



**Empowering Israel's
Youth at Risk**

**Youth Futures
Sderot**

**2013-14/14-15
Annual Report**

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קרן היסוד הישראלי
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Empowering Israel's Youth at Risk: Youth Futures in Sderot

*A Report
2013/14 and 2014/15*

We thank you for your generous commitment to support Youth Futures in Sderot from 2013- through 2015. Your contribution has helped strengthen hundreds of children at risk and their families in these communities. We are pleased to present the following report on programme activities in Sderot during the 2013-2014 and 2014-15 programme years.

Youth Futures Israel

Youth Futures is the Keren Hayesod-UIA supported Jewish Agency flagship initiative that empowers youth and families in Israel's socioeconomic and geographic periphery. Founded in 2005, **Youth Futures team of 350 professionals currently serves 14,000 children, youth, and their families in 36 communities throughout Israel.** The programme is unique in Israel due to its distinctive model of intervention which creates a safety net for young people at risk and works in close cooperation with each city's education, social services, welfare, culture/recreation departments and community organizations. The programme's underlying premise is that if children receive the intervention that they need while in elementary school at a young age, they are more likely to overcome the factors that define them as "at-risk."

Youth Futures utilizes a highly effective staffing model, wherein talented, full-time Mentors bring untapped community resources to young people and their families, as part of tailored action plans which chart the way to success for each individual. Each Youth Futures Mentor works with up to 16 youngsters, encouraging success while intervening where needed; preventing marginalization, promoting social cohesion, fostering school improvement, family involvement, and community engagement.

YOUTH FUTURES IN SDEROT

Youth Futures has been helping families and young people improve their lives in **Sderot** for nine years. Located in Israel's southern region just several kilometres from the Gaza border, the city of Sderot has a population of approximately 22,000. The city ranks 5 out of 10 on Israel's scale of socioeconomic wellbeing. A large proportion of the town's population—6,300 young people, or 30% of the total—are under the age of 18. This group includes over 2,400 school-age children.

As a result of Sderot's proximity to the Gaza Strip and the ongoing threats of rockets in the area, children suffer from ongoing emotional and physical trauma, leaving them especially vulnerable. The city also has lower rates of high school matriculation and army service compared to the national average. Thus, the need for programmes like Youth Futures is especially acute in Sderot so that children and youth have a positive framework to receive guidance and support so that they can thrive and reach their potential, both academically as well as socially.

The programme's staff in Sderot consists of the Director of the National Programme for Youth and Children at Risk, social workers, a counsellor, a psychologist, the Youth Futures Director and 10 Mentors. During 2013-15, the staff reached out to close to 130 elementary

and junior high school students and their families. The programme operates in three out of the city's six elementary schools and in one junior high school. Elementary and middle school-age children who display behaviour or social problems, or whose families are known to the Department of Welfare are referred to Youth Futures by teachers, social workers and others in their community. Most of the participants are 3rd to 8th graders and many of the children in the programme are siblings.

Almost all of the Mentors, who are between the ages of 28-47, are women and all of the Mentors aside from the manager and the coordinator live in Sderot. In addition, 50% of the Mentors have been with the programme for three to five years or more and a similar percentage joined the programme this year. Most (75%) of the Mentors have academic degrees.

The primary focus of Youth Futures is the work between Mentors and children. Each Mentor, who receives formal training and is supervised by a programme coordinator, makes a full-time commitment to serving 16 Youth Futures children and their families, working 40 hours each week for a period of three years. Mentors often work in the same communities where they grew up, bringing an even deeper sense of mission to their work. Most Mentors served in the Israel Defence Forces and hold university degrees, two important factors that further contribute to their ability to serve as role models.

The following schools in Sderot participated in Youth Futures during 2013-15.

School	Type	No. of Mentors 2013-15	No. of Pupils 2013-14	No. of Pupils 2014-15
Gil Rabin	Elementary	2	32	32
Shikmim Maoz	Elementary	2	32	32
Ha'roe	Elementary (Religious)	2	32	32
Comprehensive	Junior High	2	30	27
Total		8	126	123

During 2013-2015, Youth Futures in Sderot increased its efforts to introduce the programme to prospective parents who currently have children in our Youth Futures programme. Parents were invited to attend workshops and events, and meet participants to witness first-hand the benefits of the programme. Following this initiative, we anticipate a higher number of families will participate in the programme next year.

Participant Profiles

Among the participants, 74% have been in the programme for two to three years and 26% are first-time participants. Eleven of the families whose children are part of Youth Futures have more than one child in the programme. Most of the participants (63%) in Youth Futures are boys, compared to 37% girls. This ratio is significantly higher than the countrywide gender distribution of 56% boys and 44% girls. Approximately 42% of the participants are secular and 56% are traditional-religious.

Approximately one-quarter (25%) of the families whose children are participating in Youth Futures are known to the welfare authorities and are being monitored by a social worker. One-third of the children are from single parent families and one-third come from immigrant families, many of which are living on the fringes of poverty.

Seventy-three percent of the mothers in the programme work full-time and most (92%) of the fathers work full-time. An examination of family characteristics showed that 20% of the families include one family member with special needs such as chronic illnesses and/or physical/mental disability; a parent who is serving a prison sentence and/or has a drug/alcohol addiction.

Personal Story

*Name changed to protect anonymity

Haim's Story

Fifteen-year-old Haim is the oldest of seven children. His mother has cancer and is unable to work because she is often hospitalized for long period of time. Haim's father is also disabled and receives support from the National Insurance Institute. The atmosphere at home is very tense due to his mother's illness and Haim worries a lot about his mother.

When he was in fourth grade, Haim joined Youth Futures. Back then, he was a very introverted young boy. He had a very small group of friends and rarely left the house apart from school because he wanted to be with his mother. It was also very hard for Haim's Mentor to gain his trust. Slowly, however, he began to open up to his Mentor, confiding in him that he likes music because it makes him calm down and relax. As part of his individual work plan, Haim's Mentor registered him for a drumming class and also made a point to integrate music as much as possible into their one-on-one meetings.

Haim also became an unofficial assistant to his Mentor, helping him prepare and facilitate group activities for Youth Futures participants. This gave Haim tremendous self-confidence. Soon, Haim also began to open up to his Mentor and share his feelings about his mother's illness. As time passed, Haim's mother, who was in contact with his Mentor, shared that Haim was becoming more social after school and spent less time at home.

After four years in the programme, Haim graduated from Youth Futures last year and is now a proud member of its alumni network and communities. He attended all three alumni programmes held so far. During last year's reunion party, Haim was the DJ. Haim still participates in the drumming music class which no doubt continues to give him self-confidence and motivation to excel.

2013-15 Activity Highlights

In conjunction with teachers, school counsellors and social workers, Mentors examine each child's situation at home, at school and in the community and develop a work plan adapted to each child's personal needs. Individual programmes were devised for 100% of the children, most of them in the first half of the year. Individual programme team meetings were together with each child's home room teacher, the Director of Youth Futures in Sderot, the Mentor and a parent. It is important to note the high percentage of parent participation, especially mothers. Several times a year, Youth Futures Mentors facilitate parent workshops on topics such as sexual education, transitions, social media, attention deficit disorder and more.

Each Youth Futures Mentor worked with each child in four fields: personal, educational, social and family. Mentors are required to meet each child in his/her group individually once a week as well as hold a weekly group meeting, and to make at least three home visits a year. Mentors also have access to special funds, called “empowerment baskets,” to help children access benefits, entitlements and community resources. These include activities tailored to each child interests, needs and skills such as tutoring, arts and culture, sports and after-school activities. Parents are also invited to take part in workshops which focus on issues related to adolescence. A central part of the Mentors’ work is to plan and implement joint cultural activities such as holiday celebrations, encounters and fun days that allow youth from different cultures to learn about each other’s traditions.

In the 2013-15 school year, an average of 26% of all programme participants took an active part in one or more informal activities in the afternoons that included sports, arts and crafts, science and technology cognitive development and other enrichment programmes. An additional 21 children received therapy such as horse-back riding therapy, art therapy, remedial teaching and psychological counselling. This year, 25 children took part in youth movement activities and 38 children attended an afternoon learning centre where they received learning enrichment in key subjects such as math, English and science.

Activity highlights from Youth Futures in Sderot during the 2013-15 programme years included:

- **Afternoon Learning Centre** – now in its second year, the Afternoon Learning Centre is operated by teachers from the Branco Weiss Institute that develops educational programmes in Israel, together with a national service volunteer. Last year, the Centre was open two days a week and primarily offers learning enrichment in math. In May, the Learning Centre had a special experiential learning evening for parents and children that was attended by 30 parents and their children.
- **Amdocs Community Garden**- children work in the Community Garden that they created last year together with Amdocs employees from the company's Sderot offices. The children work in the garden once a week weeding, watering, growing vegetables and eating them and each week an Amdocs volunteer facilitates an activity focusing on gardening or the environment.
- **Chanukah and Jewish Holiday Celebrations**- for both children and their parents were held in each the communities and included a wide range of activities such as arts and crafts workshops, singing, and a quiz game.

Defining and Measuring Success

Youth Futures measures its impact through its internal Aluma Knowledge Management System, which efficiently monitors participant progress and tracks programme activities as a basis on which to assess programme outcomes. Success for each Youth Futures participant is indicated by a sustained trajectory of improvement in four realms at the core of programme activities: personal, academic, social, and family. The Aluma system also allows local and regional programme managers to stay informed about participants' performance.

Youth Futures also publishes programme-specific and system-wide reports at the end of each programme year.

Participants in Sderot improved on 10 indices, in four spheres of intervention:

- **Personal sphere:** self confidence, joy of life and ability to cope with stress.
- **Scholastic sphere:** grades in Hebrew, science and English improved on average 4 points, being sent out of class and motivation to succeed in school.
- **Social sphere:** an improvement in levels of involvement in vandalism and violence.
- **Family sphere:** relationships with father, conditions conducive to learning and personal hygiene.

It is also important to emphasize The programme also has a very low dropout rate in Sderot, which stands at 2% as compared to the national average of 4%.

In addition to Aluma, Youth Futures engages external evaluators at the Digma Institute to assess system-wide programme outcomes. Last year's summary report from Digma underscores the findings for the individual programme sites, including Sderot, confirming the impact of Youth Futures on families, schools and the wider community. Some of the main evaluation findings include:

- Up to 85% of children feel that they are "better students," have a more optimistic outlook about the future, increased ability to change their situations and feel a stronger sense of belonging.
- After just one or two years in the programme, children's self-confidence levels and ability to cope with stress rose as high as 50%.
- Parents observed positive changes in their children's behaviour and school performance. Involvement in violence, verbal abuse and vandalism decreased considerably from the beginning to the end of the school year.
- Children's relationships with their parents and siblings improved significantly.

Alumni Activities

Youth Futures views alumni involvement as a high priority and it has developed an outreach system to maintain contact with programme graduates and encourage them to stay connected either as volunteers or participating in informal education and other programme activities. The Aluma Data Management System also tracks the continued involvement of alumni in the Youth Futures community and surveys them about their participation in order to improve the programme. By recruiting graduates back into the programme, Youth Futures hopes to maintain and reinforce the programme's impact over time; to employ the graduates as positive role models for current programme participants; and to create a database with information on graduates.

Contact with graduates takes place through various channels, including a Facebook group and periodic structured interviews of graduates by graduate coordinators. This enables us to

obtain an up-to-date picture of graduate opinions and status, from the time they complete the programme until the age of 21.

This year, Youth Futures in Sderot held its annual Alumni Day for the second year, there were specific outreach activities for 50 alumni that gave them an opportunity to socialize and network. Programme alumni also met with both present and past Mentors and learned about volunteer opportunities in the community that they can get involved in.

We currently hold data on close to 100 graduates who completed the Youth Futures programme when they were in sixth grade or above. The main findings from this sample indicate that:

- An average of forty percent (40%) of programme graduates participate in afterschool enrichment activities, a low percentage compared with the programme's national rate (27%). In addition, 10% of the graduates engage in volunteer activity.
- Most graduates stated that Youth Futures had affected them positively in all four realms of intervention: personal (64%); scholastic (76%); social (72%); and familial (63%).
- The majority of graduates (79%) stated that they are very pleased with their lives and 82% believe that their relationship with their Mentor helped them succeed.
- An average of 82% recognizes the importance of serving in the Israeli Army as a high priority.

With Our Appreciation

Keren Hayesod-UIA is proud to be a strategic partner in the Youth Futures Programme. We are profoundly grateful to you for your generosity, commitment, and dedication to the children and families who make Sderot their home. With your support, Youth Futures has been able to bring our successful model of leadership and mentorship to help youth at risk in Sderot to move from the margins to the centre in their schools, families and communities. Together, we are creating an environment in which they can learn and grow, increasing the likelihood that they will achieve success and become contributing members of Israeli society.

Expenditure Report – 2013/14 – 2014/15

Expenditure Report Youth Futures Sderot - 2013 - 2015

in USD (\$)

Program Revenue/ Commitments	2013/14 Budget	2013/14 Actual	2014/15 Budget	2014/15 Actual
Partner Community	\$ 158,800	\$ 148,800	\$ 122,000	\$ 122,000
Keren Hayesod - UIA	\$ 115,000	\$ 115,000	\$ 115,000	\$ 115,000
Israeli Partner - Including Local Authority	\$ 72,200	\$ 42,889	\$ 69,000	\$ 35,330
Other		\$ 31,687		\$ 17,525
Total Income	\$ 346,000	\$ 338,376	\$ 306,000	\$ 289,855

Program Expenses	2013/14 Budget	2013/14 Actual	2014/15 Budget	2014/15 Actual
Personnel				
Program Director	\$ 44,000	\$ 42,172	\$ 44,000	\$ 39,958
Family Coordinator	-	-	\$ 40,000	\$ 37,076
Mentor Compensation	\$ 240,000		\$ 192,000	\$ 158,316
Mentor Coordinator	\$ 26,000	\$ 262,033	-	-
Phone expenses	\$ 4,400	\$ 4,400	\$ 3,600	\$ 3,600
Training	\$ 6,000		\$ 6,000	\$ 5,000
Activities				
Personal empowerment basket for each child	\$ 10,400	\$ 12,915	\$ 6,400	\$ 8,329
Equipment and maintenance				
Equipment and maintenance	\$ 13,000	\$ 16,856	\$ 13,000	\$ 21,928
Miscellaneous				
External evaluation	\$ 2,200		\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Indirect Costs				\$ 2,909
Total	\$ 346,000	\$ 338,376	\$ 306,000	\$ 278,116