

Ofaqim LeMada - Pre Military Science Program:

Trainees' Testimonies

Please find below six trainees' testimonies, who are currently participating in the 2021 program.

1. Aviv Shmueli

Hi, I'm Aviv Shmueli. I'm in Pre-military college called "Ofaqim Lemada". On the program we study a variety of scientific fields like: biology, physics, chemistry and ecology. I really wanted to come to "Ofaqim Lemada" because of the volunteering, I think that the work that we do with the children of Ofaqim is irreplaceable and the outcome of it is so big and significant to the growth of the children and their adult life.

On the program, aside of scientific fields we also study about the Israeli community and it's aspects. I think that the knowledge and the insights that we get as part of the program are very important to the rest of our life in Israel.

The program has got me wanting to do more for the community. I want to put activism on top of my scale of values, because I think that every man and woman who wants to be significant in the community and society needs to do volunteer work and give back to the community.

2. Shoham Cohen

I've always loved science. As a child I remember reading a lot of science books and bothering the science teachers with a ton of questions after class. I chose to major in physics and biology in high school and I know for certain I'll do something science oriented when I'll grow up.

I stumbled upon the program when I entered a zoom presenting pre-military programs and instantly knew I wanted to be there. Somehow I got accepted in and I'm so glad I did.

Every second Sunday of our two week stay period we go to Davidson Institute and meet researchers and listen to the wonderful lecture of Dr.Liat Ben David, and my favorite part- the science study hall in which we meet Phd students and analyze a research paper in small group. In these meetings I feel like I'm involved with true science and not the simplified version I was taught in school.

We also teach the Davidson institute's educational programs at school in Ofaqim and host science field days at the science and technology center in Ofaqim. It's very challenging but super rewarding me and my team works really hard on each lesson, and we learn a lot from them, about how to manage a classroom and being flexible.

Besides the scientific part we have weekly lessons about judaism, zionism, gender, democracy and about the Israeli society in general. Those are not my favorite if I'm honest, but they teach me things beyond my standard high school education and makes me feel more connected to the country I live in.

I met amazing people in the program that are very dear to me and learned a lot from them, I think I'm growing as a person and that's very exciting.

3. Yuval Gurfinkel

I decided to join the program because I loved the idea of multidisciplinary learning. The combination of studying science and humanities together was something I loved because of the freedom to enjoy all worlds and not choose between them.

Ever since I began the program I've gained some amazing experiences. I volunteer twice a week in the public high school in Ofaqim. We help the students with their studies while focusing on the social aspects and creating really special bonds.

Further more, the people here are exceptional and I believe the friendships I've gained will be a great part of my adult life.

I'm so happy I've joined the program, and I believe it has given me a place to become gradually independent and gain tools that will help me later in adulthood.

4. Adi Shatisiany

I wanted to join the program because I felt like I was given many opportunities other people around me didn't get. I wanted to make a difference and give others the same opportunity to be curious and feel confident about their academic abilities, especially in the field of science.

I like the concept of living together as a group. We make many decisions together and we help and support each other in times of need. We work together to make the program a better place. Every project here is done in a team, so I get to work in many different teams and to know different people.

I really like my volunteering days in the school. I volunteer in Eshkol, which is a region very close to Gaza, so it's residents deal with rocket attacks and fires. I

volunteer at the local middle school and I feel I have created a very meaningful connection with several students.

I believe the program is giving me the space I need to develop and prepare myself for my IDF service. I get to live independently, far from home for the first time and I deal with many challenges. Overall, I feel the program has given me an opportunity I wouldn't have gotten anywhere else.

5. Yona Schimmel-Wurzbarger

My name is Yona and I live in Jerusalem. I am at the moment in "mechinat ofaqim". Mechina in Hebrew means "preparing" and it is a program that prepares you for the army.

I chose to come to this mechina for a few reasons. I did not feel ready to go into the army right after high school. I did not feel like I had the proper maturity and growth that I needed. I thought this mechina was the right one for me because it had a few key characteristics that I liked. We have people of all genders, and many differences in the religious side.

The specific part of this mechina is that it is a science mechina. We are a part of the Davidson institute. This comes into play in a few ways. Once every two weeks we go to the Weizmann institute. We get scientific lectures, talks with people who are getting a PhD in science. In addition we have science classes in our home base.

In addition we volunteer in Ofaqim. (the city where we are based) It is a poor city, thus it does not get equal access to science education. Therefore, we go twice a week and volunteer. This is

A: fun

B: a helpful experience for us. We learn how to teach , and to engage with young kids

C: we get young kids to engage with science, and try to make it "cool" and "fun".

This Mechina has made me a more responsible person. I learn how to live out of home, to live with other people, who are non necessarily like me and I learn responsibility over my actions.

6. Eitan Weiss

My name is Eitan Weiss. I switched to that program from another program a few months into the year. I've always been a science nerd. I am greatly enjoying my time here surrounded by people striving for growth and immersed in giving back to the community in a scientifically oriented environment.

This Tuesday, I volunteered at "Ashalim", an elementary school in Ofaqim. We gave a lesson about forensic techniques, specifically fingerprint identification. We gave out little pieces of glass, had the children rub a fingerprint on it, and dipped it in cocoa powder to make the pattern more visible.

The students loved it and were participating enthusiastically. Well, all except one - Lian. I was confused. Normally, she is a very participative student, this was very unlike her. I asked her if anything happened, but she didn't respond. I asked the teacher, her friend sitting next to her, no one knew.

I continued the lesson, keeping an eye on her. She kept her head down, sulking. After the lesson I sat down next to her and asked her, "What's wrong? Did someone say something mean? Did anything happen during recess?"

"No"

"So what's wrong?"

"I ruined it, the whole thing..." she responded sadly. Her fingerprint had rubbed off and the cocoa powder was just a blotch on the glass. I responded- "We can

fix it!" I washed the smudged fingerprint off, she rubbed a new fingerprint on and dipped it in the cocoa powder. As the glass emerged with the fingerprint clearly showing outlined, immediately her mood improved. She gave me a smile to melt a snowman and skipped out to recess.

I'm here for those moments. Making a students day, making them excited about science.