Desert Stars
Summer 2022
Voluntary Report

نجوم الصحراء
כוכבי המדבר
DESERT STARS

Achievements and Successes

Historic Groundbreaking

After more than three years of planning, on April 11, 2022 we broke ground on our Jusidman Campus for Bedouin Leadership. Over 600 attended this historic milestone – Bedouins and Jews, government ministers, Knesset members, heads of local authorities and heads of tribes – all came together to support Desert Stars and the path we are creating. Infrastructure and earthworks will be completed in August 2022, after which building construction will immediately commence. We expect to open our doors in Fall 2023.

We have raised 85% and are currently looking for our final partners to take us over the finish line. With your support, the youth village will be a reality!

Meeting with Israel's President, Isaac Herzog

When President Herzog planned a trip to the Negev to inaugurate a new cultural center in Rahat, he invited our gap year participants for a special audience where they could ask him questions and share some of what they are learning at Desert Stars.

Biennale Education Conference

In May, Desert Stars was chosen to present our educational model at the 'Education of the Future' Biennale Conference. This special event was organized by the OECD and brought guests from around the world to learn from innovative models. Our alumni presented the educational process they went through, and recorded a special podcast for the Biennale. Attendees eagerly spoke with our alumni to hear how our programs influenced their lives and encouraged them to pursue new goals in education and dream big for the future.

Forbes 30 under 30 – Europe, Middle East and Africa

Desert Stars was invited to the exclusive Forbes 30 under 30 Summit in Tel Aviv this May. This 3 day summit brought young leaders from over 40 countries to Israel to exchange ideas and learn from one another. We are honored that Forbes sees Desert Stars as a leading organization for social change.

Student Leadership

Mohammed Al Krenawi, graduate of our 2019 Leadership Incubator, was recently chosen to serve as Ben Gurion University's Coordinator for Arab Students. In this role, he will be able to influence how the university and its 19,000 students engage with its Arab students and faculty, based on Desert Stars values.

Our Stars Exemplifying Leadership

We are proud to see our graduates demonstrating social responsibility, initiative and grassroots leadership in response to troubling current events. One such example was our graduates' reaction to the shooting at "Café Café" in Rahat. The shooting was motivated by opposition to women working at the restaurant in the evenings. The day after the event, around 20 of our alumni mobilized and came together to help clean and organize the café for reopening. They additionally provided the owners with moral support, and called on local residents to support the business, in a firm and clear statement against violence.

Coexistence in Action – Joint Iftar-Mimuna with Hagar

This year, the Jewish Moroccan holiday of Mimuna coincided with Ramadan. Desert Stars, in partnership with Hagar Bi-lingual School, organized a large scale Mimuna-Iftar celebration of coexistence at Be'er Sheva's Turkish Railroad Station Complex. Hundreds of Jews and Bedouins came together to celebrate. Our graduates were instrumental in planning and carrying out the event.

Our Brand New Youth Movement

We have just completed our first year of activity for the 'Forsan' youth movement. 140 middle school students in 4 locations spent the year learning how unconditional giving and volunteering in their communities can enrich their lives. Our end of the year survey demonstrated the effectiveness of the program:

- 91% want to continue volunteering in their village
- 84% say it greatly strengthened their self confidence
- 85% learned how to take responsibility for what happens in their surroundings.

Challenges

Growing through Difficult Periods

This past spring was marked by difficult events – riots over land disputes, multiple shooting incidents within the Bedouin community, raids, and worst of all, the terrorist wave that began in Be'er Sheva. At Desert Stars, we believe that only through deeply engaging with these difficult issues can we progress as a society. Following each disturbing event, each of our programs took time to discuss these issues in depth. In addition to the public condemnation of such events, Desert Stars modeled social responsibility, activism and leadership when we hosted a Conference for Future Leaders the week after the Be'er Sheva attack. We invited Jewish and Bedouin gap year leadership programs from across the Negev for a constructive dialogue on promoting mutual respect and to begin building a better future.

Corona's Lingering Effects

While many feel that we have learned to live with Corona, as an educational institution we see that the crisis is still affecting our students – academically, socially, economically and mentally. Nearly 2 years of distance learning and forced isolations have left gaps that we are working hard to overcome. We have invested in tutors, home visits, one on one conversations with various mentors, trips, and summer camp to meet these needs.

Leadership High School

Last month, 55 students graduated from our Leadership High School, our largest class to date. They have transitioned into our alumni program, which will guide them through the next few years as they navigate higher education, becoming leaders in their community, and their eventual careers.

Bridge to Academia

Three of our high school students graduated with honors from the "Gesher" Academic program in partnership with Ben Gurion University (BGU) in Be'er Sheva. This three year program prepares high achieving students for integration into university and will allow them to begin studies immediately after completing high school. Each week the students spent time at BGU, where they studied academic writing, research, and high level Hebrew and English. They were additionally able to sit in on courses in topics they are interested in, tour the campus, and meet fellow students.

Excellence Inside & Outside of the Classroom

This Spring, in addition to formal studies, English teacher Dahash Elbaz led his 9th-10th grade students in a months-long Amazon Hackathon for technological innovation. Our students designed an app (in English!) to improve the lives of young adults with autism. Of the 43 schools competing, ours was the only Bedouin school to participate, and made it to the top 10 nationwide! Students further honed their English and technological skills through after school activities including learning how to operate drones, build websites, graphic design, even space exploration.

The hackathon was not our only team competing at the national level. Our SpaceLab research club won 3rd place out of over 40 participating schools at competition in the North. The schools cycling team won 2nd place nationally in a special race for shared society teams. These activities promote social skill such as self-confidence and teamwork, as well as values such as striving for excellence and mutual respect.

Forsan

Knights of the Desert Youth Movement

Last month, over 70 participants from Arara, Rahat, and Hura came on a special overnight trip to Northern Israel. It was the first time they had ever been away from their families overnight. Such a trip could never have been dreamed of even at the beginning of the year! Forsan Director Kamal Alsibi credits the program's investment in parent outreach in creating this level of trust. Throughout the year, parents were invited to monthly volunteering activities, and special workshops were held for mothers and fathers for unique bonding opportunities with their children. One mother shared, "My son has never been excited about anything before! He looks forward to these activities so much – it's making him more responsible, more self-confident, even more helpful at home."

Market for the community

One of the highlights of the year was the traveling 'marketplace' the children organized. We publicized a huge call for donations from both Jewish and Bedouin communities. We picked up donations from over a dozen cities and villages across the Negev. Our stars sorted through all donations and chose the best pieces to be featured in the marketplace. They then made flyers and publicized the marketplace, which journeyed from city to city. In partnership with the local welfare offices, families in need were invited to buy clothes, games, bags, shoes and more in great condition for a symbolic price

To donate toys, clothes, bags and other items in great condition, please contact Kamal or Efrat.

Reidat

Women's Leadership and Empowerment Program

29 young women completed the year of leadership, which equipped them with the toolbox they needed to become young, educated and influential leaders in the future of the Negev.

Employment Day

In Bedouin society, women are told from a young age that if they want to work, they should be teachers. While teaching is a noble profession, it isn't the only one! One of the barriers to diversifying employment is a lack of knowledge of potential professions. To conclude their year-long course "Get out to work" with Sharon Yovu, Reidat spent the day at Kibbutz Hatzerim learning about potential careers from mentors in 10 different fields, including: paramedical, marketing, management, finance and human resources. Our stars previously indicated their preferences and then met with a mentor for an intimate conversation about what their day to day life is like, and what type of training is needed for that career. They then participated in mock interviews and left feeling excited and ready to begin working towards their careers.

Influencing Decision Makers

In May, representatives from Reidat Women's Empowerment Program, together with graduates of the Leadership and Entrepreneurship Incubator, participated in a Knesset discussion held by the Committee for the Eradication of Violence in Arab Society. Throughout the year, these young women learned about Israeli democracy, the role of the Knesset and the importance of influencing decision-makers through social activism. This visit gave them first-hand experience to parliamentary procedures and confirmed what they've been learning all year long - that even at their young age, their opinions matter, and can influence even the highest levels of Israeli society. Our stars used to forum to speak about the importance in investing in education to solve the root causes of violence.

Holiday Spirit – at Soroka!

In honor of Eid Al Fitr, celebrating the end of the holy month of Ramadan, our stars were inspired to embody the theme of giving through a special volunteering initiative at Soroka Hospital. They collected donations from friends, family and staff to buy presents and surprises for patients in the children's ward. They brought much joy and laughter to both Bedouin and Jewish children.

Social Entrepreneurship

Creating a Better Future

Over the course of the year, the young men and women in our gap year leadership programs spent over 150 hours in an intensive social entrepreneurship course to acquire the tools and skills that will enable them to become active and involved leaders in their community. Our stars divided into small teams, and together identified needs in their communities, brainstormed solutions and built a workplan. They then recruited partners and carried out an impressive list of meaningful social initiatives, which included: Road safety education for kindergarteners, a series of meetings to prevent home accidents with elementary schoolers; meetings to connect Jewish and Bedouin high school students in the Negev, a sustainability awareness campaign and distribution of reusable shopping bags; connecting teens with the elderly to teach them how to use technology; employment workshops for 12th graders, trips for children with special needs, and more.

Leadership Incubator Gap Year Program

A cohesive and skilled group of determined and talented young people from all over the Negev have completed a life-changing leadership program - full of values, motivation and social responsibility, they are moving to the alumni program on their way to becoming the future leaders of the Negev.

Learn, Implement, and Thrive Outdoors

Each year, the Incubator beings with a two month period of wilderness, strenuous hiking and ODT skills. This challenging period bonds the group together, encouraging stars to leave their comfort zone and develop their self-confidence and independence while learning new skills. Throughout the year, out stars continue to develop these skills under various circumstances, including Winter Survival Week and a navigation course. At the end of the year, they apply everything they've learned and plan a week in the wilderness entirely by themselves. Our stars choose the area, the routes, and are in charge of all of the logistics – including equipment and food. This year's group chose to spend the week traveling across Ramat HaGolan.

Developing Relationships with Jewish Peers

Throughout the year, the incubator held a series of meetings with students from Nachshon Gap Year Program – an academy for social leadership in the Negev. This enabled the groups to get to know each other on a deep level while learning how 'the other' experienced their lives in the Negev. The groups took turns visiting each other, traveled together, and formed enduring friendships. The activities were so successful the Incubator reached out to another Jewish preparatory program, Chevruta, to visit us in the Negev to learn about Bedouin society. Chevruta reciprocated by inviting the incubator to their campus when our stars visited Jerusalem as part of 'Israel as a Democratic State' seminar week. They then together organized an activity to learn about multiculturalism in Israel.

Graduates Program

On the Way Up

Even for the most ambitious leaders, the road to the top is fraught with obstacles which might seem overwhelming. In March, graduates were invited to a 3 day seminar in the North to learn solutions for overcoming such challenges. These could be in one's personal life, opposition to one's choices from family or the community, or the intricacies of politics. The seminar combined physical challenges on the Israel trail with valuable content, all led by veteran graduates and Desert Stars staff.

"Almajhar" – Putting Issues Under the Microscope

Throughout the year, our Graduates Center in Be'er Sheva held a series of meetings to discuss various issues relating to life of Arab-Bedouin society in the Negev. Speakers included our founder and chairman, Dr Mohammed Al Nabari, as well as CEO Yousef Abu Jaffar, Knesset member Yair Golan, and entrepreneur Itzik Zion. In each session, the graduates put a different challenge or topic "under the lens of the microscope" (in Arabic - al-Majhar), and discussed various aspects of the issue, different points of view and most importantly - responsible and proactive approaches to improving them.

Female Leadership

With 2 cohorts of Reidat graduates excited to continue their growth, this year our Graduates Center began to produce content exclusively for them (of course in addition to the ongoing opportunities open to all graduates!) These sessions explored identity and leadership through a feminist lens. Additionally, we launched the 'Female Leadership' program – a series of meetings that address the role of female leadership in Bedouin society with a rotating guest lectures from successful female role models. These lectures were complemented with leadership development workshops and discussion circles led by our staff.

Organizational Updates

Organizational Learning Day focused on Identity

In March we held an organizational Learning Day focused on Identity. The day opened by dividing our staff of 70 into small groups for intimate discussions about our Organizational ID regarding identity and nationalism. We then heard from speakers from 'One Family' – a bereavement support group for Jews and Palestinians who have lost family members to the conflict. The speakers inspired us by their ability to listen to other narratives and choose to pursue peace, even after suffering the most painful tragedy at the hands of 'the other.' We then split into groups to begin a workplan to better incorporate these themes into each of our programs.

A Network that Transcends Tribes and Sectors

Mabruk! This May, Mahmud Abu Kreinat, a Desert Stars graduate and current counselor of our Leadership Program, got married. Wedding guests were amazed when his friends from Desert Stars, young people from more than 20 tribes and localities from all across the Negev, as well as Jewish colleagues, came to his unrecognized village to celebrate. Graduates Network Director, Adam Al-Assad, was overcome with emotion as he watched a Desert Stars graduate distribute coffee and sweets to guests from a tribe that Adam knows his family has a longstanding blood feud with. "You simply never see things like that. It can only happen here, with Desert Stars. And it's an immensely powerful thing."

Spotlight:

Meet Mustafa Al-Sana

Extracurricular and Empowerment Center Coordinator for 9th and 10th graders at the Desert Stars High School.

"Before the program, I was a kid who always dreamed of creating change. I wanted to do something big, something that would change the world – but I didn't find a role model for how to do this. When I found Desert Stars, my world opened up. I received so many tools, and my perception changed. It provided a space for me to share what I think."

Mustafa Al-Sana, 25, graduated from our first ever leadership program in 2014. Today, Mustafa, the youngest of 10 siblings, is an undergraduate student in the Shalvim Program, which combines informal education and history. Mustafa also works as the Extracurricular and Empowerment Center Coordinator for 9th and 10th graders at the Desert Stars High School.

Mustafa is very active in our Alumni Network, and loves to initiate new projects. This Spring, Mustafa invited our 8 "Shinshinim" (Jewish gap year volunteers) and their families to his family's Shig, or traditional Bedouin tent, in Lakia. He gave an in depth tour of his village, teaching his guests about the local population, their culture, and important current events and conflicts that affect his neighbors.

Seeing the lack of employment for women in his village, Mustafa began a social initiative to provide local women with an income. These women sell traditional Bedouin food at affordable prices for events and celebrations, and Mustafa helps them find customers and facilitates the logistics – without taking even a shekel for himself.

Mustafa fulfills the vision of Desert Stars on a daily basis – educating younger generations of both Bedouins and Jews, while constantly volunteering and initiating projects for the betterment of the community.

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Thank you!

For any information about our activity, please contact

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If you'd like to support our activities

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