



The Jewish Agency Mechinot Program: "Academy for Life" for Youth At-Risk

A 2018-2019 Activity Report



קרן היסוד הישראלי
מחנה מכינת "אקדמיית החיים"

קרן היסוד הישראלי
מחנה מכינת "אקדמיית החיים"

Introduction

The Jewish Agency's ground-breaking Academies For Life (Mechinot), founded in 2011 and funded by Keren Hayesod - UIA, enable young men and women from socially and economically marginalised Israeli communities to participate in meaningful programs to provide them the tools to reach their full potential while opening a window to their future leadership and success. Mechinot offer a curriculum based on Jewish culture, identity, and leadership that builds young people's self-confidence, creates a sense of purpose and an understanding of their important place in Jewish history. Mechinot help participants access the tools, skills, and networks that they need to succeed in Israeli society as empowered women and active citizens.

Keren Hayesod-UIA would like to thank you for your generous donation to the Jewish Agency Mechinot program in 2019, supporting Youth at-risk from all over Israel and providing them with the tools they need to reach their full potential.

We are pleased to present you with the following 2019 program report.

Mechinot: A Transformative Learning Experience

A comprehensive study of existing Academy for Life (Mechinot) programs for high school graduates concludes that youth from Israel's geographic and socioeconomic periphery are vastly underrepresented in these types of programs. For these youth, who face challenging life circumstances such as poverty, academic difficulty and challenging family circumstances, this time commitment and the cost are extremely prohibitive.



In response to these circumstances, The Jewish Agency, together with Keren Hayesod-United Israel Appeal, have opened its Mechinot program in 2011, enabling motivated high school graduates from Israel's underserved areas to benefit from a transformative learning experience that leads towards a positive trajectory for success. The Jewish Agency "Academy For Life" Mechinot program network consists of a subsidised six-month program, offered to participants at a low cost, with subsidization available to participants who cannot afford the lower cost as well. The program combines informal study and meaningful volunteer work, while expanding the young people's horizons with its immersive curriculum based on Jewish culture, identity, leadership and life skills.

Mechinot programs have a transformative effect on participants' self-awareness, maturity and readiness for adulthood. They also pave the way for having an active life in their communities as they teach participants essential leadership and technical skills, foster a sense of responsibility and teamwork, and facilitate networking connections that serve young adults throughout their personal and professional lives. Some Academy for Life programs also integrate high school graduates from around the world with their Israeli peers, adding another dimension of Jewish peoplehood.

Program Description

The Jewish Agency's Mechinot programs are tailored to address the challenges of different sectors of Israeli society, including disadvantaged youth at-risk from Israel social and geographic periphery, disadvantaged young women, Ethiopian teens, lone soldiers from the Diaspora and from Israel, Druze, Bedouin, and Ultra-Orthodox Jews. This network includes the Ofek, Kol Ami, and Barak Mechinot. Each Mechinot cluster offers a unique curriculum to provide tools, skills, and resources for success, and is based on Jewish culture, identity, and leadership.

The educational curriculum focuses on four key areas:

- **Jewish Heritage and Culture Studies:** Intended to promote Jewish identity and values, and to form personal approaches to social justice, leadership, and environmentalism.
- **Team Building and Group Dynamics:** Aimed at creating a meaningful shared experience for the participants—encouraging each young person to contribute his/her strengths and to learn from their peers.
- **Civic Involvement and Participation:** Reinforced by the Jewish principle of Tikkun Olam ("making the world a better place"), the program includes volunteer work with vulnerable populations.
- **Israel Identity Building:** Learning about and experiencing the State of Israel through weeklong field trips, including challenging activities that build confidence and leadership skills.

Mechinot 2019 Updates.

Ofek Mechinot are designed for youth at-risk from Israel's social and geographic periphery. These teens typically have less knowledge about the resources and support services available to them throughout their adolescence and later in life; they are most likely to face significant difficulties throughout their lives, putting them at further risk for delinquency and underachievement. As a result of their underprivileged backgrounds, most of these youth lack strong personal skills and self-confidence—the key factors in meaningful achievements in life.



In 2018-2019, over 415 young adults participated in one of 14 Ofek Mechinot. Of these Mechinot, ten are run by The Jewish Agency for Israel and supported by Keren Hayesod-UIA; four are administrated by the Acharai organisation in cooperation with The Jewish Agency for Israel and supported by Keren Hayesod-UIA.

In 2018-2019, each Ofek Mechina program consisted of some 40 Israeli high school graduates per Mechina who gain tools, skills, and broaden their social networks in order to succeed as contributing citizens of Israeli society. The holistic curriculum builds self-confidence, promotes empowerment, and creates an enduring connection to Israel, with content based on six components:

- Jewish and Zionist learning
- Civic involvement and responsibility
- Preparation for military service
- Leadership
- Exploring the State of Israel

Ofek Mechinot generate significant change for participating young men and women and for Israeli society as a whole. Aside from gaining the ability and opportunity to reach their leadership potential, achieve successes in their professional roles, and solidify their ties to Israel and the Jewish people, these young Israelis often continue volunteering in their communities and interacting with residents in the areas where they serve.

Ofek Mechinot are designed and customised to suit the needs of various population groups, including Druze, Bedouin, young women, ultra-Orthodox, and others, and allow greater access through a lower-cost, shorter-duration alternative to other program options.

Examples of Ofek Mechinot Program in 2018-2019:

- Be'er Sheva is an urban, coed Mechina where participants live with their families but join their counterparts daily for program activities and learning. 32 participants completed the Be'er Sheva Mechina program in 2018-19;



- Or Yehuda uses cinematography and production as a means of education, personal expression, and establishing community connectedness. 42 participants completed the Or Yehuda Mechina in 2018-19;

- Nitzana includes social activism projects in which participants organize programs on sustainability, solar energy, and agriculture in their training. 45 participants completed Nitzana Mechina in 2018-19;

- Yerucham's program is designed for religious young men and includes volunteering in schools, building community gardens, and planning city-wide events. 40 participants completed Nitzana Mechina in Yerucham in 2018-19;



- Kineret is a specialized Mechina in which Jews and Christian Arabs live, train, and grow together, promoting coexistence, collaboration and personal development. 40 participants completed the third cohort of the Kineret Mechina in 2018-19;

- Alma is an all-women's Mechina in Jerusalem, providing the tools, skills, and networks needed to succeed in Israeli society as empowered women and active citizens. In the 2018-19 program year, a cohort of 32 young women from all over Israel completed the program.

- Walking the Distance is a new Mechina for women in Kiryat Tivon in the North of Israel, based on the successful model of Alma to enable more young women to participate in the program. 10 women completed the first cohort of the program in 2018-19.



- Harduf is a Mechina where Jews and Bedouins study together focusing on individual development and mutual understanding and cooperation. 18 participants completed the program in 2018-19 – half Jewish and half Bedouin.

Personal Story

Nathan Eileen

Nathan was born to a family of Ethiopian Olim and lives in the city of Netanya. He joined the Ofek Mechina in 2018-2019. He is a bright and very intelligent young man, a fact that was evident to his High School teachers. During High School, Nathan studied all the school subjects in their full matriculation tracks of 5 units each, as well as studying full matriculation tracks of 5 units each in Computer Science, Physics and Medicine. While studying in High school, Nathan decided he wants to become a doctor and completed a university course in Medical Sciences.

Nathan's parents supported him all throughout the way, even though the family lives under very limited financial means. His parents didn't give up on him and he didn't give up on himself. While studying, he also worked, saved money and funded the various courses and classes he took.

After graduating, Nathan joined an Ofek Mechina and soon became a leader amongst the students. He was also responsible for bringing quality material to his fellow students, in order to arouse their curiosity and help them develop a joy in learning.

Upon graduating from the Mechina, Nathan joined the IDF's elite Submarine Unit, one of the IDF's most prestigious and top-secret units.

