

A Permanent Home for the Yemin Orde Mechina in Hatzor

Background:

Yemin Orde's experience with disadvantaged immigrant youth has clearly proven that when immigrant, marginalized and at-risk youngsters are given the proper tools and opportunities they are able to assimilate into the mainstream, succeed and excel. Since it was founded in 1953, Yemin Orde Youth Village has taken in wave after wave of immigrant teenagers from around the world and developed an educational philosophy and innovative programs which address the challenges faced specifically by immigrant youth and communities which help children acquire a firm sense of self, confidence in their future and the tools to benefit from opportunities to advance.

The Problem/Need:

Over the past 20 years, there has been a rising awareness that not all 18-year-old Israelis are prepared for the complex challenges they face during their army service. Mechina programs have been established to address this issue, and there are now over 30 around Israel, each with a different character and focusing on a different sector of society. Immigrant teens face unique issues. Unlike native Israelis, they lack the motivation to use the period of their military service to develop their innate leadership skills and as a springboard to a successful future as part of the Israeli mainstream. Yemin Orde has established a successful program to address these issues, but the program is currently located in a deteriorating, temporary facility, which presents endless challenges for continued, successful operation.

In addition, the northern development town of Hatzor is located in Israel's geographic periphery, populated mostly by veteran immigrants from North Africa, new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union and their first generation Israeli offspring. Educational achievements and salaries are well below the national average. The Second Lebanon War and ongoing threat of renewed hostilities cast a continuing shadow over the community.

A third issue addressed is the marginalization of Israel's immigrant communities. The successful integration of Israel's immigrants is contingent upon development of a cadre of young leaders from within the community who will serve to bridge the social and cultural gaps and lead their community into the Israeli mainstream.

The Response:

Nine years ago Yemin Orde established Israel's only Mechina for immigrant youth (mainly from Ethiopia and the Former Soviet Union) who need a post-high school program to imbue them with the leadership skills that will enable them to excel during their army service and as adults. Over 250 graduates of the Mechina have served (or are currently serving) in the IDF, 90% in combat units and a third in command positions. They credit the year they spent in the Mechina as a turning point in their lives and as key to their success.

The goals of the Mechina are manifold. Mechina graduates assimilate the idea that they are on an equal footing with their native-born Israeli peers. This understanding, in turn, has a positive impact on their families, friends and communities. The Mechina has been successful both in terms of changing the participants' goals for their army service and in changing the IDF's attitude towards immigrants. It has become a beacon of inspiration to Israeli society by showing how immigrant youth from diverse backgrounds and cultures wish to belong and can work coherently together for the country's future.

One positive outcome of compulsory military service is that it can be a tremendous social equalizer as it provides the same opportunities to everyone. If a youngster enters the army with the capacity to take advantage of opportunities and lead, he gains a tremendous advantage for the future. The Mechina provides them with this capacity.

The Mechina is located in the northern town of Hatzor, a community of immigrants and first generation Israelis marginalized in Israeli society. One of the most important elements of the Mechina program is the community service requirement. All participants volunteer in the local community in order to experience the empowering benefit of being able to help others, as well as to become further engaged with the local community and bring a sense of vitality and energy.

The Mechina is currently located in a rented facility in a residential neighborhood of Hatzor. The dorm rooms are dilapidated and cramped and public spaces serve multiple purposes, posing logistical difficulties. And as the program has become increasingly successful and has attracted a rising number of participants, it has outgrown the facility.

Building a permanent home for the Mechina will provide an element of stability crucial for its continued success and a much needed boost to the local community. The building complex will contain living quarters, classrooms, a library, offices for the staff and a central gathering area. The Municipality of Hatzor has long recognized the benefits that the Mechina has brought to the town, and has allocated 2 acres of land for the construction. The proposed home for the Mechina will be a focal point for empowering immigrant and at-risk youth from around Israel and will host groups from Israel and abroad throughout the year.

Target Population:

The most direct beneficiaries of the building are the participants in the Mechina – 18-year-old immigrants from Ethiopia and the Former Soviet Union. The secondary beneficiaries are the residents of the town of Hatzor in the Upper Galilee. A third group of beneficiaries will be groups of youth from Israel and abroad who will utilize the facility for leadership training programs.

Project Components:

This is both a capital and programming project request. The Mechina has been operating for nine years in a temporary facility and endeavors to establish a permanent home. The proposed building complex will enable continued operation of this successful program.

Evaluation:

The easiest way to evaluate the success of the program is by looking at the army service of the participants, both the unit they serve in and their accomplishments. The Mechina staff are in contact with the graduates, their commanders and IDF manpower division to monitor the progress of graduates. Furthermore, at the end of each program every participant completes a detailed written evaluation of the program. The staff reviews these evaluations very carefully and uses them to make adjustments in the program to increase its effectiveness. The staff also completes monthly reports which are used to evaluate the program.

Project Partners:

Two donors have each committed USD\$1.2 million to the building: Keren L'Yedidut (IFCJ) and Americans Barbara Goldman and Mark Gelfand. Anonymous donors have pledged USD\$400,000. Funders to the Mechina program include: New York Jewish Federation, Avi Chai Foundation, Israeli Ministry of Education, JDC and Pa'amei Tikvah Foundation.

Budgets in Canadian dollars:

Capital project: budget: The estimated cost of construction including architectural plans, environmental development, licensing and building permits, civil engineer, building contractor, building materials, landscaping, fencing, and furniture and fixtures is CAD\$492 million. A commitment of CAD\$1.476 million has been received from Keren L'Yedidut and CAD\$1.476 from

Americans Mark Gelfand and Barabara Goldman. An additional CAD\$492,000 has been pledged by American and Israeli donors. Additional donors are actively being sought for this important project.

We are respectfully requesting a donation of CAD\$250,000 towards building and furnishing the facility. We would be honored to recommend an appropriate naming opportunity to recognize such a significant gift.

Completion of construction is scheduled for the summer of 2010.

Programming budget: A permanent facility will enable continued operation of this important program and the direction of all resources to programming. The Mechina program is free to the 50-55 young men who now participate each year, as none of them can afford to pay tuition.

Mechina - Annual Operating Budget- in CAD\$	
EXPENSES	
Equipment and supplies	14,760
Rent and utilities	114,390
Transportation	92,250
Food	107,010
Office supplies and telephone	15,990
Social and cultural activities, field trips	111,930
Personnel (includes director, educational coordinator, counselors, secretary and guest lecturers)	371,460
Scholarships	82,410
Accounting, insurance, miscellaneous overhead	28,290
TOTAL EXPENSES	938,490

INCOME	
Ministry of Education	266,600
Keren L'Yedidut – IFCJ	145,140
Avichai Foundation	79,950
JDC	24,600
UJA-Federation of New York	73,800
Paamei Tikvah Foundation	98,400
Requested	250,000
TOTAL INCOME	938,490