

Village Way Educational Initiatives

Report to the FYO Board

November 2019

Our current efforts include working **with 7 new educational communities for the 2019-2020 year**. For our current five-year plan of reaching 31 communities, this brings us to 25 communities, with the plan to add an additional 6 communities next year.

This brings our total number of partners to 55 educational frameworks, **bringing our impact to approximately 2,540 educators and 22,000 youth at risk from across the different sectors of society**. These numbers reflect those that have benefitted from direct, long-term training with the Village Way. If we were to add all of those directly or indirectly impacted by the Village Way through our additional activities, such as with the Security Forces, Ministry of Education, and in academia, we would be able to quote more than double these numbers of impact.

Strategic Plan

We will be presenting the next five-year strategic plan at the upcoming board meeting. Our team in Israel has been working intensely on this planning process, focused on developing the most effective plan for expanded impact within the framework of our mission and vision. The process has involved internal sessions with our professional team, as well as working with leaders within the Village Way movement, our Israeli board of Village Way Educational Initiatives, and with the FYO executive committee.

The resulting strategic plan is ambitious, yet also remains realistic. We are confident that we have built the organizational capacity to execute the plans for expansion, while retaining the highest level of professional quality that our partners have come to expect from our organization. We are excited for the opportunities that this plan outlines for growth and expansion.

As our committed partners, we look forward to hearing your feedback on this plan.

Impact in Educational Communities

As we enter into partnerships with new educational communities each year, and the Village Way integration process unfolds over time, we see the impact of the Village Way on yet another group of deserving young people from the social, economic, and geographic periphery of Israel. We have the great privilege of working with educators, who we call nation-builders, and to partner with them on a significant journey towards becoming more professional and more authentic educators. Time and again we hear from these educators that Village Way has given them a holistic outlook from which to operate, as well as practical tools, and that it has helped them develop stronger relationships with the children. With every additional community that is impacted by our work, we continue to prove the relevance and effectiveness of the Village Way methodology and integration process. Not only do we get to expand the circle of deserving

youth who are impacted, it is vital to our mission and to the level of our professionalism, to go out into the field, form new partnerships, and hear from a new group of veteran educators that there is a true need for the Village Way methodology, which is making a significant change in their work.

Each of the educational communities that partner with us benefit from a three-year Village Way integration process. Each community is matched with its own facilitator from the Educational Institute and is provided with **its own detailed, tailor-made integration work plan**, which is designed to meet the needs, challenges, and characteristics of their community.

The learning sessions provide educators, as individuals and as a team, with the unique opportunity to reflect on their work, to open up on important issues, and to work together to develop solutions to their most pressing problems. Feedback on the importance of this aspect of the process has included the following:

At Psagot Ort High School in Migdal HaEmek. Karina, the school guidance counselor, shared: *"The process we went through in the last year made us more serious, and when we take ourselves more seriously, we demand more of others. We now have a lot more stability and strength to carry out our work."* Chana, an educator on the leading team, shared, *"I have been in education for 10 years and have heard so many speakers and consultants in that time, and nothing else has come close to our work with the Village Way."*

"The facilitation that we have received has been so important to this process. The process with our facilitator has kept us focused on what is important, it keeps us asking the right questions about our work. We can't just stay on auto-pilot, we can't just put out fires, we have to stay focused on our values, what is important, and keep developing and getting better." Yehudit Levy, Director, **ORT Ktziney Yam Ashdod Youth Village**.

"The Village Way has allowed us to look inward in a way that we have not been able to up to now." Fadila, the Principal of **Naamat Ein Mahal High School**

"I want to thank you for your wonderful partnership. You are such a resource for me and this school, and it is a pleasure to learn from you and your rich experience. From the day we began working together, our students and staff have only benefitted from this experience." Principal Dror Levy, **Amal Energy Tech High School** wrote to his Village Way facilitator.

On a communal level, The Village Way integration process has an impact on the traditions, programs, and policies of each educational community. Each community working with the Village Way writes an annual work plan, which includes a wide range of educational programs that meet the need of their kids and reflect the Village Way methodology. **Below are just a few of the new programs developed this past year:**

ORT Ormat High School is in its third year of the Village Way integration process. At the beginning of the year, the Village Way facilitator worked with staff to organize a graduates' panel for the school staff, to hear straight from former students about their experiences at the school and beyond. One graduate, Sa'ar, shared: *"At a regular school I felt like an outsider, they convinced me before that nothing would become of me. When I came to Ormat I had the most amazing educators in the world, I felt that you were seeing me."* This event was a great way to kick off the school's new graduate support program, which is being developed together

with the Village Way facilitator.” Miri, the school principal, shared, “ *We as a staff got to hear from former students, hear the feedback looking back on their time as students, which teachers so rarely get to hear. It gives the staff so much strength. And the graduates – we could not believe how excited they were to come speak to us and how much they wanted to share, and the ideas they gave for our graduate work in the future. And we know this is just the beginning.*”

At **Naamat Ein Mahal**, a high school in the Arab sector, is their second year in the Village Way integration process. Last year the school launched a Young Chef Program, intended to empower students with skills and self-confidence, teach them about their traditions, and also give back to the community. Students learned cooking skills, and also learned how to make traditional Arab dishes. At the end of the year, these students utilized these skills for a local Tikkun Olam activity and went to visit a retirement home in the village with the food they had made. The staff was very surprised about how the students were behaving while there: “*We couldn’t believe how polite they were, how respectful in their interactions with the older people there. We saw a completely different side of our students come out in this environment.*” The school is working to expand this program and its Tikkun Olam component this year.

Zoharim is a youth village for boys who have dropped out of ultra-orthodox frameworks. Last year, they created an Introspection Room, a space where boys are sent after a behavioral issue. This is instead of sending them home, or another kind of punishment, and allows boys to stay within the framework but be removed to a different place for an important process. The room is outfitted with equipment to help the youngsters get out aggression and take time for self-reflection. While there, whether for a few hours, or even overnight, each child must go through an introspective process about his feelings and actions, and this process continues after leaving the room and returning to life at the Village. This program was presented to other educational communities at an Intercommunity Forum meeting last year, and served as an inspiration for similar programs at additional communities.

The 12th grade students and staff at **Amal Energy Tech High School** in Hadera kicked off their year with a three-day outdoor excursion in the desert. This Village Way partner high school was inspired by Yemin Orde’s “*Etgar*” Challenge Hike, and similar hikes adopted at other partnering educational communities, and had worked to develop a tailor-made version of the program that best fit their own needs. This program was very meaningful for the teenagers, who had the opportunity to face physical and psychological challenges. One of the students wrote to his teacher afterward, “*Even with all the difficulties, I learned a lesson for life. You even put up with me and all my pointless anger and outbursts. Another school would have kicked me out right away. You know how to deal with me and let me know where I went wrong. Thank you.*”

Miftan Tamra High School, a school in the Arab sector. This school recently changed its part of its “Earth,” to reflect their values and respect they have for the students. The school underwent changes to become more homelike and inviting in the dining hall, the common spaces, even the bathrooms. And the best part – students are the ones designing, building, and redecorating, using the skills learned in their vocational workshops. As a result, the students see their accomplishments reflected back to them and the whole community, helping them feel capable and valuable.

These are only small examples of activities and the changes that are occurring at every one of our partnership communities. Each one of these communities have an entire story of impact and change.

Graduate Communities

At the end of the three-year process, the educational community becomes a Village Way "Graduate Community." The local educational staff is then responsible for continuing their own version of the Village Way in their community – through traditions, policies, programs, work plans, staff training and community spirit. Members of these communities also participated in Village Way movement activities such as our Intercommunity Forum Meetings and our year-long Village Way Trailblazer's Course for Emerging Leaders, and they can access programs from the online educational portal and receive newsletters, as well as contribute materials to both.

Yehudit Levy, the director of **ORT Ktziney Yam Youth Village**, now a graduate community, reflected on the changes they experienced over the course of the integration process and beyond: *"The Village Way matched so perfectly with our worldview, and it let us organize how we implement everything, and really think about how to build strong programming around each one of our priorities .*

For example, we knew we wanted to strengthen our connection to parents, and our work with the Village Way helped us build an entire approach for this. We have this wonderful tradition now, our Family Day, which is really like a carnival for the whole village, everyone is showing off what they do well and everyone learns something and see the strengths of the other – for the parents, the kids, and the staff. It is now ingrained in what we do every year.

Also, we had contact with our graduates, but it was not organized. Working with the Village Way coordinator, and building the program began with a establishing the position of a graduate coordinator, and then locating graduates and contacting them, and creating a database and keeping track. Then we began creating these wonderful inspirational events, like our Graduate Day, where we invite them back to meet with our current kids, to share and tell their stories. This is another important tradition that carries on.

*Our "Earth" and how our physical space relates to education, this has also changed so much. We knew we wanted to create something better for our kids, and the Village Way partnership helped us think about it in a way that was focused on our values, our goals. We improved their living spaces, public spaces, bathrooms, everything – it now reflects the respect we have for the kids and we want them to have for themselves and their home. **And it really does make a difference. Vandalism went down to nothing, and matriculation scores went up. The kids feel valued, safe, welcome, like it is their home and they belong."***

Our graduate communities remain active in key Village Way activities and serve as an invaluable resource to high schools and villages newer to Village Way, providing inspiration and ideas for implementing successful programs and policies. For example, when **Beit Ha'arava ORT Technology** high school held their Parent's Night Gala, which has become a school tradition after working with the Village Way, this year they invited educators from other

Village Way communities to come and learn about how the school works with parents, and see this work first-hand.

At **Mahat Akko Ort Technology High School**, an Arab high school, our Educational Institute staff worked together with school leadership to launch an initiative surrounding the holy month of Ramadan. The result was an educational website in Arabic and Hebrew and provides a platform to learn about the values which are at the foundation of the month of Ramadan. This initiative was very well received by both Arabic and Hebrew speakers around the country, with **approximately 1,250 page views**.

In addition, Graduate Communities often request additional trainings or support from the Village Way Educational Institute on specific issues.

We are also proud to be able to provide those of our graduate communities that meet essential Village Way criteria with critical "With You All the Way" programming support. The support provides financial incentives to maintain activity across the Village Way blueprint, allowing graduate communities to continue implementation of their programs. In order to receive this support, communities must meet 7 out of 10 criteria, such as continued activity with Tikkun Olam programming, implementation of a graduate support program and continued involvement of parents. In addition, communities must continue active staff learning sessions on the Village Way methodology. This support is available for communities beginning Year 5 of the process (Year 4 communities are still receiving educational programming budget based on funds that were not utilized in Year 1). We are proud that the vast majority of eligible Graduate Communities received this support.

The Village Way Educational Institute

As our organization grows and expands, maintaining the high quality of our work is of the utmost importance. We are working toward this goal first and foremost by retaining our high-quality facilitation staff of the Educational Institute. We are proud that there is very little turnover from year to year, and that we have been able to maintain our excellent staff, who come with backgrounds in areas such as education, social work, and program management. These facilitators have gone through extensive training at the Institute and over the course of their time gain a wealth of experience while working in diverse settings. We are also proud to be able to recruit new facilitators of highest caliber, who we are able to attract due to our reputation for professionalism and relevance. This past summer three new facilitators joined the Educational Institute team, who each bring a wealth of talent and experience.

We are also constantly working to improve the Educational Institute's professionalism in all areas of its work. This commitment to improvement and professionalism is evidenced by the following new steps taken in recent years:

- Establishing focused working teams on specific topics, such as Arab communities, graduate communities, security forces, etc.
- Establishing a new system of facilitator peer-observation and feedback in training sessions with educational communities
- Internal learning sessions led by facilitators on areas of his or her expertise

- Establishing and improving upon a new knowledge management system

The Educational Institute also works according to annual work plans, with processes of mid-year and end-of-year review.

In its role as an educational think-tank, the Educational institute worked to develop original educator training sessions and educational materials. This included adapting materials to fit the needs of our partners, whether for an Arab high school, an ultra-orthodox community, or for the security forces. In addition, the Educational Institute in the past year developed a wide range of innovative content, including lesson plans relating to confronting racism, an educational website about the values of the month of Ramadan, interactive educational games that relate to current events, values, and creating dialogue.

The Institute works to facilitate sharing information and updates through our online portal, Facebook page and regular newsletter. This year we initiated a Facebook campaign with other partners which raised awareness of the problematic reality of racism and prejudice in Israeli society called #Face_It.

Intercommunity Forums

The Educational Institute provides opportunities for educators from our partnering communities to meet for a day of focused learning and discussion. Intercommunity Forum meetings are held throughout the year, on topics that inspire educators into action, provide a platform for sharing best practices and an opportunity to participate in peer learning activities.

Last year we hosted six Forum meetings on topics ranging from addressing attendance and truancy, encouraging participation in pre-army leadership programs, and responding to behavioral issues. These sessions focused more than ever on having participating educators bringing the knowledge and resources back to their educational communities, thus expanding the impact of these meetings. This year the Institute intentionally created booklets and accompanying materials for these meetings, in order to make bringing the content back to their communities even easier. Recently, an educator shared at the end of a Forum session: “Every time I attend a Forum meeting, I come back with a lot of ideas that I can implement the next day.”

The first forum of this year was held in October, for leadership of educational communities. 60 Village Way community leaders came together to talk about Israeli *tikkun* (repair) and hope. The day focused on the responsibility of educators to lead society, and how to bring a loaded subject such as racism into educational discourse in the classroom. Educators were then inspired by the words and music of Rabbi David Menachem, for whom connection and unification are his life's mission. Those in attendance responded positively to this event, highlighting the importance of the message of unity and connection, especially at this divisive time in our society. Dr. Sayif, the principal of **Mahat Sachnin Technology High School**, a new Village Way partnering school in the Arab sector, said, “*We need to find a way to connect to our shared humanity, and music is such a great way to do so.*”

Trailblazers Course

The Village Way Trailblazer's Course for Emerging Leaders is a year-long program for a select group of educators from across our educational movement. Twice a month, these diverse individuals come together for day-long workshops on Village Way themes, and benefit both from this intensive in-depth learning experience, and also from networking and peer-learning. The course represents a professional framework that provides participants with the tools to become leaders in their own educational communities. Nurit, an educator from ORT Tel Nof High School who participated in the course last year, shared. *"This course opened up my horizons, and was a place for me to be inspired, to bring my frustrations, to learn to develop solutions that make a real change in our community to help face our challenges."*

Evaluation

Village Way Educational Institute Evaluation

This year we once again continued our work with the evaluation consultant, Dr. Irit Sasson, at the Shamir Institute and her team, who carried out a study of the impact and effectiveness of the Village Way Educational Institute's work with educational communities. Out of a sample size of 11 educational communities, 182 educators took opinions questionnaires and exercises testing understanding of the Village Way philosophy.

The study showed high regard for the Village Way integration process among involved educators, and they reported on the high relevance and impact of the educational methodology. Some differences were found among different communities regarding their attitudes and understanding of the methodology, and the Shamir Institute recommended following up on these results. Not surprisingly, the evaluation found difference in the level of understanding of the Village Way methodology between three groups of educators: those in their first year of the process, those more advanced in the process, and those at graduate communities who have completed the process. This points to the fact that as educators continue along in the Village Way integration process, their understanding of the methodology deepens, and continues to do so after program completion.

The need to examine this aspect of our methodology arose from evaluations of previous years, which have pointed both to a gap in the level of Village Way knowledge between the leading teams and the rest of the staff (which is expected, as we spend more time working with leadership), and also the need to focus more on practical applications of the Village Way methodology. The report suggests focusing more on "implementation thinking," utilizing tools such as case studies in these sessions, and also suggests focusing on the pedagogical development of these sessions in the future.

Graduate Survey

We are proud to have completed our second graduates survey. Sixteen educational communities participated in the study, **with 1,886 graduates** of these educational communities completing the survey. We are proud that our partners were able to reach this level of participation in the survey. The survey asked young adults to report on topics such as

participation in gap-year programs, military service, education, employment, and connection with their educational community.

The results show us some general impressions across Village Way community graduates. From among Jewish graduates, the **majority are serving in mandatory military service or national service** (90%), which shows a sense of belonging to Israeli society. In addition, from across all of our communities (Jewish and Arab), and not counting those in military service, **the majority of graduates are working** (75%). This shows a positive life path, despite their difficult backgrounds.

The percentage of those graduates who attended or are attending pre-army leadership programs is small, and it was found that this varies widely between educational communities. It is difficult at this point to obtain a clear picture of higher education among graduates, as the majority are still in their army service or immediately after (ages 18-24), when the majority of normative Israeli young adults spend time working, saving, preparing for entrance exams, and thinking about the next steps in their life.

Beyond providing an understanding of our Village Way graduates, this graduate survey process had significant added value for our educational communities. The graduate coordinators were given an impetus to reconnect with many graduates that they were previously unable to locate. The results of the survey for each individual community serves as an important tool for the community leadership to see concrete details about where their graduates are headed and whether they want to work to change these results for future surveys.

As an example of this, after the completion of the last survey in 2017, Beit She'an Ort Technology High School began discussing with the Village Way facilitator the fact that none of their students were attending gap-year leadership programs. These programs can provide an important year of life skills development and, on the whole, we believe they have a lot to offer youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. The principal of this school has since been working together with the Educational Institute on a process for the school staff to learn more about the impact of these programs, and also begin developing initiatives at the school aimed at increasing the numbers of graduates attending such programs.

Internal Evaluation – Logic Model

The logic model is an internal evaluation process that assists educational communities in implementing the Village Way methodology. It uses a form of 72 measurements with each community setting their own quantitative goals. Assessments are carried out for the first time at the end of Year 1, and then every six months afterwards. Last year the Educational Institute went through a process of reviewing and updating all of the measurements of the Logic Model. The Logic Model was originally developed years ago when we were working primarily with youth villages, and there was a need to reexamine and update the model. The new version is being implemented in each of our educational communities.

City-Wide Program

Two years ago, we were approached by leaders within the **Ministry of Education Aleph Department for Youth At-Risk** to assist with a unification process of all of the services for at-risk youth available in a particular city, uniting the professionals through learning a holistic educational methodology for youth at risk. As a result, we designed an integrated training and mentorship process for staff in two cities: **Tamra, an Arab Village, and Beitar Illit, an ultra-orthodox city** and are continuing in both cities this year.

In Beitar Illit, working together with 25 women leaders, the process created a unified team who support each other and have begun working together in unprecedented ways, with life-changing results for at-risk girls. Whereas before the process began, this population had a drop-out rate of approximately 30%; today, officials report this rate has dropped drastically to approximately 3%. They see this as a result of the new approach of working together. We have also begun working with a men's group as well of leaders of educational and therapeutic frameworks.

In Tamra, due to our involvement, the city created a local leadership unit for at-risk youth, and also created training sessions for those working in the field. The leadership unit worked together with the Village Way facilitator to train field staff in the Village Way and also began taking on community projects in the city and implementing the methodology. They have also created two working teams of professionals, one focusing on working with parents and one focusing on providing after-school activities for youth at risk in the city. A local leader of the process shared after two years: *"Our dream for a common discourse was realized thanks to our work with the Village Way. Our facilitator knows the town of Tamra well and has helped to open doors for cooperation."*

We have received very positive feedback from the Department on this partnership, especially when they compare the impact in these two cities to cities working on a unification process that do not have Village Way support. We are currently in discussions with Department leadership on moving forward with an additional city in this process, and the possibility of developing a joint venture between our organization and the Department to expand cooperation even farther.

New Village Way Milestones Program

We know from experience that a key component to success of an educational framework is strong leadership. A school principal or youth village director can set the tone and the priorities for their educational community, and also empower their staff to provide the best possible educational experience for their youth.

As part of our next strategic plan, we were exploring additional ways to train and empower educational leaders through the Village Way. We explored possible partners in this endeavor, and discovered that there was only one natural partner: Avney Rosha, the Israel Institute for School Leadership. After a number of meetings with this organization, not only were they interested in partnering with VWEI, but they presented the significant need for a program that contains our unique focus on a value-laden educational methodology and innovative approach to leadership and education. As such, they asked us to launch a leadership training program this year. Because we believe in making the most of partnership opportunities, we worked quickly to create this new program.

This October, we launched the new Village Way Milestones program, a year-long course for high school principals and youth village leadership. The course will provide over 100 hours of professional leadership development training. The culmination of the program will be a 5-day travel seminar to Rwanda, including a visit to Agahozo Shalom Youth Village. The inaugural cohort for the 2019-2020 academic year is comprised of 20 distinguished leaders from diverse backgrounds and locations, including vocational high schools, religious high schools, youth villages, Arab schools, and more.

We are proud to have a very good instructional team to run the program, including leading staff members of the Village Way Educational Institute, as well as Shmuli Bing, who agreed to be part of instructional team the program, and will share from his knowledge and experience.

Academia

We are proud to report that the Educational Institute is once again offering courses on the Village Way to students of higher education. We are continuing to offer a full semester-long course on the Village Way at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, taught by Dr. Wovit Worko, a Yemin Orde graduate. This year, once again, we are teaching two full courses at Oranim College of Education – one in the spring semester, one in the fall semester. Both of these courses continue to receive positive feedback from participating students on the innovation and practical application of the course content. During the summer months we offered a course at Achva College for over 100 students, and based on student feedback, this course received one of the highest marks of any of the courses offered.

It Takes a Village

Our book was published in May 2018 as an educational resource that centers on the knowledge accumulated by the organization over the past ten years. It continues to make an impact, and to date, it has sold 10,000 copies. The book is a resource for those engaged in the Village Way through the Institute's activities, and an introduction for those who are hearing about it for the first time. We are constantly receiving positive feedback on the book from educators and other professional working with youth. We are proud to note that some notable Israeli leaders have received copies of the book, including President Reuven Rivlin, Shai Peron, Isaac Herzog, renowned researchers, leaders in the public sector, as well as prominent figures in media outlets.

FYO is working to have the book translated into English and distributed to English-speaking audiences.

FICE Conference

In October, FICE – the International Federation of Educative Communities, which focuses on out-of-home education, held its world congress in Israel. Village Way Educational Initiatives was a significant presence at the congress, with Dr. Chaim Peri speaking at the opening plenary. In addition, Village Way facilitators from our Educational Institute ran a workshop on aspects of the methodology, and also presented a poster for all conference participants.

School Closings

To date, four of our partnership schools have closed. We want to share with you our reflections and considerations regarding the number of schools that have closed or are in the process of closing in recent years.

To our understanding, the main reasons or causes of schools closing include:

- Ministry of Education policy in recent years has shifted towards preferring to keep youth at risk to larger mainstream academic schools, with special classes for youth-at-risk, rather than place them in smaller vocational schools;
- Responsibility for education has moved to the municipalities, which are charged with implementing the policies of the Ministry of Education, and as such each municipality can decide how to approach youth-at-risk in their city. There are certain municipalities that are also choosing to not maintain smaller vocational schools.

Regarding the impact on our work, we are now trying to be more careful in the process of choosing schools with which to partner, working with the school network and also municipality to ensure that there is no plan for closing the school in the near future. We are also taking similar precautions regarding the challenge of principal turnover, working to ensure that we partner with schools where the principal is intending on staying at the school throughout the Village Way process. However, we want to be clear that we do not have the power – because we are not “taking over” the schools – to ensure that they will not be closing in the future.

We feel positive knowing that even if a school does close:

- We have had an impact on the kids who were studying at the school while it was open,
- Most of the principals and educators remain in the educational system and will go on to work in other communities.
- We will accompany the school during the closing process, in a way to ensure that the kids’ needs are met as best as possible, and to minimize the emotional damage to the kids and also the staff as they go through this challenging process.

Finally, simultaneously – but not in response to these closings – we have made an internal decision to work more with larger, non-vocational high schools, in the social and geographic periphery of the country. We have made this decision in order to bring the Village Way to more children, and also understanding that there are large numbers of youth at risk learning within these schools, whether in special classes or in the general classroom framework, especially with the closing of so many vocational schools. It is less likely that such schools will be in danger of closing in the future.

Additional Village Way Projects

The above reporting outlines our flagship program of working with individual educational communities. This work constitutes the core of the Educational Institute's activities. In addition, we have outlined below those additional activities and initiatives that contribute to our organization's mission and goals.

Security Forces

Israel Border Police

The Israel Border Police provides border security, counter terrorism and law enforcement operations. This agency deals with issues of multiculturalism both within its ranks and in its work with the larger population. They take values training seriously, and we have become an important partner in this process. In 2018, we engaged in a large volume of training sessions, internal Border Police trainings deemed "ethical fitness week," working directly with their professional operational staff on how to become effective leaders and to understand the influence they have in these roles. They found these sessions as extremely relevant and applicable to their work. However, these sessions were challenging as they required a significant amount of time investment from multiple Village Way facilitators for each training session. For the 2019 work plan, our staff is training the Border Police educational officers to run these sessions internally rather than utilizing Village Way facilitators for this purpose. As part of these trainings, officers have been provided with the book "It Takes a Village" by Dotan Levi, which covers in detail the Village Way methodology and its implementation. Their educational officers continue to utilize Village Way materials through our online database.

As we previously reported, in the past decade, there has been a 95% reduction in what the Border Police call "ethical failures." While we do not take full credit for this statistic, we know that we have had significant role in this work of the agency.

Israel Defense Forces

Our work with the IDF has seen the most expansion this year of all of our security forces initiatives. We held a three-day training session for 20 educational officers who go on to work in special courses and basic training for "Special Populations" (the IDF's term for new immigrants and young adults at risk) and go on to train approximately 6,000 IDF officers and commanders who are working with these populations.

This year we have also provided training sessions for those in key command positions and strategic roles, within the framework of IDF training colleges and courses. These have included sessions with the Command and Staff College. We are proud that the IDF has found these sessions to be so impactful, that what started as two-hour sessions have expanded to full day sessions, with a request to expand these sessions to two-day sessions.

We are also working with the Officer's Training College, by providing training sessions for 20 course instructors who will go on to train 120 participants in the officer's course. We have also begun working on a similar process at the Infantry Training School for squad commanders by training those who instruct the course.

Finally, this year we have also provided sessions for units across the IDF and are proud that we have received an increased number of requests for these types of trainings from the educational officers within these units, especially in recent months.

An educational officer who went through the training shared, "*We understood more about why it is important to foster belonging among the soldiers – not only so that a soldier won't be harassed, or that his culture is recognized, but to go much deeper than that, on a moral level, and for the interest of our shared mission.*"

Ofek Juvenile Prison

Ofek Juvenile Prison is the only prison for youth in Israel. We have continued our intensive work with Ofek Juvenile Prison this year, succeeding in continuing this partnership during the transition of a new prison director, which was important for us as an organization. In the middle of the program year, we began a new process of working with the school staff together with the educational officers, who had never before had consistent work together. Our facilitators also led a process with prison management focusing on topics relating to education and adolescence (which is important as prison staff come from working with adult prisons, and have no training in working with youth).

At the same time our staff is working to integrate the prison's therapeutic, educational, and security staff together for joint regular meetings for increased cooperation between staff. There have been improvements in the prison culture, the language utilized by staff, as well as overall outlook and approach of the security staff and prison leadership. A staff member at Ofek Juvenile Prison recently shared *"These sessions are the only place where we can come together and discuss the issues that we face in dealing with prisoners that are teenagers, and seeing them as teenagers and not just prisoners, and this I think is making the biggest difference."* However, it is important for us to note that this is a partnership that presents many complex challenges, including among them a high rate of staff turnover, on all levels, as part of the institutional culture. This makes long-term cultural change challenging.

The Gap Year Programs (Mechinot)

The Young Men's Mechina in Hatzor Haglilit

In June we bid farewell to our 19th group to complete the Mechina program with a festive graduation ceremony. Families and friends arrived to the Mechina home in Hatzor Haglilit from around the country to show their support for the young men who completed such an impressive transformational process. The event began with participants giving short presentations on what they had learned at the Mechina over the course of the year.

Abevah, one of the graduating participants, gave an overview the Mechina program: *"This year at the Mechina there was so much packed into one year. At the beginning, for the first month, the staff took care of everything. Afterwards, we were divided up into committees, and the responsibility was on us, the cleaning, the logistics, and also the fun. Focusing on our own development, we could choose committees that involved something we wanted to work on for ourselves personally, whether it was public speaking, or teamwork, or attention to detail. We also studied a lot – about three courses a day, including interpersonal issues, family issues, history and Judaism, public speaking, preparing for the IDF and more. We had physical training three times a week, and became involved in volunteering placements. We had the opportunity to travel and go on tours around Israel, where we served as the guides. We also worked on our personal development in small groups throughout the year. I learned so much here. I have friends for life. Especially the counselors, I know they care so much and will be with me all the way."*

We welcomed our 20th cohort of participants to the program in September, and are looking forward to sharing with you their transformation process over the course of their year on the program.

[The IsraElite Young Women's Mechina in Migdal HaEmek](#)

We bid farewell to our 6th cohort of IsraElite program participants in June. Each of our program participants has their own individual stories of progress and growth. A few of these stories are included below:

Esti arrived at the IsraElite program with a lot of anger. When she got frustrated, she would act out, yell and throw things. At some point, it was not clear if Esti would be able to continue the program. However, our staff decided to try and work with her intensely on the issues that were causing problems: how to address and process her anger, and how to express her feelings in healthier, more productive ways. At the same time, Esti was provided with the opportunity to participate in regular community service for the first time in her life, which made an obvious improvement to her sense of self-worth. She also had the opportunity, despite her difficulties, to play a leadership role in the community, as head of the Field Committee, being responsible for the logistics of trip planning and execution. Esti rose to the challenge and became respected by her peers as a contributing member of the group. She graduated the program calmer, more focused, with a strong sense of self and her abilities.

This year, our IsraElite Young Women's Leadership Program (Mechina) has gone down significantly in the number of participants from previous years, to where there are currently 13 participants in the program. We see this situation as a problem to be taken very seriously. As our partners, we want to share with you why we believe this has happened, and our efforts to increase numbers of participants in the upcoming years.

When we established the IsraElite program, there were only a small number of women's-only gap year *mechina* programs available in Israel, all established around the same time. Additional programs have opened up in the interceding years, and today there are 5 such programs, expanding the range of options for young women. This does not detract from the great need out there among at-risk young women for such transformative programs.

Right now, we have to spend more effort, time, and resources, in strategically reaching the girls who *do* need us, because there are more programs out there. Unfortunately, there is no overarching national effort to place youth in the programs that would be the best fit for them. This is similar to what happens for youth villages. As such, each program is responsible for reaching their own target population and recruiting participants.

We have seen that other programs have taken on a staff member who is responsible for outreach and recruitment of potential participants. This year, as part of a solution to our current situation, we are working on hiring a staff member who will be responsible for recruitment for both the Men's and the Women's *mechina* programs.

We are also taking a look inward and undergoing a process of review and analysis of the different aspects of the program to see what needs to be changed or improved upon. At the end

of the year, we will re-examine these girls' experience in the program as well as whether there is enough justification to continue the program.

[The New Nitzotz \(Spark\) Mechina](#)

Last year, the National Insurance Institute Funds, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Welfare, began an initiative to open five new mechina programs that would include a vocational training component: a year of empowerment with a professional diploma. Our organization was chosen as one of five to run such a program, out of 18 other Mechina programs who applied for this initiative. Our new Nitzotz (meaning "spark") Mechina opened this year. We are so proud to share with you that the head of this new program is Mekonet Gadamo, a graduate of the Mechina, a Golani officer, who holds a master's degree, and worked as a valued Mechina staff member for many years.

The Nitzotz Mechina is for young adults who have very complex backgrounds, even more so than those in our Men's Mechina. These are young men who were previously involved in criminal activity and had dropped out of school, and as a result they were not eligible for army enlistment when they arrived. Thirteen young men ultimately completed this new mechina program. This was a difficult first year, with many challenges, including disciplinary problems and drug issues, as well as logistical issues such as working from a temporary location.

Despite the challenges, the majority of participants went through significant changes last year. The program framework, inspired by the educational traditions and methodology of the Yemin Orde Mechina, created a meaningful community that allowed participants to begin to believe in themselves and their abilities to overcome obstacles and persevere. *"I changed old habits that I did not like, made a huge improvement myself, and learned of patience, acceptance of others, and how to cope with difficulties in a calm way,"* said one participant. *"I feel that I have become more open to people and confident, and I feel ready for anything."* Now, most graduates are in a special process of enlisting in the army, which would not be possible without their participation in the program this year. We are so proud of Mekonet and his staff and all they have accomplished with this groundbreaking new program.

The second year of this program has been launched with 23 participants. We are excited about the potential impact of this program to change the lives of these young men, and future cohorts in the years to come.