This past year, almost 1,800 at-risk youth participated in the "Yedidut Zahala" program, led by 132 adult volunteers (aged 45+) who accompany and support the young men and women for three consecutive years (between 10th and 12th grades), helping them become better Israeli citizens. Each volunteer directs a group of 15 young men and women, through weekly sessions devoted to value-centered issues, such as social involvement, avoiding hazardous behavior, current events, and the importance of service in the IDF. In addition, each year, groups engage in bonding activities, and visit IDF bases and heritage sites.

This past year, the program encompassed 117 groups in 33 locations, from Eilat in the south to Nahariya in the north. Altogether, all Zahala volunteers dedicated 5,955 hours to the program – an average of 45 hours, per volunteer, over the course of the year.

Notable achievements from the past year:

- We welcomed twelve new volunteers to the program. The volunteers received basic training, and each was partnered with a veteran volunteer, who advised and assisted the new volunteers throughout their first year with Zahala.
- We began activity at six new locations, including Beersheba, Or Akiva, Kannot Youth Village and Ben-Yakir Youth Village.
- We conducted two large-scale "activity days" for all participants and volunteers in the program.
  
  Over 1,000 participants and volunteers attended the first "activity day," which aimed to encourage enlistment in the IDF, and included visits to four Air Force bases. In addition, Zahala participants approaching enlistment received individual support from members of the IDF Recruitment Office.

  Close to 500 Zahala participants attended the second "activity day," which was devoted to group sports. The highlight of the day was a soccer game between a Zahala team and a team of Israeli artists. The Zahala team won, of course…

- This coming August, Zahala will send its thirteenth delegation to the death camps in Poland. The Zahala delegations allow participants of the program, who are unable to join their school's delegation, whether for financial or for behavioral reasons, to share
in a meaningful educational journey, bringing them into contact with values of mutuality, contribution to the country, and self-identity.

After consultation with professionals working with the organization's evaluation and measurement program, we modified our evaluation questionnaire—and are now distributing it, for the second straight year, among participants in the program. Unfortunately, we have encountered two difficulties, which have prevented us from processing information and drawing conclusions:

1. Low response rates to the questionnaire (approximately 30%) make it difficult to draw conclusions relevant to all participants in the program. Possible reasons for the lack of responses are:
   - Long questionnaire: The questionnaire is voluntary, and at times, its length causes would-be respondents to give up before completing it.
   - Outdated method of data collection: The questionnaires are both long and "hard-copy," and not in more user-friendly digitalized form.
   - Lack of cooperation on the part of volunteers, who prefer to engage in group activity, rather than the "bureaucracy" of filling questionnaires.

2. The IDF's promise to provide us with statistics pertaining to the recruitment, positions and survivability of Zahala alumni in the army has yet to be fulfilled. We are, at present, in the midst of determined negotiation to obtain these important figures.

We are working to find solutions to these issues, so that we may be able – during the coming months – to demonstrate the program's effectiveness.

In preparation for the coming year, we have established the following goals for ourselves:

- Increase collaboration with the IDF with regard to recruitment, preparation for meaningful service, and familiarity with the various branches of the IDF.
- Conduct three "summit events" for each group, including at least one countrywide "summit event."
- Conduct workshops and seminars for volunteers on the topics of at-risk youth, group methodology and forging "team spirit," preparation for military service, and more.
- Advance processes of evaluation and measurement – finish data collection, process information, draw conclusions.

In addition, the program is now going through a "changing of the guard," from one generation to the next. Having reached the age of 80, Ran Pekker – who founded Yedidut Zahala – decided to retire, passing the reins to the program's new chairperson, Izhar Shay. Izhar, who has volunteered with Zahala for the past eight years, and established a vibrant program in the town of Kadima, is a General Partner at the Canaan Partners venture capital fund, as well as an active and respected social entrepreneur.

For more information: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSDcy9jeeaU