned with democratic and social legislation in the U.S. These are the values we hold dear."

These goals have spurred a wide range of actions. Among the beneficiaries have been infants, toddlers, at-risk children, troubled teenagers, immigrants, working women, victims of abuse and women seeking to better themselves and their families.

NA'AMAT established day care centers, technological high schools, agricultural youth villages, legal aid bureaus, community centers and domestic violence centers. It has worked to elevate the status of women in the home, the military, academia, the workplace and the political arena.

NA'AMAT responds to the challenges of the moment. After World War II, it supported Youth Aliyah to rescue and

re-settle children. Following the Israel War of Independence in 1948, it helped integrate hundreds of thousands of immigrants. NA'AMAT provided legal aid to war widows and their children after the Six Day War in 1967. It supplied clothing, toiletries and toys for child victims of missile attacks by Iraq during the Gulf War.

And following the brutal attack by Hamas terrorists in 2023, NA'AMAT established an Emergency Fund to purchase six mobile shelters; distribute care kits to

—Continued on page 2

Virtual convention

The 2025 NA'AMAT USA National Convention will be held on March 30 via Zoom at 10 a.m. Pacific time, 12 p.m. Central, 1 p.m. Eastern. Join us for important updates, and vote on amendments to the bylaws and the proposed slate of national board officers and directors. Register today at <https://naamat.org/promotions/convention-registration>.

Inside

Living Legacies	3
NA'AMAT USA history at a glance	4
Message from the President	6
Looking back, moving forward together	6

NA'AMAT USA

Continued from page 1

women soldiers; and provide food, clothing and programming for about 20,000 Israelis who were displaced.

NA'AMAT is part of a movement rooted in Zionism, feminism and social justice. In 1932, Beba Idelson, secretary general of Moetzet Hapoalot, wrote, "Ours is the only women workers' movement in the world that numbers among its members not only women who are working outside the home for pay but also housewives who are not part of the labor force."

Long before feminism was popularized, and before the organization would label itself as such, Pioneer Women was a feminist organization. "I didn't know what it was to be a feminist until somebody told me I was one. This is what NA'AMAT meant," said Shoshana Cardin, chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, at a NA'AMAT convention in 1989.

Our origin

In 1925, Rahel Yanait Ben-Zvi established a tree nursery in Jerusalem to train young women in agricultural work. There was insufficient water available and the young saplings were dying. Ben-Zvi turned to her friend Sophie Udin in America for help raising the money for a well. A group of seven Yiddish-speaking Jewish women, all New Yorkers and wives of Poale Zion (Labor Zionist) leaders had organized earlier to raise funds for kitchen and laundry equipment at a collective settlement in Palestine. They responded to Ben-Zvi's request by raising \$500. With this, Pioneer Women was born.

Our name

Early members of Pioneer Women wanted to identify with the women pioneers who left their homes and families in Europe to settle in the land now called Israel.

Labor Zionist women had organized Moetzet Hapoalot (Council of Working Women). Activities were conducted through local branches called Irgun Imahot Ovdot (Organization of Working Mothers). Not surprisingly, this was confusing, and in 1975 the Israeli organization changed its name to NA'AMAT, a He-

brew acronym for "Movement of Working Women and Volunteers."

In the U.S., members resisted the name change because they feared that their hard work to establish Pioneer Women in their communities would be lost. At the 1981 convention, delegates adopted a compromise: the organization would be called Pioneer Women/NA'AMAT. However, even members often dropped "NA'AMAT." Consequently, visitors and the Israeli media failed to connect the U.S. organization with NA'AMAT's work in Israel. In November 1985, convention delegates voted to change the name to NA'AMAT USA.

As then-national president Phyllis Sutker said, "It reflects who we really are – a movement of working women and volunteers, not women in covered wagons. The link between NA'AMAT Israel and NA'AMAT USA will never be left to misinterpretation or chance."

At the 2005 convention, delegates voted to change the subtitle for NA'AMAT USA from "the International Movement of Zionist Women" to "the Women's Labor Zionist Organization of America." Historically Pioneer Women/NA'AMAT was associated with the ideals of the labor movement in Palestine. Until 2010, NA'AMAT Israel was an arm of the Labor Zionist movement. That year, leaders including NA'AMAT USA president Alice Howard fought successfully to become an independent organization with its own delegates at the World Zionist Congress.

Today, NA'AMAT Israel is a coalition of political parties and is called "NA'AM-

AT: the Women's Movement in Israel." All 400,000 women members of The Histadrut, Israel's national trade union, are automatically members of NA'AMAT.

Golda Meir

Golda Meir, the first and only woman prime minister of Israel, was deeply connected to Pioneer Women. In 1928, she was chosen by labor leaders in Palestine to go to the U.S. for six months as an emissary to the fledgling organization. Meir visited clubs throughout the country, sleeping at members' homes and inspiring them to raise money for women workers' farms in Palestine. She served as secretary general of Moetzet Hapoalot from 1932 to 1934.

In her honor, NA'AMAT USA instituted the Golda Meir Human Relations Award, which was awarded to luminaries including Labor Zionist leader Marie Syrkin; Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres; former president of Israel Yitzhak Navon; U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg; and author Dr. Ruth Westheimer.

The Golda Meir Child Development Fund began as a special Israel convention gift in 1979 to support professional development for preschool teachers and supervisors, and enrichment programs for young children. One hundred founders contributed \$5,000 in the first phase.

Conventions

From the year after Pioneer Women was established to the upcoming gathering in May 2025, conventions have served an

—Continued on page 3



Golda Meir accepts a bouquet from a mother attending a NA'AMAT summer respite camp in Israel.

Living Legacies

Elizabeth Raider's aunt, Sara Halperin, was a NA'AMAT leader in Cleveland. When Liz was 13 years old, Halperin told her, "You're going to Habonim on Friday night." Though she felt like she had little choice in the matter, that moment turned out to be pivotal. Through Habonim, the youth movement affiliated with NA'AMAT, she met Dave, her husband of 64 years. It also led to her deep involvement in NA'AMAT, including service as national president from 2010-16.

Raider's term boasted many achievements, but she is most proud of her work to reach members and others through modern communication channels. She spearheaded a redesign of the organization's website, and expanded its participation on Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media. "I wanted us to be in today's world," she said.

Chellie Goldwater Wilensky grew up in NA'AMAT. When she was a child, her mother, Nettie Goldwater, hosted a Pioneer Women meeting at their home. The speaker was Esther Zackler, who later became national president (1969-1973). Although Wilensky had homework to do, she decided to listen for "a few minutes." She was mesmerized as Zackler spoke brilliantly for about an hour, without notes.

Wilensky became national president in 2016. During her term, she was on a flight to Israel for a scholarship event. She needed to be back in Chicago in four days, and was out of sorts about the long journey for such a short stay. Chat-



Scott Howard visits day care center.

ting with a flight attendant and a businessman sitting next to her, she mentioned her work in NA'AMAT. The flight attendant said that her mother had attended a NA'AMAT respite summer camp with her youngest child, and it changed her life. "It made the whole trip worth it," Wilensky said. "I was so proud."

Scott Howard has visited the day care center in Beersheva named in honor of his late mother, former national president Alice Howard, several times. Opened in 2014, the center serves a low-income community that includes Ethiopian and Yemenite immigrants. "It's an amazing place — the kids are headed in the right direction to grow up and become productive adults," said Howard, a loyal NA'AMAT donor.

Howard's maternal grandmother, Sarah Bocharsky, was president of her

Pioneer Women chapter in California. "When she was 80 years old, she raised \$5,000 for NA'AMAT, which she personally delivered to Beba Idelson (secretary general of Moetzet Hapoalot)."

"I really love NA'AMAT, and anything I can do for it, I will," he said.

Stern/Rub Family

NA'AMAT is a family affair for the descendants of Masha Stern and Raquel Rub. In 1962, Stern became president of Pioneer Women in Peru. Stern's daughter, Raquel Rub, founded the Or chapter in Miami and later became president. She also served as Southeast Area Chair for NA'AMAT USA.

"Mom was the force behind NA'AMAT in Miami," said Raquel's son, **Dr. Beny Rub**, a pediatrician. He and his wife **Marta Rub** are generous regular donors to NA'AMAT USA.

Anabel Rub Peicher, Raquel's daughter, remembers "Babi Masha's" home in Lima, where her chaverot made hamantaschen to raise funds for Pioneer Women. "At Purim the whole living room and dining room was a huge kitchen," she recalled. Babi Masha continually came up with creative ways to raise money, including the "El Libro de Oro" (The Golden Book), where she would enter events such as weddings for a donation. "Everything was a fundraiser," said Peicher, who founded the Mazal Club in Florida, together with a group of Latina Jewish women.

"We loved my mom and want to continue her legacy," said Dr. Rub.

NA'AMAT USA

Continued from page 2

important purpose for the organization. Originally, they were held every two years; now they are held every three years. At conventions, members from throughout the U.S. discuss and vote on bylaws, install new officers and board members, and share ideas regarding membership, fundraising, organization and other topics. Over the years, prominent speakers addressed the attendees at plenary sessions.

At its first convention, delegates set the agenda for the new organization: help create a homeland in Palestine; support Moetzet Hapoalot; and educate American Jewish women to help establish a more just society in America and the world.

Other conventions through the years featured elaborate fashion shows with outfits created by teenagers at NA'AMAT's Timon vocational high schools (now called technological high schools).

Chicago hosted a notable convention in August 1989, during which hundreds of

members participated in a pro-choice rally. The NA'AMAT contingent joined hundreds of thousands of protesters that year who feared that the Supreme Court would limit the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade abortion ruling in an upcoming case.

Day care

NA'AMAT is the largest provider of childcare services in Israel, with 134 day care centers serving 9,000 preschool children. In addition, 15 multipurpose centers

—Continued on page 4



Performers entertain delegates at the 1979 convention, the first to be held in Israel.

NA'AMAT USA

Continued from page 3

serve about 1,600 infants and children who have been abused, traumatized or come from impoverished families. The facilities are staffed by specially trained teachers, counselors and psychologists, and provide extended hours and three meals a day.

One of Moetzet Hapoalot's early priorities was to establish a day-night home for orphaned infants and a children's home, Omna, as well as day care centers that allowed women to go to work, confident their children were well taken care of.

In the 1970s, Pioneer Women launched the Spiritual Adoption campaign, which became a major fundraising vehicle. For a specific sum, one could "adopt" a child in a

NA'AMAT day-night home or help support a child in day care.

Over time, many women were attracted to Pioneer Women not for its Labor Zionist ideals, but its work with young children. NA'AMAT's day care centers have helped raise generations of Israelis, and were a model for Head Start in the U.S.

Education

Among the favorite destinations for NA'AMAT members visiting Israel are Kanot and Ayanot, co-ed boarding schools for teens from low-income families or whose needs are not met by the traditional school system. Now known as Youth Villages, they originated as agricultural schools, providing practical experience in farming along with academic subjects.

Their curriculum has expanded to include programs such as equestrian training, a police academy and information technology. Today, 960 students, about half boarders, attend Kanot and Ayanot.

Historically, NA'AMAT operated vocational high schools for Jewish and Arab teenagers who have been unsuccessful at traditional schools.

Today 1,400 students attend nine technological high schools, characterized by small classrooms, modern facilities and specially trained teachers. Students enter the high schools with a wide range of challenges, including abuse, neglect and addiction. Some are new immigrants. NA'AMAT also runs three junior colleges focused on engineering, architecture and jewelry-making.

NA'AMAT USA supports college and post-graduate scholarships for women. In a typical year, it awards 180 scholarships for students pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as eight research grants for doctoral students in gender studies and science.

Domestic Violence

NA'AMAT recognized the problem of family violence long before the media and general public. In 1983, it established Israel's first center for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence in Tel Aviv. Together with the government, NA'AMAT opened three more centers in the 1980s and early '90s.

In 1995, NA'AMAT opened what was

—Continued on page 5

NA'AMAT history at a glance

1921 Moetzet Hapoalot established.

1925 Pioneer Women founded in U.S.

1926 First national convention in New York.

1930s First English-speaking clubs formed.

1930 Ayanot, first cooperative training farm, founded.

1931 First kindergarten opened by Moetzet Hapoalot in Haifa.

1935 Habonim, Labor Zionist youth movement, created.

May 1948 State of Israel declared.

1949 Pioneer Women elects Bert Goldstein first national president.

1951 First World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem.

1952 Kanot Agricultural School dedicated.

1954 First group of haverot sent to seminar in Israel for leadership training.

1960s Pioneer Women begins advocating for Soviet "refuseniks."

1975 Moetzet Hapoalot and Irgun Imahot Ovdot become NA'AMAT in Israel.

1979 Golda Meir Child Development Fund launched.

December 1982 Phyllis Sutker is first NA'AMAT representative elected to Executive of World Zionist Organization.

1983 NA'AMAT builds first Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Domestic Violence.

1985 Pioneer Women-NA'AMAT changes name to NA'AMAT USA.

Sept 13, 1993 Israel signs peace agreement with Palestine Liberation Organization.

1995 NA'AMAT opens Glickman Center, now the NA'AMAT Center for Women and the Family.

Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas terrorist attack kills thousands; hundreds held hostage.

NA'AMAT USA

Continued from page 4

then called the Glickman Center, now the NA'AMAT Center for Women and the Family, in Tel Aviv. It includes a shelter for battered women that houses up to 30 residents and their children, and runs a crisis hotline, as well as a center for fathers.

The center's newest program, "The Day After," was launched in 2023 to prepare women to join the workforce when they leave the shelter, greatly increasing the odds that they will not return to their abusers.

Women's rights

NA'AMAT fights for equal opportunities for women through Women's Rights Centers, Women's Empowerment Centers, Legal Aid Bureaus and community centers.

In 1975, Moetzet Hapoalot established the Department of Legislation, Legal Aid and Social Security to "lobby for legislation and to help Israeli women and families know and protect their legal rights." In 1977 it was renamed the Status of Women Department.

At the Women's Empowerment Centers (in Karmiel and Sderot), social workers and other counselors assist women with a wide range of issues, including career advancement, family relations, economic and financial counseling, and mental health.

NA'AMAT's 22 Legal Aid Bureaus provide low cost or pro bono legal advice on those issues and others. NA'AMAT also submits petitions and amicus briefs to the Israeli Supreme Court and spearheads legislative initiatives in the Knesset to expand and safeguard women's rights.

Unfortunately, even established women's rights require constant vigilance. For example, this year NA'AMAT is protesting a plan by Israel's Council for Higher Education to integrate ultra-Orthodox students into master's degree programs by creating gender-segregated classes. Currently such segregation is permitted in bachelor's degree programs.

Immigration

Over the years, NA'AMAT has worked with government and social service agencies to ease the process of integration and



Chicago members of Pioneer Women protest treatment of Soviet refuseniks in the mid-1970s.

absorption for Jews from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia and other countries.

After 1948, vast numbers of immigrants from Europe arrived in Israel, followed by waves of immigrants from Yemen, Morocco, India and later Russia and Ethiopia. NA'AMAT responded to the unique needs of each wave of immigrants.

In the 1970s and '80s, NA'AMAT USA members joined other Jewish organizations to support "refuseniks," Soviet Jews who were unable to obtain exit visas. By the early 1980s, emigration had come nearly to a halt. Officially sanctioned anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism had escalated and refuseniks were subjected to arrest, imprisonment and other punitive treatment.

At its 1987 convention, NA'AMAT USA continued its efforts to free Ida Nudel, a refusenik leader who waged a 16-year fight for an exit visa to Israel. Months later, Nudel finally was allowed to emigrate.

In the mid-1980s, NA'AMAT was integral to assimilating Ethiopian Jews. For seven weeks beginning in November 1984, Operation Moses secretly transported about 8,000 Ethiopian Jews from refugee camps in Sudan to Israel. About 500 more were evacuated later in the U.S.-led Operation

Joshua. In recent years, most immigrants have arrived from the Ukraine and Russia.

Conclusion

NA'AMAT USA has provided continuous support to its sister organization in Israel for a century. It remains committed to the state of Israel, the individuals whose lives are enriched by the wide variety of programs it provides, and the ideals of women's equality and social justice. For generations, NA'AMAT USA has been a home for women seeking personal fulfillment and friendship, while working together toward a larger goal.

Judith Sokoloff, the longtime editor of *NA'AMAT Woman* magazine, wrote in 1996, "The original heart and soul of the organization endures, adapting with each new twist and turn of history—with courage, strength and commitment." Her statement remains true today.



**THE DEADLINE HAS PASSED,
BUT THERE'S STILL A CHANCE!**

★ ★ **ADVERTISE** ★ ★

IN THE
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION TRIBUTE JOURNAL

We're making a special exception for last-minute ads!

To be included, act today and contact **Susan Isaacs**
susan@sriadvertising.com | (818) 512-5930



6505 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 635
Los Angeles, CA 90048

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SKOKIE IL
PERMIT NO. 72

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



<https://naamat.org>
Facebook: www.facebook.com/naamatusa; Instagram: @naamatusa
naamat@naamat.org
(818) 431-2200

NA'AMAT NOW is written and produced by Complete Communications Inc., Skokie IL

Support NA'AMAT by visiting <https://naamat.org/> and clicking on "Donate"

Message from the President



By Jan Gurvitch

This year, NA'AMAT USA will celebrate our 100th anniversary. As I write this, hostages are still imprisoned in Gaza following the terrorist attack on Oct. 7, 2023. NA'AMAT has played a critical role during this harrowing time, supporting Israeli women, children and families — as it has done throughout the past century.

Originally founded as Pioneer Women in 1925, the organization launched myriad programs to help women become equal partners in building the new nation. I encourage you to read the article beginning on page 1 about NA'AMAT's distinguished history, and how we help women break the glass ceiling in all aspects of society today.

As president of NA'AMAT USA, I am particularly proud of the tradition of giving that was created and nurtured by our

founding members and continues to this day. Last year's fundraiser for daycare centers and playgrounds, called "Play it Forward," exemplifies the spirit that inspires our members to help build a more equitable society. I invite you to become legacy donors so that the NA'AMAT story continues for generations to come. For more information, please see <https://naamat.org/ways-to-give/legacy-circle/>.

Learn more about our recent activities by attending our virtual convention on March 30 via Zoom. You can register at <https://naamat.org/events/>.

And finally, in celebration of all we have achieved and our dreams for tomorrow, please join with our Canadian sisters to mark 100 years of NA'AMAT from May 16-18 in Toronto. It promises to be an amazing time filled with camaraderie, solidarity, great programming and fun. For information and to register, go to <https://naamat.org/events/>. I look forward to seeing you there.

Looking back, moving forward together

By Selma Roffman

On May 16-18, NA'AMAT USA and NA'AMAT Canada are celebrating 100 years of supporting women, youth and families in Israel. This is our time to dance, hug, learn, share and rejoice! Even in a difficult and uncertain time, after 100 years we must be joyous and celebrate.

Come join us in Toronto to meet with like-minded individuals and share in the achievements of the past. Dream with us

as we look toward an even brighter future. During our celebration at the Novotel Toronto Centre hotel, you will be meeting haverot who share the dream of a vibrant, inclusive, egalitarian Israel.

Participants will meet the officers, leaders and staff of NA'AMAT, while honoring past and present presidents for their incredible service. You'll also watch a "historical" panel show, laugh at a comedian's jokes and have opportunities to meet old

friends and new acquaintances. A walking tour is available on Shabbat, and we'll celebrate at a gala on Saturday evening.

You can honor our past and present presidents by placing an ad or good wishes in the Tribute Journal. Proceeds will be used to renovate a playground in honor of the past presidents of Canada and the U.S. Last-minute ads are still being accepted.

Look back with us as we move forward together!