

# *MATANEL FOUNDATION*

## *ACTIVITY REPORT*

**Program:** Tzahali Academy

**Year:** 2020-21 5781

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

**Name of the Program:** Tzahali Academy

**Year of activity:** 2020-21 (5781)

**Name of the report's writer:** Dr. Gary Coleman

**Function of the report's writer:** Director of Resource Development

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**Number of active participants in the program:** 67 young women graduates of religious high schools

**Estimated number of impacted participants:** About 1050 people when include the families of the participants, the residents of Kibbutz Ein Tzurim, the families that the young women volunteered with during the year, participants of other Mechinot that Tzahali met with, Tzahali alumni and potential participants, and their peers at Midreshet Roni, in the army, sherut leumi, and other walks of life.

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

Tzahali as a program is now on break. The fifteenth year ended at the end of June and year sixteen will begin September 1. The 67 participants are getting ready to join the Israeli army, better prepared, with greater motivation, and a better understanding of whom they are and their mission. The staff is spending this season (July and August) reviewing and evaluating the year, planning for the upcoming year based on what they learned from the review and evaluation, and training new staff. They are also taking some vacation time after finishing an intense and successful year. Dealing with both coronavirus and Guardian of the Walls operation, as mentioned later, added to both the intensity and the success. There will be 79 young women starting the 16<sup>th</sup> year of the Mechina on September 1.

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

As in every year since Tzahali was founded fifteen years ago, the year was extremely busy; complete with all types of activities, experiences, and leadership opportunities as well as personal, social, group, and educational challenges.

The 67 participants opened the year in Elul with an evening of spiritual and emotionally rich Slichot. During the year, the regular learning included Torah,

Halacha, Midrash, Chasidut, Talmud, Prayer, and Jewish Philosophy. Prior to each Chag they learned about the Holiday and organized a special program.

Learning at Tzahali also occurs beyond the walls of the Beit Midrash and what is written in books. An important and unique educational feature of the mechina is the emphasis on "group living". Each participant is part of a group, which sustains independent group life. They live in their own dormitory; have their own kitchen and dining hall, educational staff, and classrooms. Each student is active within her group and together (taking turns and in teams) they are responsible for running the kitchen, buying the food, preparing the meals, cleaning, planning and implementing social activities for themselves and the kibbutz, as well as Shabbat and special activities.

Much thought and time is spent teaching skills of conversation (sensitive talking and empathetic listening) and the skills needed for successful group living. Each person reflects on her own values leading to both personal and group growth. These skills and experiences are very important for today's high school graduates to learn, especially as preparation for army service.

Because of COVID-19 that was with us for the entire year and the Guardians of the Wall operation towards the end of the year (Ein Tzurim is slightly more than 20 kilometers from Gaza), we needed to make certain changes to the program. The learning for much of the year was in "capsulot" (small groups) and volunteering opportunities had to change. Trips to learn about the various groups who make up Israeli society and their challenges were one day excursions, until after Pesach, instead of multiple days with sleeping off campus. The participants stayed on campus for longer periods including more Shabbatot.

The year was emotionally very difficult for the participants, but through the work of our excellent staff, the challenge of this unique year brought the young women closer together and made the experience a growing one and unforgettable. We saw this through the Judaic learning component of Tzahali which was very intensive throughout the year and the internal programming the young women did together. Both of these were excellent as they greeted the challenges of Corona and the Gaza operation and found ways to make their time more meaningful.

Besides the learning and internal activity, they found special volunteer opportunities including; calling senior adults, working in agriculture, helping in afternoon day care programs, working with children at risk, cleaning up nature areas, organizing three blood drives, calling new immigrants to practice Hebrew, preparing and delivering plants to seniors living alone on Ein Tzurim, cleaning apartments of senior adults and families in need prior to Pesach, painting outside stand-alone safety shelters at communities in the area, organizing and running a fair that sold second hand items in the Shafir regional council, phone calls to and hearing the stories of members of the pre State Palmach military unit, cleaning the Azrikim forest, cleaning safety shelters in Ashdod so they could be used during the Guardian of the Walls operation, and preparing food packages for people in need.

All of this brought greater group cohesion and the time was used effectively for continued growth and preparation for their drafting into the Israel Defense Forces. In preparation for the army, the students had a number of special workshops including one about suicide prevention and choosing life and another about sexual harassment.

In addition, they heard lectures about battle legacy (מורשת קרב) and had discussions with army officers about the importance of army service and different army roles and assignments. The students also received spiritual and Halachic preparation for army service from the teachers at Tzahali.

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

Please refer to the separate Evaluation Report

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

There will be about 79 young women starting the 16<sup>th</sup> year of the Mechina on September 1.

During this upcoming year, Tzahali Academy will continue to be an intensive experience. The participants will be involved in multiple areas of study and immersion including:

- In-depth, existential and relevant Jewish Studies
- Preparing themselves emotionally, mentally, and physically for meaningful army service.
- Understanding Israeli society through meaningful dialogue with its different groups including four multiple day educational excursions to different areas in Israel
- Volunteer community social action activity

The participants are responsible for their daily schedule and prepare special programming including the "excursion/trips."

We are considering opening an additional group for Tzahali in September 2022 or 2023.