

Digma  
Applied Evaluation

Youth Futures  
The Partnership for Children and  
Youth  
The Jewish Agency

# Youth Futures

Summary of All Evaluation Reports for the 2010-2011  
Activity Year

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## **Preface**

Youth Futures (hereinafter: “the program”) is a national program active in Israel’s geographic and social periphery and based on a partnership between Diaspora Jewry and Israel. The program was developed in response to Israeli poverty data indicating a trend toward wider disparities between the center and the periphery, and toward growing numbers of at-risk children and youth. The program’s goal is to offer at-risk children and teens and their families an equal opportunity to develop their unique personal skills, scholastic and social, and to break out of the cycle of poverty and distress. The program’s holistic orientation means that the guidance provided to the child, and the way in which the services delivered to him are integrated, relate to four spheres in the participant’s life – personal, social, scholastic and familial.

The program is active in 32 local authorities and addresses the needs of 10,000 children and teens from elementary school to Grade 8 and their families, by means of 350 trustees who work with the children and their families for periods of at least three years.

Digma Applied Evaluation ‘s **external evaluation** of the program is multi-year and focuses on the following:

1. **Effectiveness** – immediate and ongoing , for participants and for secondary target populations (parents and teachers), at the end of each activity year, based on the following main evaluation questions:
  - Does the program help the children/teens and have an impact on them – in what areas and to what degree?
  - Does the program help adults in the child’s environment function as an accepting and supportive framework for the child?
  - Does Youth Futures have a lasting influence on its graduates even after they leave the program?

2. The program's **impact** on the program staff (trustees) and on the locality environment in which it operates (schools, social services, recreational institutions, etc.).

Regarding trustees –

- How do the trustees perceive Youth Futures and their role within it?
- Do the trustees feel that they have adequate skills to succeed in this role?
- Does the trustees' Youth Futures work affect their career trajectory, and how?
- What organizational climate does the trustees experience?

Regarding the program partners in the localities –

- How do the partners perceive Youth Futures, professionally and organizationally?
- In their view, does the program have an impact on its direct beneficiaries? On the partners themselves and on the locality as a whole?
- Are there differences between partner attitudes by area of activity – education, social services and recreation?

**The first evaluation report** addressed the 2009-2010 activity year. The report evaluated the program's immediate and ongoing effectiveness vis-à-vis its direct beneficiaries – children, teens, graduates and families.

The main evaluation findings indicated satisfaction with the program in the short- and medium-term (during the period of program participation) and in the long term (one and two years after completion of the program), testifying to participants' and graduates' enhanced resilience and ability to cope with life challenges. A high level of satisfaction with the program was also found for participants, their parents and teachers. The findings supported the concept of trustees both as significant adults in the participants' lives and as mediators and integrators of inputs and processes

surrounding the child. This is due to their role as the person acceptable to all parties within this environment, and to the quality of their interactions and their work.

The previous evaluation process suffered from methodological limitations due to the fact that on only one occasion – the end of the activity year – was it possible to investigate the status of the participants, and to the lack of a sampling of new participants. These limitations, which undermined the validity of the first evaluation findings, have been rectified in the 2010-2011 activity year evaluation.

**The present report** is for the 2010-2011 activity year. The report addresses seven topics. Below is a summary of each of the sub-reports:

1. Evaluation of the program's immediate effectiveness vis-à-vis the current group of program participants – children and teens.
2. Evaluation of the program's ongoing effectiveness vis-à-vis its graduates (jointly with the previous report)
3. Evaluation of the program's immediate effectiveness vis-à-vis the families
4. Evaluation of the program's immediate effectiveness vis-à-vis the Druze sector
5. Evaluation of the program's first activity year with the Arab sector in Lod
6. Evaluation of the program's impact on its partners in the localities
7. Trustees survey

Overall, the findings of the evaluation sub-reports paint a picture of Youth Futures as a voluntary program with clear goals for staff, trustees, program partners and the parents of participating children. The program has a well-established operating model suited to the needs of the at-risk children and teens that it serves.

According to the program's locality-based partners in the areas of education, social service and leisure/recreation, the program is well-run from both a professional and an organizational point of view. Not only that, but the program partners report intensive and ongoing cooperation with the program staff – an unusual feature of

school-based programs. The trustees garner praise from the program partners and parents for the way in which they do their job, for their commitment, dedication and seriousness, and for their outstanding relationships with the participating children and teens – relationships that bear fruit in the form of meaningful change. The participants themselves overwhelmingly testify to the fact that the trustees constitute, for them, significant adults.

Regarding outcomes, the locality-based partners, the parents and the trustees themselves agree that the program is achieving its goals vis-à-vis the children and the teens to a moderate or higher degree. From the program participants' perspective, we find confirmation of this in several ways:

Firstly, the graduates exhibit an ongoing impact in terms of enhanced life skills and the embrace of a normative worldview, an ability to cope with scholastic challenges, and improved relationships at home.

Secondly, indications of change in these areas are visible among program participants even during the period of their participation, in all of the program's intervention areas.

The parents of participants – both graduates and current participants – perceive Youth Futures' impact as even more positive than the participants themselves perceive it. The parents report meaningful change in their children, improved relations with them, personal empowerment on their own part (the parents) and improved parental functioning. Altogether, the parents would be happy for the program to continue working with their children, as an inclusive and supportive framework.

These findings are further confirmed by the opinions of the program partners, which take a broader view due to their familiarity with a larger number of children. The partners identify two levels of impact: at the basic level, the program helps keep pupils from dropping out of school and from getting into trouble. At a higher level, there are participants who, thanks to the program, have undergone a complete transformation in terms of attitudes, motivation and behavior.

These findings confirm the trustees' sense of having done their job well, and in particular of having achieved goals related directly to the program beneficiaries.

Although the program partners feel that, on average, the program is only slightly superior to similar programs, they nevertheless recommend it to their colleagues. Furthermore, a large number of program partners were interested in expanding the Youth Futures client base and in further establishing its operation in their localities.

The picture that emerges from the findings is not free of criticism on the part of parents, program partners or trustees. However, on the whole, all of the program stakeholders share a feeling that the program representatives display an open and dialogue-based approach. Accordingly, they express faith in Youth Futures and are willing to maintain their partnership with it.

Based on the findings as a whole and on the conclusions, several major options for improvement are proposed: structuring and intensifying the process by which new trustees assume their duties; strengthening ongoing training processes; intensifying efforts on the scholastic and social planes; continued reinforcement of trustee professionalism vis-à-vis parents, and learning what successful features of the Family Program should be adopted by the child and youth trustees; developing program graduates and a young leadership; improving the structure of work relations with the social service departments and guiding trustees in this area; and, to conclude – improving trustee wage conditions.

## **Evaluation of Youth Futures' effectiveness**

### **A. Participants and Graduates**

The present evaluation report is concerned with Youth Futures, a program operated in the framework of the Jewish Agency's Israel Department and funded jointly by Diaspora Jews and by parties in Israel. The program seeks to offer at-risk children and their families an equal opportunity to develop their unique skills in various areas of life and to break the cycle of poverty and risk. The program does this by

comprehensively addressing four spheres of its participants' lives – the personal, the social, the scholastic and the familial.

**The evaluation** examined the program's immediate effectiveness vis-à-vis its participants (during the period of participation) and its ongoing effectiveness vis-à-vis graduates (one and two years after program completion).

The **evaluation method** employed vis-à-vis the program participants was based on a ranking of comparison groups by seniority in the program, as well as a before-after view (beginning and end of first year) of new participants. The evaluation sample for the previous activity year was updated and comprised 540 children and 150 teens in all of the localities where the program operates. The end-of-2009-2010 data were supplemented by data on new participants, to whom a closed questionnaire was administered at the beginning of 2010-2011. Second questionnaires were administered to all of the sample participants at the end of the 2010-2011 activity year.

With regard to graduates, a one-time assessment design was used which included a comparison of graduates by the amount of time that had passed since they completed the program. The graduates sample for the previous activity year was updated as well. The graduates sample comprised a total of 106 teens and 135 parents. Semi-closed telephone interviews were conducted with the graduates and the parents.

**Evaluation parameters** were formulated in accordance with the way in which Youth Futures defines success, and based on the professional literature. In this report the parameters were organized into 19 comprehensive variables subsequent to factor analysis, which reinforced the program's working premises:

- In the personal sphere – a sense of self-efficacy, proactively coping with problems/challenges, faith in the ability to change one's life, sense of joy, optimism;

- In the social sphere – assertiveness vis-à-vis authority, assertiveness vis-à-vis the peer group, anti-violence attitudes, self-control in social interactions, social status;
- In the scholastic sphere – attitude toward studies, the child’s perception of his/her scholastic level, school attendance (adherence to rules), nature of involvement in the school, sense of being included in the school (visibility), sense of being helped by the school, optimism regarding success in the school setting. Respondent scholastic performance was also assessed in four core subjects – Hebrew language, mathematics, English and science, using the Aluma system.
- In the familial sphere – parental support, the familial picture of the future.
- We also assessed the degree to which the program made a positive contribution – the trustee as significant adult, attributing positive impact to the program in the personal, social and scholastic spheres, attributing positive impact to the program in the familial sphere, and satisfaction with the program.

With regard to **participant attributes**, Youth Futures serves children living in circumstances liable to put them risk and/or constituting a dangerous environment: nearly half of the participants’ families are social service clients, and the decisive majority of the children live in poor neighborhoods. A third of the families suffer from chronic unemployment or unstable employment, a third are single-parent families or families in crisis, while a small number are new-immigrant families experiencing immigration-related difficulties. No essential difference was found in the background-attribute profiles of participants across the years of program operation (between children/teens currently participating in Youth Futures and program graduates). This similarity in attribute background between current and former participants makes it possible to compare the groups.

**The evaluation findings** indicate that the program has an **ongoing impact** on graduates who completed the program one and two years prior to the time of evaluation, as well as an **immediate impact** on current Youth Futures participants – both children and teens.

### **Ongoing impact of Youth Futures on its graduates**

**Youth Futures has an ongoing impact on its graduates in terms of distancing them from the margins of society, and strengthening their life skills.** The fact that for most variables no significant differences were found between today's participants and the program graduates shows that **this impact remains in force at one and two years post-program-completion.**

1. In the personal sphere – Not only do graduates attribute to Youth Futures a positive contribution in terms of strengthening their self-image, they were also found to exhibit a high degree of optimism, a sense of joy, a proactive approach, and self-efficacy. Moreover, a significant improvement was found in graduate versus current-participant attitudes regarding faith in their ability to change their lives. This was also reflected in the existence of normative aspirations and dreams. These findings point to the program's success in exerting an effect in one of the areas most critical for escaping the cycle of risk.
2. In the social sphere – The program had a discernible impact on the graduates in terms of shaping a normative worldview, as directly indicated by their testimonies and from a moderate-high rating on a set of several variables: anti-violence attitudes, continued participation in enrichment courses by half of the graduates, even courses not subsidized by the program, enhanced sense of social inclusion, interest expressed by over half of the graduates in military/national service (a percentage similar to the IDF conscription rate for the Israeli population as a whole), and preservation of the social network that was created or at least shaped during the period of program participation. The graduates' assertiveness level is moderate and similar to that of the current program participants.

3. In the scholastic sphere Youth Futures had a discernible impact on perseverance in the study framework, compared with an 8% national drop-out rate for at-risk teens. The graduates also testify to the program's contribution to their integration in study frameworks, their scholastic performance and improved attainments.
4. In the familial sphere the graduates attribute to the program a moderate-to-high level of contribution to improved relations within the family, similar to that of the program's current participants. In contrast to the graduates, their parents attribute to the program a significant impact in terms of improved communication with their children, due to changed participant attitudes and skills and to greater parental awareness and enhanced parental functioning.

The findings for the graduates' evaluation confer validity on the multi-year component of the program's work model, which facilitates development of intensive personal and interpersonal processes. The findings also demonstrate that the decision-making processes of the program staff in the localities are reliable and characterized by a high degree of validity. Program staff are correctly assessing participant maturity levels and dismissing them from the program with adequate life coping skills. If this is true regarding successful program graduates, it may be assumed that the staff are equally adept at identifying participants who need longer-term guidance, or those requiring assistance of a different kind, so that the chance of generating change in and with them is low.

As noted above, even during the period of Youth Futures participation one can discern **immediate effects** of the program on its participants. These effects have several features:

1. Shared impact trends are evident among children, teens and graduates – this despite great differences between the individual participants' specific starting data and despite the fact that an individual plan is designed for each participant in accordance with his/her needs. This testifies to the program's ability to achieve its goals vis-à-vis the participants.

2. The program has a similar impact on children and teens in the personal sphere – in terms of greater joy in life and optimism, alongside a small but significant regression in the way in which participants choose to cope with challenges (a decline in the level of pro-activeness).
3. Participants have a moderate-low belief in their ability to change their lives. This finding contradicts other findings pointing to moderate-high or better attitudes and functioning regarding the decisive majority of other variables. This is due to the elusive nature of social exclusion and testifies to the importance of removing children and teens from risk.
4. Participants report highly positive situations in the familial sphere, without acknowledging any positive program contribution to family relations. Moreover, no link was found between duration of Youth Futures participation and change in this area.
5. The children's and teens' scholastic attainments in core subjects remained low to moderate-low.
6. The program's effects at the social and scholastic levels are manifested differently by the children and the teens (see below).
7. In general, no difference was found in the status of boys and girls. Only regarding a few variables at the scholastic level were girls found to have an advantage over boys (adhering to rules and more positive attitudes toward studies).
8. In contrast to the previous evaluation report, a significant trend was found toward shorter average periods of program participation, to 2.3 years. This finding is consistent with an effort that began a year ago of more tightly structuring the decision-making process regarding each participant at the end of each school year.
9. In accordance with the previous finding, the complex change process initiated by Youth Futures staff bears fruit vis-à-vis most participants within 3 years. The program appears to realize its impact potential within 4 years, after which the cost-benefit ratio is unclear.
10. There is similarity between the program's effects on current participants and graduates, and the intensiveness of these effects, indicating Youth Futures'

ongoing effectiveness and the depth of change that it generates among its participants and in their immediate environment (parents and school staff).

### **Immediate impact of Youth Futures on elementary school aged participants**

1. During the first year of program participation a significant improvement was found among the children in the personal sphere only, and only at the level of self-efficacy.
2. The different "program seniority" child groups exhibited a significant improvement over time in three spheres: the personal sphere – in terms of faith in the ability to change one's life, the social sphere – in terms of assertiveness vis-à-vis peers, and the scholastic sphere – in terms of degree of involvement in studies and in optimism regarding scholastic success.
3. The 2010-2011 program activity was found to have had a significant impact on all of the children (both new and "veteran" program participants) in the same three spheres:
  - A. In the personal sphere – A mixed trend was found. On the one hand, the children's sense of joy and optimism levels improved. On the other hand, there was regression with regard to pro-activeness.
  - B. In the social sphere – Participation in Youth Futures improves the children's social status and their levels of assertiveness vis-à-vis the peer group (a variable indicative of the ability to withstand peer pressure).
  - C. In the scholastic sphere – A mixed trend was found, featuring change for all attitudinal and functional variables except for scholastic performance which remained moderate-low. On the one hand, the children became more optimistic about their future scholastic success. On the other hand, there was a significant decline in the children's sense of being included by, and visible to, the teaching staff.

### **Immediate impact of Youth Futures on junior high school participants**

1. During the first year of Youth Futures participation a significant improvement was found for junior high school pupils in the social sphere – in terms of anti-

violence attitudes, and in the scholastic sphere – in terms of school attendance and adherence to rules.

2. The different "program seniority" teen groups were found to exhibit significant improvement over time in the personal sphere – in terms of faith in their ability to change their lives, in the social sphere – in terms of assertiveness vis-à-vis peers, and in the scholastic sphere – in terms of involvement in studies and optimism regarding scholastic success. This was similar to the findings for "veteran" children in the program.
3. The 2010-2011 program activity was found to have exerted a significant impact on all of the teens (both new and "veteran" participants) at all levels:
  - A. In the personal sphere – in terms of improved sense of joy and optimism, on the one hand, along with a significant decline in pro-activeness, on the other. This finding was similar to that for the elementary school children.
  - B. In the social sphere – Youth Futures participation strengthens anti-violence attitudes and assertiveness vis-à-vis the peer group (again, an indicator of the ability to withstand peer pressure). At the same time, however, there was a worsening of assertiveness vis-à-vis authorities.
  - C. In the scholastic sphere an overall trend was found toward improvement for all attitudinal and functional variables measured, except for scholastic performance (as with the elementary school children). A significant improvement was found in school attendance and adherence to rules, in optimism regarding scholastic success and in participant perception of scholastic level.
  - D. In the familial sphere the teens exhibited a significant decline in their sense of security at home and of parental support.

### **Summary of discussion, conclusions and recommendations**

The findings as a whole indicate that changes among the participants and graduates can indeed be attributed to Youth Futures, even taking into account participant maturation over time, and despite the lack of a control group. Three reasons point to this:

1. The program's multi-year **work model** is consistent with psycho-social developmental theories that emphasize the interrelatedness of various aspects of life, and the spiral dynamic of maturation challenges at each stage. The model is also suited to the actual attributes of the children served by the program, their needs and the areas that need to be focused on (in terms both of the children and their environment), so as to ensure that the children have an equal opportunity to flourish. The relationships found between the variables indicative of life skills in different areas confirm the program's basic premises and the holistic intervention model derived from those premises.
2. The **manner and quality of the operating model's implementation are corroborated** by the very high satisfaction levels garnered by the program, by the high degree of positive contribution attributed to the program, and by the high and positive degree to which trustees are regarded as significant adults in the participants' lives. The findings indicate that participants and graduates find in Youth Futures a protected space and a "home" at the emotional and concrete levels.
3. **The nature of the evaluation findings.** Improvement was linked to "seniority" in Youth Futures for many of the evaluation variables. However, participant seniority does not entirely overlap with age. Were the improvement merely a matter of the natural maturation process, one would expect significant and consistent differences between age groups in the evaluation variables, or a similar degree of improvement across all parameters. Moreover, comparative analysis of the findings for current participants and graduates reinforces the linkage of changes in respondent status to the program. Ongoing and stable effects of the program were found for graduates in terms of their functioning in the personal, social and scholastic spheres; the graduates themselves attribute to the program a highly positive impact on their worldview and functioning; and, above all – graduates exhibit significantly improved faith in their ability to change their lives, compared with current participants. In this context one may ask whether this attitude (inner faith) determines success in life or whether experiences of success generate such an attitude. The aforementioned findings

indicate that attitudes can be changed by experience. This, apparently, is the added value offered by Youth Futures as a program for at-risk children and teens – the inclusiveness, the support and the improved conditions created by the program enhance participants' ability to experience success, thereby strengthening their faith in their ability to generate meaningful change in their lives, and to escape the sense of exclusion.

To summarize, Youth Futures appears to be successfully addressing the formidable challenges that it has taken upon itself, and is achieving its goals vis-à-vis its participants, though to varying degrees. Considering the comprehensiveness of the program goals and the difficulty of the intervention, it is hardly surprising that the findings regarding the program's impact are not straightforward or unequivocal. Clearly a significant period of time – several years – is needed to ensure that the program's work processes have their full effect and manifest in a coherent way, as was indeed found for the program graduates.

**We will end** with several conclusions and recommendations for the future, including (a) analyzing the degree of congruence between the areas of effort currently being emphasized vis-à-vis program participants and the evaluation findings; (b) reconsidering what the optimal format should be for program activity at the various grade levels (elementary, junior high and high school); (c) intensifying work with the program participants on parameters found to be critical by this evaluation; (d) deepening staff understanding of the way in which the program exerts an impact at the social level; (e) considering how and in what areas work with school staff can be intensified; (f) continuing to strengthen the trustees' professionalism in their work with parents; and (g) developing program graduates as a young leadership, both in order to exert an influence on younger participants and in order to maintain the program's impact.

Youth Futures works with thousands of children and their parents, and has one of the widest geographic distributions associated with any single voluntary program in

Israel. That the program has substantial achievements to its credit does not mean that it no longer faces any challenges. The name "Youth Futures" appears to be a highly appropriate expression of the benefit that the program confers on the children and teens who take part in it, as well as on their parents. Particularly fitting is the image evoked by the program's division of labor between the staff (who help open the door to a brighter future), and the participants (who are expected to cross the threshold, and to continue along the path to success, on their own).

## **B. The Family Program**

Youth Futures' Family Program, the focus of this report, was planned as an additional means of creating a stable and supportive environment enabling each child to flourish. At the heart of the program lies the insight that the family is the child's primary and most meaningful socialization agent. This unique program component is intended for the families of Youth Futures children and teens whom the staff have identified as likely to benefit from "reinforcing elements within the familial space, in order to provide the child participating in Youth Futures with optimal conditions for success and change." The Family Program serves 330 families in 15 localities, with the support of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit.

The program evaluation was executed in a before-after design and drew on a respondent pool of 70 families, half of them new to the program and half of them families whose guidance period had ended. The similarity of attributes between the two family groups means that one can view the beginning families as a "before" group, and the families who completed the program as an "after" group.

The **families who join the program have similar profiles** – the parents have low educational levels and most of the mothers work, if only part-time. A significant proportion of the families are in crisis – whether due to changes in family status (divorce, the death of a parent) and/or to immigration or changes in living environment. The main reason why families join the program is the parents'

recognition that they themselves need help – in their relationships with their children and/or in order to cope with the challenges of life.

**Regarding the program work processes,** the respondents as a group express a high degree of satisfaction with the family trustees. The respondents' sense of the trustees' character, abilities and actual contribution is consistent and impressive, for both beginning families and families that completed the program. It is clear that the family trustees are identifying real needs and addressing them in an effective way. The minimal criticism that was voiced related primarily to problems with coordinating expectations.

**Regarding program's outputs:** Despite the short amount of time that the “new” families have been participating in the program, these families are already taking part in structured groups, particularly ones devoted to parenting. This finding is consistent with the program's focus on parenting skills, and testifies to the program initiators' recognition of the importance of group work and of a support network in the community.

**Regarding the program's contribution,** the findings support the program's working premise that by empowering parents one can improve their parenting skills and functioning. The guidance that the family trustees provide is useful to the families, particularly in terms of empowering the parents themselves and improving their relationships with the children.

The Family Program addresses the feelings of isolation, powerlessness and of being overwhelmed that parents of at-risk children experience. Not only does the program identify the areas in which parental functioning is weak, it also manages to improve them. Moreover, the family trustees' focus on the specific needs of each family is reflected in the fact that different people have been helped by the program in different ways.

Attention should be paid to a discrepancy between need and guidance in two areas – managing the family budget and exercising rights. Although neither of these areas is central to the program intervention, they nevertheless constitute barriers to

supportive and enabling parenting. We thus recommend reinforcing trustee skills in guiding families to autonomous exercise of their rights.

The aforementioned discrepancy, and respondent reports of needs not adequately addressed by the program, drive home the need for clearer and more continual coordination of expectations with the families and for structured processes of program completion, as well as referral to appropriate services in the community to ensure that families get help with issues outside the scope of the program intervention.

**To conclude**, the Family Program is a feature that distinguishes Youth Futures within the sphere of interventions for at-risk children and youth. The program strengthens its participants' parenting skills and improves Youth Futures' ability to help the children and teens who constitute its primary target population.

The knowledge and skills amassed through operation of the Family Program should be imparted to, and implemented by, the child trustees in their own interventions in the familial sphere. This is even more important in localities where the Family Program is not being operated. In order for this learning process to take place, the knowledge has to be conceptualized and shared in a deliberate and intelligent way, both at the administrative level and on the ground.

Thus, the challenges currently faced by the program include continued upgrading of Family Futures work processes, and incorporation of the program's successful features into the child trustee role.

## **Evaluation of Youth Futures' Impact**

### **A. Partners in the program localities**

The report below summarizes the findings of a survey administered during winter-spring 2011 to 130 major Youth Futures partners in the education, social service and leisure/recreation systems of localities in which the program is active. The aim of the survey was to find out how the program is perceived by personnel belonging

to these locality-based systems, as its strategic partners in assisting children and teens at risk.

The survey respondents comprise a representative sample of the locality program partners in the areas of education (65%), social service (23%) and recreation (13%). They exhibit a deep and lengthy familiarity with the program (over four years), particularly the education personnel.

The program's most important goals in the eyes of its partners, and by a wide margin vis-à-vis its other declared goals, are those focused on the child – instilling in each and every child a belief that they have within themselves a collection of unique personal abilities, strengths and talents, and developing these abilities and talents.

In accordance with this approach, the program partners feel that the program's contribution to its participants – particularly in the personal and social spheres – is moderate-high to high.

Youth Futures' contribution to the localities in general and to local education, social service and recreation systems in particular, is perceived to be quite moderate compared with its contribution to the program participants. In these areas, the program's most notable contributions are:

To the locality as a whole – by expanding the programming and services available in the localities for children, teens and families at risk, and by creating a range and continuum of services for locality children;

In the educational sphere – in terms of awareness of the needs and attributes of at-risk children;

In the social service sphere – by enriching the social services available to at-risk children and their families, and by reinforcing a holistic approach on the part of treatment providers;

In the recreational sphere – by making recreational activities accessible to at-risk children and their families.

In the municipal partners' view, the program is able to achieve these goals thanks primarily to its well-established work model and its high-caliber work processes.

The program partners express a high degree of satisfaction with the way in which the program carries out its activities, from both an organizational and a professional point of view. The partners call particular attention to the tailored and comprehensive service provided to each child via extensive and intensive cooperation between the program staff and locality-based parties; to the staff's overall approach – its dedication and commitment; and to the strong relationships that the program creates with the children and their families.

Although Youth Futures is regarded as just slightly better than other programs for at-risk children and youth, this does not prevent the decisive majority of respondents from recommending it to their colleagues in other localities. Moreover, quite a few respondents express an interest in extending the program's reach to other children in the same school and/or to additional schools and/or higher grade levels.

At the same time, the respondents also express criticism of the program and raise suggestions for improvement. Most of the criticism relates to a lack of resources for special needs, to high trustee turnover, to a need for more intensive interaction with social services , and to a need for assessment and better outcomes in the scholastic sphere.

In light of the findings presented in the report, our recommendations focus on the following areas: deciding on the importance of systemic goals versus goals at the individual level and adapting the program's work model accordingly; strengthening the program's work processes on the scholastic plane; and fine-tuning mutual expectations and work relations with the social service departments and divisions.

## **B. The trustees – the program staff**

The trustee's role is a unique one that coalesced to meet the needs of Youth Futures, and it is a major component of the program's operating model. The trustees' job is to guide the program participants – mainly children and teens – and to serve as big brothers/sisters and role models for them. At the same time, the trustees are

expected to identify, coordinate and integrate the various services needed to address the children's emotional-attitudinal, scholastic, social and familial needs, with the aim of promoting their personal development and removing them from the cycle of risk.

Since the program's inception the trustee role has continually evolved. It is a semi-professional job that encompasses several different occupational spheres – informal education, social work and education – and whose range of practices draws on individual, group and communal orientations. The job is defined as time-limited – up to five years. The position-holder's target population has changed considerably since the program's beginnings. From a semi-voluntary, part-time job manned by communities of young Noar Oved VeLomed participants, the job has turned into a full-time one manned by young people from the localities in which the program is active. In the context of this change, Youth Futures added a secondary goal: to empower the young generation in Israel's peripheral localities as a future local leadership in the social and communal spheres.

As Youth Futures developed, three sub-categories emerged for trustee activity, in accordance with the relevant target populations:

1. The **child trustee**, who works with elementary-school aged children. In accordance with the program's operating model and participant distribution, this group accounts for most of the trustees – 80%;
2. The **youth trustee**, who works with junior high school pupils. This group accounts for 15% of the trustees.
3. The **family trustee**, who works with program-participant families carefully chosen in consultation with the locality social service departments. The family trustees account for 5% of the trustee population.

Against this background, the survey's goal is to delineate the trustees' attributes and attitudes in the context of their role within Youth Futures and their professional future.

The **trustee profile** was found to be highly homogeneous. Most of the trustees are women. Most of them are Israeli-born, the children of parents who immigrated to Israel. The respondents' median age is 30. The trustees are an integral part of the peripheral areas in which they work. The vast majority of them currently reside in the localities in which they are employed; half of them were actually born there. Regarding lifestyle, the trustees are about evenly divided between secular and traditional. In contrast to Youth Futures' early years, most of today's trustees have some academic background, usually a bachelor's degree in an education- or therapy-related discipline.

With regard to the trustees' **employment status**, all of the trustees, with just a few exceptions, are employed full-time. The child and youth trustees are responsible for 16 participants each. The family trustees work on average with fewer clients – 11 and a half families, of which five on average are single-parent families.

**The trustees have a strong affinity for Youth Futures.** They are very proud to be working for the program, they report a high degree of identification with its goals and regard it as substantially superior to other programs for at-risk children and teens with which they are familiar. The job provides them with personal gratification that compensates for the low financial compensation that they receive – it is a challenging job that affords the trustees considerable scope for impact and a high degree of responsibility and autonomy, as well as opportunities for professional enrichment, and the trustees are on very good terms with their supervisors. The trustees feel that the job contributes moderately to their career development. However, the low wage explains why most of the trustees are women.

In general, **trustee feedback about the job and about the program** is positive to very positive. Clearly, the program's national distribution means that there are inter-locality differences in the way in which the program's ideals and procedures are implemented, due to differences between the people involved and the attributes of the various localities. Unfortunately, because the number of respondents from

each locality was small, it was impossible to assess locality contribution to this variability of implementation.

**A few issues on which feedback was exceptionally positive:**

- **Attitudes toward the program goals.** The trustees perceive the importance of the program goals in a way that is consistent with how these goals are defined by the program administration, with an emphasis on those goals that are directly related to the program beneficiaries and to having an impact on locality education systems. In the trustees' view, the program is achieving its goals to a moderate-high degree, thanks to its work model and principles.
- **The job.** Most of the job components are very clear to the trustees – what is required of them regarding one-on-one and group work with the participants, working with school staff and with parents, the integration tasks, working with Youth Futures colleagues, documenting the activity and using that documentation to plan further activity, and handling special situations.
- **Skills and resources for carrying out their tasks:** The respondents feel that they are given skills and guidance with sufficient frequency for their “behind-the-scenes” tasks, e.g. teamwork, documentation and drawing up individual plans.
- **Success at the job:** Consistent with the above finding, the trustees have a stronger experience of success with regard to the “internal” aspects of their job (teamwork, documentation, writing up individual plans, etc.), than regarding their direct work with program beneficiaries and their integrative work vis-à-vis other elements in the children's environment.

At the same time, regarding the specific element of one-on-one work with children and teens, the trustees report experiencing their highest degree of success, thanks to the personal relationships that they create in their work environment.

- **Follow-up and evaluation:** Most of the trustees monitor changes in participant progress vis-à-vis the individual development plans. The measures that appear in Aluma are helpful to trustees in this regard to a high or very high degree.

**Several aspects of the trustees' work environment were found to be in need of improvement.**

- **Training prior to the assumption of duties:** The trustees disagree regarding the degree to which they received sufficient training at the start of their employment. One may assume that these differences of opinion relate to the way in which the trustees assume their duties and to the number of trustees hired by a given locality at a given time. It seems likely that the greater the number of trustees who join the program at a given time, the more orderly the training provided and the more gradually the trustees are eased into their duties.
- **Professional rules and guidance:** The trustees still need additional skills and guidance in their work with the children and in the scholastic sphere, as well as in their interaction with the social and recreational services. Indeed, in their teamwork with the social services the trustees testify to only a moderate degree of success – the lowest rating associated with a trustee task.
- **Resources for carrying out their tasks:** The trustees' satisfaction with the scope of their job – the number of participants per trustee and the work hours – was found to be significantly lower than for other job resources. That is, the trustees feel that they are overburdened in these two areas, negatively affecting their ability to succeed at the job and to achieve the program goals.
- **Success at the job:** It is worth noting the low weight (a few percentage points, on average) that the child and youth trustees assign to the program's work model and to their interaction with the children's parents in their success at the job. This low weight testifies to an attitude that views these two factors as insignificant for success at the job compared with other factors. The implications

of this attitude may include reduced attention to Youth Futures' guiding principles and reduced investment in relations with parents.

- **Follow-up and evaluation:** The frequency with which changes in participant functioning are monitored vis-à-vis the personal development plans is not uniform across the trustee group. Nearly half of the respondents conduct regular follow-up on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, while a third are divided between those who conduct follow-up toward year's end and those who do it prior to Tsavta meetings (interdisciplinary meetings regarding program participants).
- **Organizational tools:** The trustees express moderate satisfaction with three aspects of Youth Futures' organizational climate: satisfaction with the work itself, interaction with colleagues, and the moderate degree of openness to criticism that they experience. For the "job satisfaction" cluster a large discrepancy was found between the trustees' high degree of satisfaction with the professional aspect of their job and the sense of unfairness surrounding their wage.

In accordance with their job characteristics, **the child and youth trustees' attitudes were found to be similar** in most areas examined, while on a large number of issues the family trustees have a different and significantly more positive outlook than that of the child and youth trustees.

#### **Involvement in Youth Futures has a mixed impact on the trustees:**

- **Professional advancement:** Half of the trustees have been with the program for short amounts of time, a year or less, and therefore have most of their job tenure ahead of them. The respondents have read the map correctly and understand that, due to Youth Futures' flat hierarchical structure, they have little room for advancement within the program.
- **Youth Futures' contribution to the trustees' professional future:**

- The trustees ascribe to the program a high degree of influence on their professional direction, along with a moderate contribution to their professional future (i.e., their career trajectory).
- They are interested in further study and development in educational and therapeutic fields, but their ability to fund such studies on their own is low.
- Youth Futures has a highly positive impact on the ability of former scholarship recipients to pursue/complete academic study.
- Over the past two years, the number of scholarship applicants has doubled. These applicants are similar demographically to those who received scholarships in the past. That is, they deserve financial support.

**To conclude**, it appears that Youth Futures' ongoing investment in developing the trustee position has proven itself, both in terms of the job definition and in terms of the decision to work with trustees who reside in the localities where the program is active, and to employ them full time. Today one can talk about a job that is becoming increasingly professionalized, thanks to several factors: professional knowledge as a prerequisite for the job; a clear definition of the trustee's areas of responsibility – both internal and external, vis-à-vis the program beneficiaries and vis-à-vis the partners; the emergence of a coherent body of knowledge that is transmitted via an orderly training system; a defined set of supportive resources; and the development of an ethical code that sets forth trustee do's and don'ts.

The program succeeds in instilling a high degree of commitment and identification among its position-holders, due particularly to the sense of personal reward that it offers – meaningfulness, responsibility, autonomy, professional enrichment and a positive organizational environment, along with a strong sense of success.

There is a certain tension between the professionalized knowledge requirements and work processes that the program demands of the trustees, and the actual features of the job. On the one hand, the program aspires to maximal professionalism, while on the other hand, the job is time-limited, with little room for advancement and a low wage – meaning that it attracts mainly women with bachelor's degrees aged up to their mid-twenties.

A number of fundamental issues still need to be clarified. For example, does the trustee job's professionalization ensure greater program effectiveness? And in what areas is this professionalization necessary? What are the consequences of the trustee job being almost exclusively filled by women, when the trustees are supposed to serve as role models for a target population consisting mainly of boys and male adolescents?

Considering that Youth Futures is a program active in Israel's geographic and social periphery, and considering both its secondary goal of developing the trustees as a young leadership and the low trustee wage, one has to ask to what degree the program's declared goals are consistent with the messages that are actually being conveyed. The scholarships provided to trustees for academic study are important and exceedingly useful to those who receive them. But the scholarships are still only a partial solution, and one that is relevant only to a few; there is no comprehensive solution for the entire trustee population.

The more entrenched Youth Futures becomes in the localities where it is active, and the more interested it becomes in long-term cooperation with the State, the more necessary it will be to offer unequivocal answers to these and other questions. It is to Youth Futures' credit that it has created an infrastructure well-equipped to examine these issues from a position of being able to choose between different alternatives.

[For more on Youth Futures, click here.](#)

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