

# A unique educational model designed to help Israel's at-risk youth

On June 18, 2019, 96 graduates of Yemin Orde Youth Village's high school, located near Haifa, will proudly stand on a stage before their peers, family and teachers 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 Yemin Orde's at-risk immigrant youth who have called the Village home for the past several years, this achievement is nothing short of a miracle. Thanks to an innovative educational methodology, called the Village Way, Yemin Orde's graduates, indeed, thousands of at-risk youth across Israel, now have high hopes for a bright and productive future.

Michael Staenberg, a native Omahan and St. Louis-based businessman and philanthropist, was greatly inspired by the success of the Village Way methodology in helping at-risk and immigrant youth overcome the complex challenges they face as they strive to be productive and upright citizens of Israel. Staenberg visited Yemin Orde Youth Village for the first time in March 2019 and returned two months later to share his personal story with the 11th grade class and consult on the Village's capital project plans.

"Yemin Orde gives at-risk youth not just a second chance, but a third chance. The Village Way methodology's holistic approach to education works with great success. Anyone can teach the three R's of learning, but Village Way educators help their students achieve success not only in school but in life, as well," Staenberg said. "I found it unique that ongoing financial and emotional support continues for graduates well into adulthood. The Village Way offers an opportunity to look at education and at-risk youth differently."



*Michael Staenberg leads the way at Yemin Orde Youth Village in Israel.*

## The Village Way

Yemin Orde Youth Village 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 fragile teens are first generation Israelis – or their parents are first 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.

Israel's Ministry of Education considers Yemin Orde a model of educational excellence. The Village'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 adolescents. In 2006, Israel's Ministry of Education urged Yemin Orde educators to expand the Village Way methodology nationwide.

Village Way Educational Initiatives (VWEI) launched with this mission in mind. Since the launch, staff in 49

schools and villages throughout Israel have trained in how to apply a holistic approach to education for their challenging students. VWEI partners with youth villages, residential therapeutic communities and high schools with large populations of at-risk youth, including schools in Arab communities. Since 2006, VWEI has impacted 18,800 youth and 2,300 educators in Israel. By 2021, VWEI hopes to partner with 61 educational communities and impact 25,000 youth and 2,550 educators.

The Village Way Educational Institute, which operates under the auspices of VWEI and is similar to U.S.-based “think tanks,” provides a blueprint for how each partner educational community can integrate the successful methodology to transform immigrant and at risk youth into productive members of Israeli society through value driven education and support.

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.

The Village Way Educational Initiatives also operates three pre-military gap year leadership programs (*Mechinot*) to prepare marginalized young men and women for service in the IDF. The Village Way offers a great educational training ground for many important life skills. Israel’s at-risk youth will be the country’s next generation of leaders and it is critically important that they receive our help,” Staenberg said.

### **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.



***Top: The Beautiful and therapeutic overlook at Yemin Orde; bottom: Youth in classroom with educator.***

One educator noted, “Before we brought the Village Way into our school, most of our students did not have dreams. Now, we have a framework to help us encourage our students to dream and have aspirations. The Village Way unifies us as educators and allows us to have a fresh attitude about our fragile teens and about teaching, too.” Staenberg agrees that the Village Way model offers an opportunity to change the nature of education for Israel’s at-risk youth population for the better.

“It is amazing to see the changes in the youth in the school communities that are implementing the Village Way methodology. Israeli educators can now help their struggling students go on to improved lives and from a mindset of survival to leadership,” said Staenberg. “I encourage everyone to visit Yemin Orde which is located near Haifa overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. I guarantee that meeting the students and staff will be a highlight of your trip.”

Visit [yeminorde.org](http://yeminorde.org) for more information or email [info@yeminorde.org](mailto:info@yeminorde.org).

**Friends of Yemin Orde**

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