Program Status:

In September the Mechina began its seventh year, overseeing two active programs; Shanah Aleph and Bet (Year One and Two). Shanah Aleph is made up of 47 participants, and Shanah Bet is made up of 16 participants – female and male in each program. Each year is comprised of a diverse group of participants, coming from all different kinds of households and lifestyles, ranging from urban to kibbutznik, various religious and traditional backgrounds as well as olim from all over the world, some who have lived in Israel most of their life and others who have made aliyah before or during the Mechina.

Presently, the educational programming has been fully realized by both Shanah Aleph and Bet. The participants have been assigned to their work committees, each participant is already well into his or her own weekly volunteer project, and we are working hard to intensify and further develop and deepen the experiences in Mechina – the impact of the participants studies, the execution of large community projects, and most importantly the empowerment of each and every participant as they go through meaningful personal development.

Primary Achievements of the Past Year:

We completed Mechina this past year with forty-three participants in Shanah Aleph, and an additional group of eleven in Shana Bet.

We feel that we have achieved our objective in establishing a group dedicated to learning, understanding our country, volunteering and preparing for meaningful service in the I.D.F. We have seen throughout the year an impressive strengthening of group harmony and inclusion that does not engulf the individual, but rather enables him to reveal his true character and personality. The unique nature of this group and the phenomenal support each individual receives from the other members has resulted in an astoundingly united group this year.
Despite these considerable achievements, there is no doubt that the greatest among them is the empowerment of the participants in our Mechina due to the effectiveness of our educational program. Participants graduate each year charged with greater knowledge, a founded set of values on top of a clearer, richer sense of identity as well as a burning desire to contribute to and strengthen Israeli society. Each year they leave more prepared for meaningful service in the military, not only as soldiers but also as instructors and commanders – the next generation of Israeli military and social leadership.

We of course did not neglect recruitment of participants for the upcoming year, and thus we arrived at dozens of schools across the country; schools from which this year's participants came from.

The personal growth each participant experienced was the core success of this past year. We feel that each year, our participants leave the Mechina with stronger identities and greater will to contribute to Israeli society and have an impact. They leave each year with excellent leadership skills and learning expertise, enabling them to provide invaluable input in the army and beyond. Graduates of Mechina are able to realize their goals and optimize their role within whatever framework they find themselves in, and do so seriously and with integrity. We felt that this year's studies were at such a high level that it was appropriate for the continuation of this learning to occur, and therefore we allowed the most serious and dedicated group of this year to continue on for Shanah Bet – the second year program, focused on intense study and devotion to values.

Program Evaluation

Throughout the year, we functioned by using several different methods of both internal as well as external supervision and examination. The Mechina is examined regularly by an experienced accountant and a two-person Audit Committee. The Committee checks the Mechina in regards to its budget, organization and management. The Audit Committee noted that the fiscal behavior of the Mechina is superbly organized and under control, and supports the approval of the annual report.

The staff held three meetings throughout the year dedicated to internal feedback, checking the quality of each course, satisfaction of each student and to which extent each one is participating in each aspect of Mechina. Upon receiving this feedback, we conducted a number of internal changes as we saw fit, most notably in our curriculum.

This year, we monitored our staff very thoroughly since the beginning of the year, including our secretary, counselors and senior staff members. We had our students complete feedback forms on each staff member and lecturer, in which the students provided invaluable advice. This feedback from the students served as one of the most significant landmarks in the development of their counselors, and resulted in each and every counselor, lecturer and staff member to engage in constructive dialogue and meaningful improvement.

We also progressed meaningfully this year in regards to our guiding and teaching abilities as staff members. We employed an outside source, Abigail Ben-Moshe, who trains counselors and staff at several Mechinot other than our own. We truly feel that this year's counselors were better prepared to address with their challenges as authority figures, educators and individuals in a challenging position. By bringing in a
professional resource, these counselors were given many important tools to help bring about this year's success in Mechina. Additionally, the counselors of every Mechina were brought to Beit Avi Chai for several educational seminars that took place throughout the year organized by Yaniv Mezuman, Director of Mechinat Lachish.

The biggest challenges are always the material and technical ones for us. We as a management run very smoothly are meticulously organized and never run into deficit or any other stumbling blocks that exist in other organizations and programs. However, we are not without our challenges. Students who are new immigrants to the country, who have health problems that result in military exemption, or who have other complicated stories often do not receive the necessary assistance they require from the government during their drafting process. Our desire to support these students and integrate them into the mainstream of Mechina graduates is great, yet increases our expenditures and often loses out to budget.

We firmly believe that the main benefit of the program this was the strengthening of the participants and in our contribution to the region. The participants are more prepared for their upcoming military service, having received valuable lifelong tools and exposure to new worlds. They exhibit impressive awareness and caring for the environment and society. The graduates maintain a constant connection with the Mechina, the staff and the current class. They see the Mechina as a place where they can 'recharge' in a social and spiritual sense and where they can seek advice. In regards to the region, the Mechina acts as a center for cultural events and contributes to the surrounding community in this way.

Our general understanding and conclusions insofar are that the Mechina has been extremely successful in achieving its objectives and fulfilling its vision, while we continue to improve by making changes based on the previous year.

**Guidelines for Next Year:**

Next year we hope that the staff will consist of four instructors who will live on the kibbutz, in order to provide more personal and therefore effective support to the students. We will continue next year with our second year program, Shanah Bet, in light of this year's great success in the first year program. Shanah Bet is a year of significant learning that greatly influences the entire Mechina, and has proved to be a huge influence on organizational memory and acted as a bridge to our graduates. The Mechina will attempt to develop additional programs with the same-aged youth of Diaspora Jewish communities as well as graduates who have finished their army service.

The central project that we are engaging in now is the construction of a permanent site in Eliav, the new combined religious and secular community in Eastern Lachish, where the new Mechina will start next year. The plan for this coming year will be a group of students, temporary structures and the establishment of a major campus.