David's New Life

At thirteen, he was already indicted for severe offenses

■ Yet, on the brink of incarceration, he met a judge who believed in him and gave him an opportunity to join a pre-military program and enlist

■ "You are my angel ,," he wrote to Judge Michael Nebenzhal

■ Young people like you are our driving force,," responded the judge

ISRAEL MOSKOWITZ | YEDIOTH AHRONOTH

Photo credit: Gil Nachushtan

For more than two years Private David had fought to enlist in the IDF, during which time he shed a long trail of arrests, a prison sentence and ten indictments for severe violent offenses. As soon as he was able to put on the IDF uniform, he sent an emotional thank-you letter to Judge Michael Nebenzhal, who believed in him, followed his rehabilitation process and even came to visit him at the pre-military program (Mechina), travelling to the Northern Galilee all the way from the juvenile court in Ramla. Now that he has enlisted, David is aiming much higher, and plans to undergo combat soldier training in the prestigious Egoz Unit.

David, now twenty years old, was born in a city in Israel's central district. At thirteen, he had he first encounter with the police, after been held on charges for stabbing another man in the back several times. He was arrested, interrogated, and sentenced to jail. Because of his young age, he

was instead sent to house arrest. From then on, things quickly deteriorated. He became involved in a series of violent offenses, which culminated in a serious street fight, for which he was convicted of assault and battery, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment in Ofek Juvenile Prison.

"When I got out, I still had several pending charges for serious violence on my police record. All in all, I had another ten charges for assault and breaking into cars", David recollected.

"I came to Judge Nebenzhal, who was supposed to send me to nine months of imprisonment. He spoke to me straight, and took interest in what I am going through. This gave me the kind of good feeling that I mattered to him, that he cared about what happened to me. I felt he was the first person who believed in me and gave me a chance. Instead of sending me to prison, this allowed me to attend

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the Nitzotz Yemin Orde Mechina Program in Hatzor HaGlilit," David shares.

David underwent a significant rehabilitation process after serving his prison sentence. It's very rare to have a judge come to our Mechina program to see for himself a participant's rehabilitation," explained Sagi Aviran, who was David's informal educator at the Nitzotz Program.

After a two-year battle, aided by the Nitzotz Program, David was able to volunteer for IDF service just over a month ago. Shortly after his enlistment, he found the right moment to sit down and write a personal note to Judge Nebenzhal. "Hello Michael, how is it going? My name is David, I don't know if you still remember me, but I can't forget you. You were the judge who oversaw my case. You were the only one in the judiciary system who believed in me and in my goals, and who could issue a sentence that did not sever my hopes for the future."

David also added: "At Nitzotz, I learned the saying that 'all a child needs is one adult to believe in him.' You are my angel; you are the man who saved me from sinking further into violence and crime. Thank you so much."

Mekonent Gedamo, the head of the Nitzotz Mechina Program, added: "David came to us with pending criminal records, and stood out with his high motivation to better himself. We believed in him every step of the way."

A few days ago, David received Judge Nebenzhal's reply. "Indeed, all a child needs is one adult to believe in him," he wrote, "but at the end of the day, in order to succeed, a man should believe in himself. Youngsters like you are our driving force. You have already gone a long way, but life is a long journey. Keep on making the right choices, and you will succeed and achieve all of your dreams."how I learned the language. I learned faster that way, in an environment that speaks another language."