

Jewish Teens Who Fled France's Anti-Semitism Look to a Bright Future in Israel



Friends of Yemin Orde
www.yeminorde.org

Among the 115 graduates at Yemin Orde Youth Village's high school are 16 teens from France who fled to Israel following a dramatic rise in anti-Semitism and violence against Jews. Some of these youth lived in financially-challenged single parent households, and others had language, economic and educational difficulties when they arrived in Israel. Some of them arrived in Israel without their families. For the most part, they were fearful, displaced and under-educated, with many lacking basic Hebrew language skills.

Thanks to the support and care of the Village's staff and professionals and Yemin Orde's acclaimed Village Way educational methodology, these French-Jewish youth have shed their past fears and uncertainty. Today, their future is bright and they stand proud and confident as citizens of Israel.

Nine of the graduates will participate in one of Israel's gap year leadership programs (Mechina in Hebrew). The other seven graduates will go directly into Israel's military or national service.

There are a total of 440 at-risk immigrant youth at Yemin Orde; 115 are French youth of Moroccan, Algerian or Tunisian descent. For the most part, they had lived in the French cities of Paris, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Nice and Toulouse. The Village's other youth are from Ethiopia, Former Soviet Union, Brazil and Israel. Most of the teens at the Village suffered trauma in their lives. At Yemin Orde, they find a safe haven, an excellent education and a forever home.

A climate of anti-Semitism in France has sparked a mass movement of French Jews to Israel. According to Israeli government figures, 7,469 French immigrants made *aliyah* (moved to Israel) in 2015. That number is up from 6,658 in 2014 and 3,263 in 2013. A decade ago, the number was 2,948. For the past two years, the French have been the largest immigrant group arriving in Israel.



Aharon Cohen, 18, is among the group of French Jewish teens who recently graduated from Yemin Orde's high school. He moved to Israel with his parents a few years before coming to Yemin Orde. Aharon said his family fled France because of rising anti-Semitism and the "dream to live in Jerusalem."

Aharon recalled a difficult adjustment period when he first moved to Israel, and later at the Village. "I felt isolated and missed the atmosphere of the big city that I was used to in France. But, everyone at Yemin Orde supported me and taught me the importance of studying hard – for my own benefit and for my future."

Aharon will now attend one of Israel's gap year leadership programs to continue his studies and strengthen important life skills before serving in Israel's military. "I feel a great sense of pride and satisfaction after graduating from Yemin Orde. I know I have made friends for life," Aharon said. "I have learned to take responsibility for myself and for my future."

Yemin Orde is well-known throughout Israel in helping immigrant children adjust to a new life in their new home. The Village's dedicated staff and educators, plus its successful educational methodology, the Village Way, ensure that fragile youth receive the support and life skills they need to adapt to their environment.

Yemin Orde staff has worked hard to ease the transition for the French youth at the Village. The Village provided an intensive Hebrew program and extra academic support when needed. Throughout the year, the teens participated in extracurricular activities such as the choir, art and sports programs.

Today, the Village's French-speaking youth host a "French Day" which includes exhibits about important French and North African Jews, a play about aliyah from France and presentations of French food. Yemin Orde will continue to provide assistance to our French graduates as well as all graduates who require additional support, and will continue to help teens who struggle with integration into Israeli society and culture. ###

Yemin Orde Youth Village and Village Way Educational Initiatives (YOEI)

Yemin Orde Youth Village is located in the Carmel Forest region of northern Israel, just outside Haifa. It is home, school and safe haven to 440 at-risk immigrant youth from Ethiopia, the Former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Brazil and Israel. The youth at Yemin Orde have experienced trauma: from abandonment and isolation to family dysfunction and extreme poverty. With the help of the Village's successful educational methodology, the Village Way, and its dedicated staff, educators and professionals, at-risk teens develop self-esteem, leadership skills, strong cultural identity and a positive outlook on life. Graduates receive a wide range of services including scholarships and emergency financial support.

Village Way Educational Initiatives (VWEI) extends Yemin Orde's successful educational methodology, called "the Village Way", to 26 other youth villages, therapeutic residential communities, and public high schools with high populations of at-risk immigrant youth, including schools in Israeli-Arab communities. VWEI provides its partner communities with a three-year educational framework that includes workshops, teacher training and interventions, thereby empowering educators and positively impacting hundreds more at-risk youth. The goal by 2020, is to partner with a total of 53 educational communities throughout Israel. Today, VWEI and its resources are credited with transforming education for at-risk youth in Israel.

Visit www.yeminorde.org for more information, email info@yeminorde.org, or call 202-237-0286.

