

*MATANEL FOUNDATION*  
*ACTIVITY REPORT*

**Program:** Mechinat Beit Yisrael - Kvutzat Reut  
**Year:** 2017-2018

Please present your activity report according to the following lines. The whole rapport will not exceed 2 or 3 pages (as word document).

Name of the Program: Mechinat Beit Yisrael

Year of activity: 2017-2018

Name of the report's writer: Aviva Lahav

Function of the report's writer: Deputy Director

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**Number of active participants in the program:**

There are 87 participants in the program, 63 in Gilo and 24 (second year) participants in Armon HaNatziv. The young Israeli men and women reflect diverse geographic and ideological communities and religious practices, from yeshiva high school graduates to secular youth, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, and varied political views. This year, six North America high school graduates participated in the Mechina.

**Estimated number of impacted participants:**

Beyond our 87 students, our program bore an impact on the students' parents, who are closely involved in the yearly proses. They followed their children's studies, community-building and voluntarism and learned from their experiences. Parents hosted the mechina during educational trips and lectured to them in fields of expertise. Parents are invited to participate in a Friends Forum, to encourage their own studies and community leadership.

Impacted participants also include some 600 children, youth and elderly members of the Gilo Aleph neighborhood who benefited from the varied community services provided by Mechina students. Our students and staff also worked in tandem with over a dozen community council leaders, who cite the positive impact of their voluntarism on strengthening the community at large. All told, we estimate there are over 800 people who have experienced the impact of our Mechina.

We now have some 1,000 Mechina graduates who have been deeply influenced by the Mechina experience. They are active in Israel and abroad in different fields-motivated by ideals, justice, diversity and social action. All of which stem from a deep Jewish identity.

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**Kvutzat Reut - Beit Yisrael**

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**Give the actually state of the program (where the program stands at the date of the activity report, no more than ten lines):**

The 87 participants of the 2017-2018 class graduated in July 2018 (they are the twenty-first class of our Mechina. The new participants in 2018-2019 participated in a shared Shabbat in July. Our new class includes eight scholarship students—from the Gilo Aleph community and other peripheral cities and towns throughout Israel. For the first time, the Mechina is seeking out participants from significantly disadvantaged and sometimes troubled homes. They were chosen on the basis of their motivation to broaden their horizons and fulfill their potential. We feel it is vital to continually strengthen the diversity of our program.

**The main achievements during the last year of activity (main achievements, number of events, number of participants, etc.):**

- (1) Enhancing the Mechina study program (25 weekly hours) to further enliven dialogue among participants of varied backgrounds. Mechina participants from widely divergent backgrounds--yeshiva high schools, ulpanot and secular high schools study sources such as Talmud and Mishna together—and create stimulating discussions in which everyone gains new insight. This has been a cornerstone of the Mechina since it was founded 21 years ago, and a sphere we continually seek to nurture. (a) The Matanel Tikun Olam curriculum (taught twice weekly) played an important role in strengthening shared study this year—by providing insight into the natural link between study and active engagement in society—to promote Jewish values and humanism. (b) Our studies were strengthened by a new “Think out of the box” class in which students used creative writing, music, theatre and dance to bring to life their learning and mechina experience. They created an original theatrical musical performance that gave expression to the joys and challenges of learning and forming their individual identities and points of view. (c) A course on classical philosophy and its influence on contemporary Israeli life (taught by an alumnus) also proved especially stimulating to our students.
- (2) Encounters with new communities: This year we introduced a program in partnership with the Israeli NGO Jewish Connections--in which 30 Mechina students were paired with Haredi men and women in their 20s and 30s (parents to young families from Gilo and Bait va'Gan). They studied topics ranging from Shabbat and the sacredness of the Jewish people; the Mechina students also joined their study partners at Shabbat meals and other occasions. It was an eye-opening first exposure to an ethos and way of life they had never before experienced and it stimulated their curiosity and desire to expand their horizons.
- (3) Strengthening support for some 80 elderly residents of our public housing project. Most are immigrants from the former Soviet Union who settled in the public housing project when they arrived in Israel, and did not significantly improve their circumstances since then. They are of limited economic means and many do not have nearby relatives to alleviate loneliness and help them with vital tasks of everyday life. (Most municipal social workers are responsible for hundreds of cases and cannot provide time-sensitive assistance). This year, In addition to conducting

weekly visits at their homes, we established a quick response hotline to ease their isolation and provide a real-time response to urgent needs.

- (4) Environmentalism and rehabilitation of shared public spaces is another cornerstone of our work. A key achievement in Gilo this year was scores of sessions of experiential learning in which Mechina students taught local elementary school students in a “nature classroom” in a recently restored green archeological park (in past years, our volunteers did the daily excavation work that led to the inauguration of the park this spring). In Armon HaNatziv, Mechina students worked with local authorities and residents to restore a neglected scenic space (Mitzpe Tel) and make it a site for community gatherings.

These are highlights of our endeavors—which also include tutoring of schoolchildren, mentoring at-risk youth, afternoon care for young children (who otherwise might not have supervised care) and other projects.

Our broader aim is to prepare our graduates not only for the immediate future as young soldiers, but to fulfill their potential over the long term and contribute to Israeli society and humanity. This year, we have placed a greater emphasis on nurturing encounters—and relationships—between Mechina participants and individuals among over 1,000 alumni who may serve as role models, including young families now part of intentional communities guided by Kvutzat Reut in Hatzor Haglilit, Lod, Carmiel Yavniel and Armon Hanatziv. These encounters include one-off conversations and talks with alumni who are now community leaders, environmentalists and spiritual leaders. Sadly, our special events also include talks by parents of fallen soldiers (who were alumni of the Mechina)—and the parents’ reflections on the lives and values of their children—a painful but important aspect of the Mechina’s ethos and history.

**The evaluation (methodology, results, comparisons with the precedent year, conclusions for the future...):**

As a matter of course, we seek written and oral feedback from staff and participants at the beginning and conclusion of the year (and of course conduct an ongoing dialogue over the course of the year.

Among telling indicators:

- We ask participants to identify themselves (religious, secular, traditional or “no label” at the beginning of the year, and a many switch to “no label” at the conclusion of the year.
- Participants cite that the years' experience helped narrow the gap between their “Jewish and “Israeli” identity.
- Participants affirm that their experiences have created a model for open-minded inquiry community engagement and leadership that will guide their futures.

**Please see attached-As requested:**

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Mid-year and end of year Evaluation Report, the Financial Report, list of the mechina participants, 5 photos, and link movie describing the mechina and Kvutzat Reut-Beit Israel organization.

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