

THE HISTORY OF NA'AMAT

Na'amat's roots start at the turn of the 20th century

Protesting a society in which women were relegated to the kitchens while men worked the land and built the country, the women who made aliyah, made it their goal to become equal partners in the life of the founding of the State, the Labour movement and the future of the Jewish people. Pioneering women believed that a women's Labour Zionist organization would engage immigrant and working women in the Zionist cause and organized the first feminist movement in Israel; NA'AMAT, (formerly Moetzet Hapoalot - the Working women's Council).

In 1921, with the severe water shortage threatening to destroy a fledgling Jerusalem tree nursery, Zionist leader, Rachel Yanait Ben Zvi, one of the early founders of the Labor Zionist Movement, had dug a well to irrigate the trees. Yanait wrote that "our tree nursery cannot exist without a well" and that during the previous two years "more than 130,000 saplings have been planted in seventeen points in Galilee and Judaea." She contacted her friend Sophie Udin, based in New York, and she, along with a small group of women in Canada and the United States rallied in support and successfully raised the necessary funds. The gesture forged a spirit of sisterhood, leading in 1925 to the founding of The Women's Organization for the Pioneer Women of Palestine (Na'amat).

The organization opened new channels of communication between the Palestine Labor Movement and the Jewish community in Canada and became a significant force in Canadian Jewish life, playing a central role in Canadian Zionism, in the years prior to the formation of the State of Israel. In 1966 Pioneer Women (Na'amat) became autonomous in Canada.

Laying the Groundwork

Former Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meyerson Meir, was one of Na'amat's earliest members. In the 1930's as Na'amat's National Secretary, Golda proudly wrote that the organization was "the first and last women's organization for which I ever worked." During the 1920s and 1930s, Na'amat laid the groundwork for a modern Israeli social services network-- creating training farms for girls; opening hostels and vocational classes for young women and pioneering the concept of "day care," for children whose mothers were working to build the land and its economy.

In Canada, among their initiatives during this period was the launch of a Zionist youth movement, Habonim D'ror.

Na'amat members held meetings in their homes raising both awareness and support for, the budding Jewish homeland.

ENHANCING THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CANADA AND ISRAEL

1940s - Na'amat lobbies for more generous maternity leave laws, the creation of daycare centres near places of employment and legislation guaranteeing equal pay for equal work.

1950s - Na'amat in Canada organizes annual International Women's Day events where women from various ethnic and Canadian organizations share their thoughts about key issues of the day.

1960s - Na'amat in Canada launches a Perpetual Scholarship Fund to send financially disadvantaged Israeli women to college or university; one of the few organizations to promote post-secondary education for women.

1960s and 1970s - Na'amat Canada expands its activities across the country through participation in such organizations as the Voice of Women and the Consumers Association of Canada. Shalom receptions are held for newly-elected women members of Parliament. Petitions are circulated for the Canadian Committee for the Control of Radiation Hazards.

1980s - Na'amat Canada organizes a series of leadership seminars to encourage the bonds of sisterhood and to mould the leaders of tomorrow. Rotating Seminars continue to be planned locally, nationally, and in Israel.

1990s - Na'amat in Israel establishes two Centres for the Prevention and Treatment of Violence, including the Na'amat Canada Glickman Centre for Family Violence Prevention, a shelter for battered women in Tel Aviv. The organization also helps thousands of immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union get a new start in Israel.

2015 – Na'amat Canada celebrates 90 years in Canada.

Today Na'amat Canada members are successfully raising funds to support a broad spectrum of social, educational and advocacy services in Israel and Canada. We are now welcoming a third generation of Na'amat women, who have grown up with the dreams and ideals of their dedicated mothers and grandmothers.