



Beit Yisrael

Kvutzat Reut

MATANEL FOUNDATION ACTIVITY REPORT Mechinat Beit Yisrael 2019-20

Name of the Program: Mechinat Beit Yisrael

Year of activity: 2019-20

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Number of active participants in the program:

There are 88 active participants in the Mechina program: 68 Shana Alef (Year 1) students in the neighborhood of Gilo, and 20 Shana Bet (Year 2) students in Armon Hanatziv. The students hail from a wide range of religious and economic backgrounds, and from all areas of Israel, including secular kibbutzim, religious settlements, cities and the periphery. This year we also had 4 students from abroad.

Estimated number of impacted participants:

The Mechina program impacts nearly 100 new participants each year through an experience shaped by exposure, discussion, study and research, and intensive volunteer work with the local community. The students' community involvement throughout the year has an enormous impact on the thousands of local children, youth, vulnerable families and senior citizens, providing support, attention and activities that empower these individuals and strengthen the resilience of the community as a whole. At the same time, the program has an active network of more than 1,000 alumni who work from within society in various sectors to promote tolerance, empowerment and social justice.

Give the actual state of the program:

Mechinat Beit Yisrael's 23rd cohort recently completed the program year. We focused our last month on reflecting on this complicated year and the many lessons we learned about ourselves and the strength of community, identifying and discussing tools we can utilize as we begin our adult lives, and wrapping up the critical neighborhood support we've been providing as a result of the pandemic. Our Year 2 students were recently drafted to elite positions in the IDF, and we wish them much success!

The main achievements during the last year of activity:

Successfully provided quality content and experiences despite Corona and the changing guidelines. When group activities were banned, our amazing teachers and staff reorganized the entire curriculum, built a new schedule, established core groups and learning partners and successfully completed the program with all of the students via Zoom, and later, with small cells of students who rotated throughout the week.

-We learned that these intimate, consistent groups added tremendous value and a sense of stability and connection during these tumultuous times.

-The virtual classes were also attended by Mechina alumni and other young community members, exposing them and our students to even greater perspectives, discussions and role models!

-We successfully completed all of our field trips while adhering to the changing guidelines, providing our students with eye-opening experiences, perspectives and insights into the challenges and opportunities facing Israeli society today.

Turning the Corona crisis into a motivator. students began to appreciate their time and impact more, working harder to make the most of the experiences and really internalizing the lessons they learned. At the conclusion of the program, when reflecting on their time here and the impact the Mechina experience had on them, the students hardly even addressed the pandemic, instead focusing on the positive things they learned and on their goals and missions for the future.

Establishing a crisis hotline and support network. when the Corona outbreak hit the city, volunteers from Beit Yisrael and the Mechina played an enormous role in easing the pressure on the most vulnerable in the Gilo neighborhood. These incredible young volunteers supported thousands of families, children and elderly residents by providing supplies, emotional support, medications and food at all hours of the day, every day, for several months.

All students successfully completed the program, and two joined in the middle. An extraordinary figure in the field of Mechinot.

The evaluation (methodology, results, conclusions for the future):

Halfway through the year, we went on a trip in the Jerusalem mountains to reflect on all we had experienced so far, including the lectures, workshops, discussions, community work and life as a group. The students also laid out their goals and expectations for the rest of the Mechina experience and beyond. The retreat left both the students and the staff with meaningful insights and plans to move forward, imbuing the group with a sense of accomplishment and motivation for the future, instilling a sense of agency and responsibility and bringing the group even closer together. Our mid-year and end-of-year evaluations continue to demonstrate that:

- The Mechina experience enhanced the meaning of Jewish and Israeli identity among students.
- The Mechina experience deepened the connection to Diaspora Jews and a sense of responsibility toward the Jewish nation as a whole.
- All Mechina students affirmed that social activism will be paramount in their lives moving forward.
- At the start of the year, the Mechina students defined their religious status under one of three categories: Orthodox, secular or traditional. At the end of the year, we see an increase in the number of students who define themselves as "without a label".
- By the end of the year, the majority of the students state that their experience of studying, living and working in a mixed group contributed to their understanding of the "other".
- The majority of students state that the community services through the Mechina provided them with a sense of purpose and practical tools to bring about social change in the future, and influenced their personal identities and perspective of their capabilities.
- All students stated that the Mechina experience proved that people from diverse backgrounds can work together for a better society.
- Students find value in joint learning with people from a range of Jewish backgrounds

We conclude that the program content and experiences continue to yield results. We see that success is very much reliant on our staff and their ability to connect with each student, guide them on their individual journeys, and to forge a group that is able to communicate respectfully and effectively while working together as a team throughout the course of the program. Experiential learning, independence, creative outlets and open, honest dialogue play an enormous role in the success of the program. Please see attached Year-end feedback questionnaire.

Short testimonies:

- A student who joined us following an anthroposophic education described an intensive process that she went through regarding her Jewish identity: “a large part of my decision to join the Mechina was to get to know Judaism better, a world I wasn’t familiar with. I realized that I actually do know this world, just explained in different words.”
- “I went through a meaningful process with myself, learned to accept myself, know myself better and genuinely like myself, and this also contributed greatly to my relationships with my family and loved ones.”
- “Throughout this year, our eyes are focused outward toward society, but also inward toward ourselves. To perfect ourselves, our feelings and our dreams, so that we can become better people and understand our role and mission in society.”
- “The freedom and independence at the Mechina led me to always take on additional responsibilities.”
- The group is an enormous gift. I was granted with a new ability to turn to others to seek connection and dialogue.”

COVID-19:

Like so many other organizations, our plans took a turn when the pandemic hit Jerusalem. Classes were cancelled, funding was lost, and some of our staff members were put on unpaid leave in order to keep the organization alive. With shortened staff and limited options, we rebuilt our curriculum and schedule to provide our students with the same level of studies, discussions and guidance they would receive on campus through Zoom meetings and remote group activities and workshops. At the same time, our strong community ties kept us at the [forefront of the crisis](#) in Gilo and Armon Hanatziv. We felt responsible for the neighborhoods, and saw first-hand some of the greatest challenges on the ground, including a desperate lack of support for thousands of resident seniors as well as the daily struggles of vulnerable families. Partnering with local authorities, our community network and Mechina students became an indispensable force, quickly setting up a Crisis Support Hotline and Whatsapp group, providing round-the-clock support and delivering more than 30,000 hot meals, food packages, medications and other critical supplies. The students report that the impact they were able to have during this crisis deepened their sense of purpose and demonstrated just how much they are capable of even, and especially in, times of uncertainty and hardship. From our perspective, we witnessed just how significant the power of community and of youth truly are in times of crisis, and were deeply moved by just how much support we were able to provide in these challenging times thanks to these wonderful young people.

Still, our organization is in a vulnerable position. During the crisis funding dropped due to the local economy and global uncertainty. It has been a challenge to maintain the same value and content for our students while understaffed and meeting the ever-shifting guidelines and restrictions. We are currently trying to plan ahead for the coming year without much information, but are confident that we will be able to meet any challenges head-on and come out even stronger.

Provisional guidelines for the advancement of the program in the next year:

Over the next year, we aim to continue to nurture the leaders of tomorrow and bolster society by maintaining stability during this tumultuous time both in terms of funding and finances and of successfully offering an outstanding and meaningful program that adheres to the changing guidelines of the MOH and MOE. Our goal is to continue to cultivate leadership skills and a sense of purpose in the next generation with a focus on both personal development and team building. Next year, we intend to focus on an exploration of identity and knowing our roots, learning from generations past and where we and our families came from in order to inform our futures. We will also expand on our understanding of the meaning of community service through personal support and guidance, as well as activists, lecturers, personal stories etc. The program will also work to develop each student’s independence, self-motivation and ability to

study and learn on their own, as well as offer new classes and lectures on the topic of communications and current affairs.

At the same time, the Mechina, our flagship program, serves as the heart and soul of a number of significant projects that we aim to continue to expand upon this year with the help of our students, alumni and community members.

This year has shown us more than ever the importance of community resilience and unity, and we see its challenges as a catalyst that will build an even brighter future for the people of Jerusalem and beyond. Watching our students graduate into the “real world” with their newfound skills, perspectives and missions is heartwarming and encouraging, especially in a time defined by uncertainty and hardship.

Like so many other organizations, the COVID-19 crisis has taken a significant toll on our finances. This year, more than ever, we are dependent on our partners’ dedication to keep this mission alive.

Please see attached Photos, Evaluation Report, Financial Report and the list of the participants to the program (as PDF documents)

Please see attached photos – as JPG files – and any link or any other document connected to the program which will seem to you relevant – as PDF document.

More relevant links:

Link to a short video about our activities during the Corona crisis-
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kYa7rnYqk&feature=youtu.be>

Link to Mechina graduation ceremony-
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p67ra0IcJYE&t=1947s>

minutes movie describing the project (while the movie should help people that don’t know the project or the association at all, understand what it is about).

Link to Mechina video- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixXL1WIVHlg>

As the end of an especially meaningful Mechina year draws to a close, we want to thank the Matanel Foundation for your incredible support of Mechinat Beit Yisrael and the leaders of tomorrow. Our partnership has had a tremendous impact on thousands of lives by nurturing a generation of compassionate, idealistic young activists, supporting those in times of crisis, and mending the very rifts in Israeli society. We are thrilled to be sharing this mission with

you.