



# Youth Aliyah Villages: Transforming the Lives of Israel's Youth-At-Risk

## PROGRAM PROPOSAL

JULY 2008





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The rise in the number of children and youth-at-risk remains one of the most serious social problems facing Israel today.** The reality in Israel is that there continues to be an alarming rise in the number of children-at-risk. The intensity of living in a landscape of terror is stressful for all Israelis. But for those already in crises, already vulnerable, the uncertainty and violence exacerbate fragile, deteriorating personal situations. Especially hard hit are new immigrant families and their children.

- 40 percent of Israel's children now live under the poverty line.
- Hundreds of thousands of these children are considered to be at varying levels of risk—200,000 of whom have been identified and are being monitored by the Department of Social Welfare.
- Of these, tens of thousands are being raised, to some extent, outside of their biological homes
- 10,000 have been removed from their homes because they are considered to be in imminent danger.

These are statistics that cut to the heart - Jewish children living in the shadow of neglect or abuse. If such a thing is quantifiable, these are Israel's most vulnerable. As the economy slides further, the needs have become greater, both in terms of providing more places for more children, but also qualitatively in the services being provided. And all of this at a time when the government has been forced to cut social service budgets.

Israel cannot afford for children at risk to fall through cracks created by rising budget cuts. Fortunately, due to the generous and unwavering support of donors around the world, 1,070 of these precious souls are able to call a Jewish Agency Youth Aliyah Village home.

**By investing in Youth Aliyah Villages, you are investing in the future success of Israel's most disadvantaged children. Please join us in creating opportunities for these amazing children that come from difficult situations.**



## PROGRAM RATIONALE

**The purpose of the Jewish Agency's Youth Aliyah Villages is to provide a normative, residential environment where children removed from their homes, can receive the intervention to heal and flourish.**

What began as a rescue operation to save Jewish children from Nazi Germany has evolved over the years, providing safe havens for over 300,000 of Israel's most disadvantaged youngsters—children-at-risk, ages 12 to 18, who have been abused or neglected or are on the fringes of society.

Three of the five Jewish Agency Youth Aliyah Villages focus on remedial education in addition to residential care for children 12 to 16. These children lag far behind the academic and emotional norm for their age group. In addition to personal and family issues, they face numerous learning differences and suffer from low self-esteem. But academic and social rehabilitation is not an overnight process and requires a multi-staged approach. Youth Aliyah Villages offer:

- A remedial junior high school program to close the educational gaps and designed to help the children mainstream into general high school education
- Individually designed programs and intensive tutoring to meet specific needs
- Therapeutic and psychological counseling
- Extracurricular activities developed to maximize and reinforce positive behavioral models, such as sports programs and responsibility for animal care in innovative onsite zoological centers

Working with the families, when at all possible, is a priority in the Youth Aliyah Village approach. While many of the children live at a Village full-time, many maintain some family contact and will regularly visit home. While Youth Aliyah has provided successful intervention for thousands of children over the years and has generated unique remedial models that have been widely adapted at special education schools worldwide, today the opportunity exists to take the quality of care to the next level. Over the past two years, major Israeli philanthropists have become passionately involved as partners with the Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Education. Their objective is to develop a new therapeutic intervention model built on this success.



## TARGET POPULATION

Israeli Children-At-Risk between the ages of 12-18.

## PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- To provide personalized intervention using a comprehensive support system for Israel's At-Risk Youth
- To provide specialized education in order to close the educational gaps these children have fallen into
- To provide individualized counseling and therapy for children that come from abusive backgrounds
- To provide opportunities for success to children that otherwise would have none

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Many of children—if not the majority—arrive at Youth Aliyah with significant educational gaps. The student population includes primarily immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) and Ethiopia, as well as disadvantaged Israeli-born youth.

**Three of the five Jewish Agency Youth Aliyah villages offer intensive remedial educational intervention to bridge these gaps.** After three years, children have the option of enrolling at an area high school while continuing to reside at the village, moving to another boarding school like Youth Aliyah's Hadassah-Neurim—or returning to their home community:

### **BEN YAKIR**

Located near Hadera, Ben Yakir is a religiously oriented youth village. The 129 boys, ages 12 through 15, currently enrolled have either dropped out of public school or been forced to leave because of an inability to perform at grade level.

### **KIRYAT YEARIM**

Located near Jerusalem, this youth village is home to 140 children ages 12 through 16. Students are referred to Kiryat Yearim by social services and school counselors due to underachievement, behavioral problems and learning differences.



### **RAMAT HADASSAH SZOLD**

Located in a natural oak forest in Kiryat Tivon, near Haifa, this youth village specializes in remedial education and intervention for 220 severely disadvantaged at-risk children, aged 12 through 16.

### **HADASSAH-NEURIM**

The Hadassah-Neurim Youth Aliyah Village, located near Netanya, Israel, is owned jointly by the Jewish Agency and Hadassah Women's Zionist Organization of America. The village currently educates 260 boarding and 240 day students, who range in age from 14 to 18. Many students are graduates of the remedial programs at the three Youth Aliyah junior high schools: Ramat Hadassah Szold, Kiryat Yearim and Ben Yakir.

Hadassah-Neurim offers both vocational and academic tracks, and unique sports program targeting young people who excel in sports and athletics.

### **NITZANA**

Located in the Negev desert along the peaceful border between Egypt and Israel, this village provides year-round programming to young immigrants, other Youth Aliyah residents, and regular high school students. Because of its setting in the unique ecological environment of the Negev, the village provides an array of programs dealing in science, technology and desert studies.

### **FUNDING REQUEST**

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