

MATANEL FOUNDATION

ACTIVITY REPORT

Name of the Program: Yemin Orde Young Men's Leadership Program (Mechina)

Year of activity: 2019-2020

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Number of active participants in the program: 37 for 2019-2020 cohort

Estimated number of impacted participants: 37 participants + 843 graduates = 880

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

The 21st cohort of the Yemin Orde Young Men's Leadership Program started this past September, with participants coming from across Israel. Many are immigrants or first generation born, coming from lower socio-economic communities with families still struggling to adjust to life in Israel. These young men are taking the year to invest more in themselves, gaining life skills and developing a stronger connection to Israel, before serving their mandatory military service.

Going into the 2020-2021 program year, we knew it would be unprecedented due to the pandemic and we continue to face challenges; some staff or participants have ended up in quarantine and over the high holidays, the country went into a second lock down. Yet, we have found opportunities in the restrictions as well. In order to comply with the Ministry of Education regulations, staff and participants are maintaining distance and wearing masks. The group has been divided into 3 capsules with staff members assigned specifically to each one. While this has taken away somewhat from the feeling of a larger united group, the structure has allowed the staff to better know those participants they are working with, to better know when a participant is struggling and needs a bit more support.

Just as in past years, the young men are taking courses in life skills, Israeli history, geography, and navigation, exploring their identities, learning to work together in capsules - in self-governance committees, undertaking challenging hikes and boosting morale in the Hatzor HaGlalit community. These young men are meeting with Mechina graduates on Zoom to help better prepare for their mandatory army service, asking questions and learning from them.

We have also started two new initiatives for our graduates: One is that of connecting them to a diverse range of career professionals. They act as mentors for the graduates, guiding them in their university, college or vocational studies and helping them prepare and choose careers. The second is the "Life as a Graduate" workshop in which one graduate presents his field of work on Zoom to other graduates. The presenter discusses how he chose his line of work, his experiences, what one needs to do to work in such a field, etc. Topics have included investing in real estate, investment in general, hi-tech and more.

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

The 20th cohort (37 participants), of which this grant supported, graduated in June 2020 and has either gone on to serve in the army or is waiting for their official notifications of service. These are young men who were between the ages of 18 to 20 years old and came from at-risk communities across Israel.

The year got off to a great start, with everyone excited to learn, participate and focus on their dreams. They benefited from a unique educational curriculum with courses that included life skills, interview and presentation preparation, budgeting and personal finance, learning navigation and more. In preparing them for their futures, we placed a stronger emphasis on thinking about the right direction

for each and everyone's army service. The emphasis was on comprehensive exposure to a large range of positions in the military, not just the elite combat units. We wanted them to see that there are benefits to other positions allowing them to achieve the best possible use of their skills and have a meaningful service. To prepare our young men for beyond service, we spent more time pushing them to consider next steps after the military; community college, university or certificate programs for vocational professions. Our aim was for participants to not just focus on the next three years but the next five to eight years, having them envision and then layout the steps needed to achieve their dreams.

As immigrants and children of immigrants, our participants are often in conflict with their cultural, national, and religious identities. We therefore created chances for these young men to learn about themselves and their relationship to the diverse communities within Israel. One event was that of Identity Week. The focus was on one's heritage, focusing especially on the different backgrounds represented by the program participants. They focused on the heroism of the Ethiopian community, starting with those who trekked through Sudan to get to Israel. Discussion was opened up to understand what it means to be part of other communities in Israel, such as Russian or Moroccan (representing other participant's backgrounds.) The young men pushed each other to recognize and appreciate their differences and similarities, creating a very provocative but mature discourse.

Holidays are special times at the Mechina and last year was no different. Celebrations for the Ethiopian holiday of Sigd have become a true tradition with the Hatzor HaGlalit community. Participants put in numerous hours and effort to organize a memorable day that was fun, educational and entertaining for everyone. It included a parade from the center of town to the Mechina, an official ceremony with town leadership and an exhibition of Ethiopian Jewish heritage with food, music and dancing. We were also glad to see the number of graduates who showed up, with some representing elite military units who, a few years ago, were struggling personally. Right before corona developed across Israel, the Mechina celebrated Purim. Even with the looming lock down, our young men planned as best they could. They visited elementary schools to perform skits and do activities with the local children. They organized a smaller scale Purim Carnival at the Mechina, bringing their positive outlook and high spirits to everyone who attended.

Tikkun Olam activities are a central component of the Mechina. Our participants develop a sense of responsibility and obligation to the local community as well as to larger society, understanding what it means to give back and make a difference. Over the course of last year, our young men were very active volunteering in Hatzor HaGlilit; serving as big brothers for local school children, volunteering in after-school programs, in an absorption center helping immigrant children practice Hebrew, helping senior citizens in any way possible and so much more.

When the corona pandemic hit, most participants had to return home according to government regulations. However, some were allowed to live on-site due to various personal reasons during the lock down. The Mechina turned to the mayor of Hatzor HaGlilit to offer assistance in helping maintain the wellbeing of the residents. These young men assisted with the cleaning and maintenance of homes where the elderly or disabled lived, distributed food packages and delivered medicine. After Passover, the Ministry of Education and Health approved the return of all participants. With more young men available to help, a meeting was organized with the mayor and his staff to figure out the best use of our participants for the benefit of the community. Then our young men took charge; over 24 hours they mapped out and contacted 800 seniors to see what was needed. In order to comply with regulations they were divided into three separate groups. They delivered food baskets and hot meals to families in need and the elderly, assisted with delivering groceries and medicines, did activities with children with special needs to give families a bit of a break and helped other local children and teens with school work. Their actions made such a positive impact on the lives of local residents that a local newspaper wrote a story about their volunteering and their efforts were recognized in a commemorative ceremony with the mayor and other officials of Hatzor HaGlilit.

The Mechina's director noted that the volunteering went above and beyond expectations, using the concept of Tikkun Olam to give back to those less fortunate, making our participants leaders. He spoke to the fact that even though the survival hike and other activities were canceled, the

volunteering throughout Hatzor HaGlilit was a significant and central element in shaping the personalities of this cohort.

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

The shorter-term impact is ultimately measured by the transformation and maturity of the participants while in the program. By the end of the program year, we expect to see that these young men have increased self-confidence and the ability to overcome obstacles, that they have internalized the skills taught in courses and can utilize these skills, that they are more knowledgeable about Israeli society and have developed a sense of belonging, that they feel committed to their community and broader society. These are measured by regular one-on-one and group meetings with the young men, tracking how they believe they are progressing.

The longer-term impact is seen after graduation, when they move on to the next stage of their lives. The Mechina provides its 800+ graduates with a close-knit support system where they can receive guidance and support when needed. Over the years, their outstanding achievements reflect the impact of this program.

- In their mandatory military service, 80% of our graduates have served in combat positions while 30% have risen to leadership roles, including that of officers. When taking into account 80% of our population comes from the Ethiopian Israeli community, these numbers are even more encouraging for our graduates.
- Eleven of our graduates have received the prestigious President's Outstanding Soldier Award, an honor which only 120 recipients receive each year nationwide.

Over the years, the success of our graduates in the military has served to open doors for the newer cohorts. The IDF is now willing to overlook test results, which may disqualify our at-risk population from certain roles and rely on the placement recommendations of our staff. This has been an important impact of the program. We also work with many of our graduates to guide them towards opportunities for higher education and vocational training, allowing them to fulfill their potential in the professional world. We are proud of our achievements, including:

- 41% of our graduates between the ages of 30 to 33 are working towards or achieved some level of higher education, as compared to only 8% of Ethiopian Israeli men in the general population of the same age group.
- Each year, around 50 of our graduates receive scholarships to study in higher education, mainly for degrees and certifications in the STEM fields.

Provisional guide lines for the advancement of the program in the next year:

Over this program year, the most pressing challenge is ensuring the safety and security of the 2020-2021 cohort and the staff. We are continually working to ensure that the structure of the program remains as consistent as possible while complying with any government guidelines. While there are activities allowed: courses, hikes, day trips, others have been put on hold: volunteering directly with the local population, organizing large holiday events like Sigd, meeting graduates face-to-face. We are working within three capsules and will continue this structure for as long as needed. Those who must be in quarantine are not allowed on site until the quarantine period is over.

We are extremely concerned about our graduates, as this year has been tough, especially for those who have recently finished the army and have yet to make the next step in their lives. They are navigating young adulthood while facing lockdowns, uncertainty and seeing their families in even more dire economic situations. We have been in contact with them and will remain in contact, providing guidance in making life decisions and considering options for their futures as well as helping them navigate government bureaucracy and find ways to receive stipends and/or financial assistance.

Movie:

With English subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqNLpPII760&feature=youtu.be>

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Financial Report pdf

List of participants and stories pdf

Photos in JPG format and Article from Yediot Aharonot