

By *MARILYN HAWKES* | Staff Writer | March 18, 2015

When Ukraine resident Sasha Rosenbaum was 16 years old, her country was in upheaval, her father had died three years earlier and her mother was having a hard time making ends meet. Rosenbaum's parents had been divorced – her father Jewish, her mother not. While



Yemin Orde Youth Village graduate, Sasha Rosenbaum, walks with her unit.

exploring her Jewish identity, Rosenbaum attended a summer camp where she met a girl who had recently immigrated to Israel. “She was full of light and sunshine ... she was so happy and so different from everyone around me and had this freedom about her,” Rosenbaum says. That’s when she decided to make aliyah.

After she convinced her mother that it was a good idea, Rosenbaum made aliyah at 16. “I got lucky because I went to Yemin Orde,” she says.

Yemin Orde Youth Village, atop Mount Carmel in northern Israel, was founded in 1953 after the Holocaust to take in the wave of children coming to Israel without their families, according to Jackie Louk, regional director of Western States Friends of Yemin Orde.

Today, Yemin Orde houses about 400 teenagers ages 15-18, most of whom have suffered trauma in their lives as a result of isolation, neglect, abandonment or poverty. At Yemin Orde, the teenagers find a home, a family and a future, Louk says. “We are creating normal, functional and amazing Israeli adults.” This year, the village has children from France, the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia and Brazil, who are learning Hebrew and attending high school.

Rosenbaum, now 31 and living in Chicago and working as a software engineer and consultant, made a recent visit to speak at Temple Solel to illustrate the success of Yemin Orde graduates. Temple Solel has a five-year relationship

with Yemin Orde, says Temple Solel’s Rabbi John Linder. During congregational trips to Israel, participants visit the youth village and deliver money and supplies collected from the congregation. “Yemin Orde represents the heart and soul of Israel, making sure that nobody is cast out,” Linder says.

For Rosenbaum, Yemin Orde gave her a sense of security and connection. “The director, Chaim Peri, came up with the idea of the Village Way, which means the village is like a home and a family, not like an institution. That meant you could talk to and rely on everybody,” she says. “The feeling of community and feeling of belonging is very strong.”

When Rosenbaum graduated from the village, she deferred her army service and went to Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, majoring in biology. About a year later, she realized she disliked her major and wanted to switch to computer science, but the army “isn’t the most flexible,” Rosenbaum says. Since she didn’t want to get stuck studying something she had no interest in, she quit school and her scholarship and housing were discontinued. So without a place to live, she turned to Yemin Orde’s “Home Away From Home” program, which houses Yemin Orde graduates who need a place to stay. “Otherwise, I would have gone in the street,” she says. “I was 19.”



Rabbi John Linder, left, stands with Sasha Rosenbaum at Temple Solel.

After that, Rosenbaum went into the army and completed her service. From there, she returned to Technion and completed her degree in computer science. “I feel very empowered in my life and Yemin Orde has played a big role in getting me to feel this way,” she says.

For more information about Yemin Orde Youth Village, visit yeminorde.org.