



Empowering Educators Across Israel

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by Lianne Goldsmith

On a bright and cloudless afternoon in June 2018, 117 graduates of Yemin Orde High School proudly stood to accept graduation certificates in anticipation of the next hopeful chapters of their lives.

Such an accomplishment might seem typical for American teens during annual high school graduation rituals. However, for these young adults who have called Yemin Orde Youth Village home for the past several years, their achievement is nothing short of a miracle.

Yemin Orde Youth Village, located atop the coastal mountain range of Mt. Carmel in northern Israel, is home, school and safe haven to 430 at-risk and immigrant youth from Ethiopia, the Former Soviet Union, France, Brazil and native Israelis. Most of Yemin Orde's teens are first or second generation Israelis and are from Israel's lowest socio-economic sectors. They have suffered trauma from destructive childhoods framed by elements such as extreme poverty, family dysfunction, abandonment, loss and violence.

Yet, at Yemin Orde, with the help of dedicated staff and a highly successful and innovative educational methodology, called the Village Way, the hearts and minds of these youth heal, and they embrace hope for their future as citizens of Israel.

Yemin Orde's remarkable success at transforming the lives of Israel's at-risk youth provided a paradigm shift in the educational philosophy for Israel's growing population of underserved youth. In 2006, Israel's Ministry of Education urged Yemin Orde educators to create a blueprint to expand the Village Way methodology to other youth villages and schools nationwide. Village Way Educational Initiatives (VWEI) launched with this mission in mind.



Teacher and student at Yemin Orde Youth Village.

Today, VWEI serves as Israel's national resource center for the Village Way methodology. The Village Way Educational Institute is similar to U.S.-based "think tanks," generates and disseminates customized educational frameworks to 44 partner educational communities, which includes youth villages, residential therapeutic communities and public high schools with large populations of at-risk youth, including schools in Arab communities.

Since 2006, VWEI has impacted 14,200 youth and 1,775 educators in Israel. By 2021, VWEI hopes to partner with 61 educational communities and impact 25,000 youth and 2,550 educators. San Diego's San Pasqual Academy, the first residential education campus in the U.S. to serve only foster youth, has successfully integrated elements of the Village Way methodology into its curriculum.



“Our impact in enhancing the spiritual well-being and leadership potential of at-risk youth from poverty-stricken families and dysfunctional homes is broader and more profound than I dreamed it would be. In just 12 years, we have reached more of Israel’s at-risk youth than ever thought possible,” said Haim Rubovitch, Chief Executive Officer, VWEI.

Rubovitch entered the educational management field after serving for 26 years as a high-level executive in the Israeli Security Agency (Shin Bet). After a career safeguarding Israel and working in high-risk and culturally diverse communities, Rubovitch says the Village Way methodology offers a proven and successful path to secure Israel’s future and to close its achievement gap between ethnicities, religions and social classes.

“In my previous career, I learned that, while defense organizations are critical for our existence, our security depends first and foremost on the moral quality of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. Our existence depends on our human quality in all aspects of life and work. We cannot achieve this without proper education and educational frameworks that lead the way,” Rubovitch said.

A Long Walk to Freedom And a Future

Studies prove the efficacy of the Village Way methodology in educational environments. Graduates of Village Way communities, such as Yemin Orde Youth Village, indicate positive views toward volunteering, belonging to the State of Israel, participating in community advocacy, and believing in themselves and their ability to succeed.



Haifa attorney, Nofar Getanech Desta, a graduate of Yemin Orde Youth Village, arrived in Israel as a youth, wracked with insecurity and fear from her traumatic childhood experiences walking with her family across Ethiopia’s deserts to its capital, in order to obtain government permission to emigrate.

At 14 years old, Nofar arrived at Yemin Orde angry and discouraged by the complexities of her new homeland where everything, from language and school to friends and her family life, seemed difficult and out of control.

“I knew from the start that I made the right decision to come to Yemin Orde,” Nofar said. “It wasn’t just another boarding school for me – it was home.”

Thanks to Yemin Orde’s exemplary therapeutic support and educational teams, its caring community and its excellent activities and academic programs, Nofar developed self-esteem, leadership skills and learned to embrace hope and dream of a bright future in Israel.

In 2014, after serving three years as a combat soldier in the Israel Defense Forces, Nofar attended college in Tel Aviv and studied law. Today, she serves as an attorney in the Haifa District Attorney’s office and works to safeguard justice in Israel.

Village Way Empowers Educators and Students

As Israel’s at-risk and immigrant youth population continues to grow, it becomes vital for its educators to embrace a new educational model in order to better teach and connect to young underserved segments of society.

With the help of the Educational Institute’s cadre of professionals, educators develop an understanding of what it means to be a more professional, meaningful and authentic educator. They note improvements in their ability to deal with daily challenges in their work, develop stronger relationships with their students and see their at-risk youth achieve better outcomes in school and later in life.

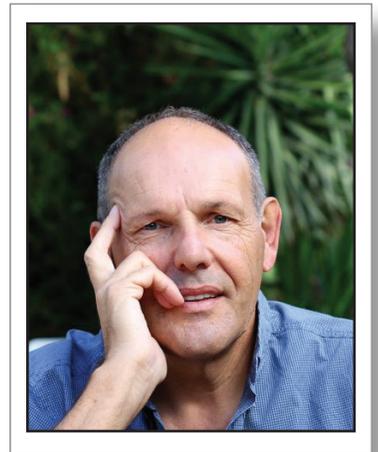
“The Village Way concept increases my knowledge, gives me strategies on how to approach and treat teachers as a group and how to behave with parents and students. Knowledge is power!” said an educator at a VWEI partner high school. “The Village Way methodology is a discipline that gives you a lot of strength when you work with children in a school like ours. The entire concept when implemented today is a source of strength.”

In addition to partnerships with educational communities in Israel, the Village Way Educational Institute has introduced the Village Way methodology in academic settings, including full-semester courses in the education departments at Israel’s Oranim Teacher’s College and the prestigious Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

“It is amazing to see the external and internal changes that many of these school communities have made through implementing the Village Way methodology, helping the youth they work with go on to improved lives. I believe that in the future, the Village Way will find a place in the wider world of education as a whole,” Rubovitch said.

Haim Rubovitch will visit San Diego in November 2018 to discuss his years in Israel’s security agency and how closing his country’s education achievement gap places him, again, on his country’s front line of defense.

For more information on VWEI and the Village Way methodology, visit yeminorde.org or contact Lianne Goldsmith, Director, Western Region, Friends of Yemin Orde, at lianne@yeminorde.org or 310-383-2190.



Haim Rubovitch, Chief Executive Officer, Village Way Educational Initiatives