



Friends of Yemin Orde

Supporting educational communities for at-risk youth in Israel

Yemin Orde Alumna Talks Program's Success

By Marissa Stern / JE Staff

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It was one of the final hot days of September and an unusually tall man walked across the terrace outside of Starbucks on City Avenue.

“People are tall in Philadelphia,” said Israela Tadela with a laugh.

For the past two weeks, Tadela has been meeting with people in New York, New Jersey and now Philadelphia (her first time in the city) to talk about Yemin Orde Youth Village, a school and safe haven for at-risk and immigrant youth in Israel.

“We are grateful to our board members from Philadelphia who have been advocates in their community on behalf of our important mission,” said Karen Sallerson, executive director of Friends of Yemin Orde. “Israela is a good example of how the Village Way methodology impacts at-risk youth and provides the tools for our graduates to be successful. We welcome visitors to Yemin Orde to meet our staff and our youth who have the potential to be leaders of Israel.”

Tadela, the first-generation Israeli in her family, attended Yemin Orde from 15 to 18 years of age and still gladly talks about her experience.

Her parents and three brothers — and other siblings who tragically didn't make it — were part of Operation Moses in 1984, a secret mission that brought more than 7,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

They trekked through Sudan, often through the night with no food or direction, with thousands of other Ethiopians hoping to make a home in Israel.

And her parents haven't left the home they made in northern Israel for 30 years, laughed Tadela, whose name was inspired by her parents' “Israeli dream,” as she was born the year after they made it to the country.

She made her way to Yemin Orde atop Mount Carmel, whose population is 32 percent Ethiopian, according to Friends of Yemin Orde's 2015 annual report, because she was having a difficult time with her parents.



The adjustment to a new culture and language made it hard for them, she said, and while Tadela speaks Hebrew, her parents didn't speak it as well then, which made it difficult to communicate.

Plus, she was a teenager, so that brought its own problems.

"I got to Yemin Orde, and I found children in my situation," she recalled. "What the village does, we support you and we listen to you and we believe in you, that you can be something, you can be someone."

After serving two years in the air force and going to the University of Haifa to study education and sociology, Tadela is now a producer at Channel 2, a main news station in Israel.

She was the only Ethiopian to work at the station when she first started, and she proudly said there now are a few more.

At Yemin Orde, with the help of the Israeli government and Friends of Yemin Orde, each student receives their education on a scholarship, but that doesn't come without its own price — though not necessarily a monetary one.

"You need to give to the community, too," she said. "You need to volunteer. Even when I got my scholarship, they don't give you the scholarship and say, 'That's it.' I come there once a year and I speak with the children and tell them about my process, 'look at me, you can be like this.' You can be a role model for them."

She recalled a saying by a rabbi about how "everything a child needs is one adult to believe in him, so I'm trying to be this adult and show them I believe in you and you can do it."

As she goes around talking with people about Yemin Orde, she also brings up its new initiative called Derech Kfar, or the Village Way.

"What Yemin Orde is trying to do now is take their methodology and spirit to other high schools in Israel, to other villages of youth at risk and teach them," she said, "because research has seen the graduates of Yemin Orde have great success — we have graduates in parliament or Knesset, had someone as mayor, there are good stories of graduates."

As of December 2015, according to the same annual report, Village Way Educational Initiatives is working with 26 educational partners throughout Israel.

Tadela hopes that students all over the country learn the same values she did and keep them.

One of those values that has remained with Tadela is respect for other cultures. As Yemin Orde sees students of all backgrounds and cultures, she learned to embrace diversity, including her own.

"My roommate was French, there was Russian [students], there was Brazil, there was Tibet once," she said. "So when you grow up with all this culture, it makes you respect the other

cultures. You see what we're dealing with now with racism and discrimination and all these things, I will never be like this because I can't — I respect all the cultures."

Her own culture and background was one that took her time to accept. She and her younger sister took a trip to Ethiopia two years ago for the first time. They saw where their parents and family came from and the conditions in which they lived, which also changed her relationship with her parents.

"When I came to Israel again after months, I was, like, I'm so glad they are my parents, they're so brave, I appreciate them even more," she said, adding they didn't talk much about what they went through while Tadela was growing up.

"I'm proud to say I'm Israeli at the same time I'm Ethiopian," she added. "I'm from two cultures, and it's OK. Five or 10 years ago, this was very difficult, I had an [identity crisis], I didn't know where I belonged to, but now I'm proud. It makes me unique, it makes me creative that I'm from both sides. I can see things outside of the box, so I'm very happy with my diversity."

For more information about Yemin Orde, visit yeminorde.org or email info@yeminorde.org