

MATANEL FOUNDATION

Evaluation REPORT

Program: *Mechinat BINA* - The Arye Lova Eliav Mechina

Year: 2018-2019

We recently completed another successful year of activity at Mechinat BINA, with 58 Israeli and international Jewish high school graduate participants. Over the last three years, with the support of the Matanel Foundation, Mechinat BINA has seen 183 young adults complete the one-year pre-army program. Each cohort studies five full days each week and volunteers in the surrounding communities of south Tel Aviv two afternoons a week.

This year we undertook a project (supported by the UJA Federation of New York) to improve BINA's internal capacity to conduct professional evaluation of the impact of our key programs on participants and to assess the impact of our programs on achieving BINA's overarching goals. Over the course of several months BINA's evaluation team worked with an external evaluation consultant to refine our evaluation process. Together with the evaluation consultant, BINA's evaluation team developed a professional evaluation tool, which BINA will utilize for all its long-term pre-army (Mechina) programs. We collected qualitative feedback as well as data that can be analyzed quantitatively across several programs. This year we only have end-of-year data (from the new set of questions) so analysis is somewhat limited (as we have no equivalent pre-program data). Next year, however, we will have both pre and post program surveys, allowing for deeper and more encompassing data analyses.

The surveys combine quantitative measures using a Likert scale to measure attitude changes during the year and open-ended questions to receive qualitative feedback on program impact. The aim of our evaluation is to learn the impact of our programs in two axes: Jewish Identity and Social Responsibility. In each axis we measure:

- Attitudes (How has the program effected participants' perceptions, opinions?)
- Behavior (How has the program effected participants' actions and life choices)
- Cognitions (How has the program effected participants' knowledge?)
- Motivation (How has the program effected participants' motivation to act?)

Each program participant is surveyed regarding the particular classes, activities, meetings and volunteer work in which they participate. Participants are also surveyed on more global questions regarding the impact of BINA's programs on their attitudes, behavior and cognitions regarding their Jewish identity and their intention to continue learning, their view of the role of social action in their lives and its connection to their view of Judaism and their views on community.

Quantitative Impact (gathered through evaluation surveys)

Israeli Society:

Our evaluations for the 2018-19 activity year show that all of our respondents feel connected to Israel and that their participation in Mechinat BINA strengthened their knowledge of Israeli society and the challenges that it faces. 54% of respondents feel that as a result of participating in Mechinat BINA, they have a deep understanding of Israeli society and the diverse groups that it comprises, while 45% feel that they have a base understanding but that there is more to learn ("the more that I learn, the more I realize how much more there is to learn.") 77% of respondents feel that they have a thorough understanding of the challenges that Israeli society faces, while 23% feel that they have a foundational understanding but recognize that there is more to learn.

Jewish Identity

On the Jewish identity axis, all of our respondents stated that they feel strongly connected to Judaism and to their Jewish identity and 73% feel very connected to their Jewish roots. A majority of the respondents say that after participating in the Mechina, they feel more secure in their knowledge of Jewish sources and feel a greater sense of ownership. 90% of respondents say that they have been exposed to new traditions and streams of Judaism and feel that they know how to express their secular Jewish identity. 73% believe that there are aspects of the Jewish tradition that give meaning to their lives and 92% feel that there are aspects of Jewish culture that are relevant to their daily life. Over 90% of respondents cited a wide range of choices for celebrating Shabbat and lifecycle ceremonies as distinctly Jewish expressions. 76% feel that BINA has given them the tools and knowledge necessary to study Jewish texts and all of our respondent's state that they feel connected to the BINA community. The place of Judaism in participants' lives is evident; Judaism fills their world with content and values, which clearly do not contradict their universal, humanistic outlook.

Social Responsibility:

The connection between Jewish identity and the concept of social justice is apparent in our evaluations. On the Social Responsibility axis, all of our respondents said they see a connection between their Jewish identity and social justice and that they feel committed to social action. We saw evidence of a strong drive for a significant service in the Israeli Defense Force and a desire to be involved in community life and social work on a voluntary basis. Most participants answered "to a great extent" or "to a very great extent" to all questions related to exploring Israeli society, capacity for social change, empathy for disadvantaged populations, and the motivation for involvement at local and national levels. 73% of respondents stated that after participating in Mechinat BINA, they are familiar with a variety of methods for promoting social justice and 73% stated that they will continue to work toward social causes that they believe in. 78% feel that through their participation in Mechinat BINA, they have formed a community with whom they can work to promote social change. Mechinat BINA is effectively cultivating the next generation of leaders that are driven to build a more just and democratic Israel.

Qualitative Impact

Gathered in focus-groups, group feedback sessions, written evaluations, and discussions with participants, our qualitative assessment has highlighted a few specific areas of impact, most notably that participants feel a sense of personal growth, a greater ability and desire to take responsibility, they feel they have learned to think critically, have gained new perspectives, are more task/goal orientated, more independent, more confident, have a deeper understanding of Israeli society, a stronger Jewish identity and a greater commitment to activism and social justice.

Participant quotes:

How did your experience in Mechinat BINA impact your Jewish identity?

The Mechina made me realize that I can be very Jewish even if I do not observe the Sabbath and Mitzvot and that there are many ways to be Jewish - not only the ways that are demonstrated to us by the religious or ultra-Orthodox. The Mechina made me love my religion more - not out of necessity but out of my own desire.

I feel a much stronger desire to get involved in the Jewish community and to seek out different Jewish organizations to be a part of on my college campus when I return to the USA.

Did you experience any changes in your personal views during the semester regarding your personal identity, views, life and career choices etc.? In what ways?

I experienced too many changes in my personal views to name here, but one big one was my view of my Jewish identity and Judaism as a whole. I never knew I could incorporate my Judaism into my everyday life and that I could even connect to traditional Jewish texts in any way. Judaism has a much stronger presence in my life now as a set of guiding values and morals and I feel much more confident and secure in my Jewish identity.

My view of Israel and its importance to me shifted dramatically. Before the Mechina, I didn't really see Israel as essential to my Judaism and I wasn't very personally connected. Now I feel a really strong connection with Israel and a deep love for it that I wasn't as secure in before coming here. I also learned a lot more about the complexities here in Israel and information on the socio-political issues and situations here which helped ease a lot of my discomfort with Israel that was due to just not understanding what's going on here.

I realized that my Judaism and my social justice and activism can all be intertwined. My social activism that I was doing back home in the US was inherently Jewish in many ways if I consider everything that I learned here about Jewish values and morals.

I've grown and changed a lot this year in so many ways that I probably won't fully understand until later in life. I feel so much more secure in who I am as a human being concerning many different facets of my identity.

How did the integration of the Israeli Mechina and International Gap Year programs influence your experience?

Being integrated with the Gap program allowed us to make deep connections and friendships between Jewish youth who come from different places with different cultures. It helped me understand the Israeli-Diaspora relationship firsthand.

Immersion with the Israeli Mechina program was fundamental to my experience here at BINA and helping me feel immersed in Israeli society. I chose BINA for many reasons, but one of them was that it was an Israeli program and I would be able to interact and live with Israelis. Also living in Shapira was so important to understanding the communities we were working with and feeling like a member of Israeli society.

Being with the Gap program enabled me to understand that the connection to Judaism is not only due to being born here in Israel...the connection to Judaism is much deeper and is rooted within us.

As an American Gap participant, living and learning with the Israelis was the most important thing to me this year and it has helped me immensely with my improvement in Hebrew and understanding the culture and the world they live in.

As an American Gap participant, being combined with the Israeli program was amazing and I could obviously not imagine this year without them. I learned from personal experience who Israelis are and what it is like to be an Israeli teenager. I got an insight into Israeli society and culture that I would never have been able to get otherwise. I also was able to learn so much more about how the army works here and what it is like to live in a country with a mandatory draft. I feel so thankful to

have had these firsthand experiences and I never thought I'd learn as much as I did or have so many Israeli friends. Being integrated with Israelis is part of what makes BINA's Gap program so unique.

Would you recommend the Mechina to your peers? Why or why not?

Unequivocally, yes. An irreplaceable and priceless year, more worthwhile than any of my 12 years of schooling. Developing and maturing and having experiences that we wouldn't have anywhere else. Learning to live in a challenging reality that builds you as a person. Most important year of my life because of what I learned, the people I met, the transformation I underwent and the person I became.

Yes, during the Mechina I significantly developed my leadership abilities. The Mechina provided me with a framework for independence, leadership and learning and I am very grateful for that. I feel that I have been able to bring this side of me to fruition and have become much more capable of making a substantial change in my environment. This year has really sharpened the importance of activism in my life and I totally see myself taking an active part in this field later. This year also taught me to ask questions and to be more involved in shaping my Jewish lifestyle in terms of how my Sabbath and holidays would look, considering ecological practices and how I plan to educate my future children.

Yes, very much. Mechina is a year of activism and social action, enrichment and expansion of mind and soul, new experiences, tremendous fun, community life and the connection of values and actions. At the Mechina you acquire tools for your Jewish identity, social action and you create meaningful and strong connections for life. In my opinion, this is the greatest gift a person who wants to develop and develop their environment can receive.

Unequivocally yes. I think that in our day-to-day life we have no time and space to deal with material questions in life, especially not Jewish questions (at least for secular people) and I think that this is an amazing place to come and explore the basis of secular Judaism and the understanding that Judaism is everyone's.