

Research Report – Evaluation of the Program  
'Placement and Community Centers for ex-Haredim'  
Founded by the *Yotzim le'shinui* Association

**Executive Summary**

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## Executive Summary

The Program 'Placement and Community Centers for ex-Haredim', founded by the *Yotzim le'shinui* Association (hence YLA), is comprised of two centers – one in Jerusalem, the other in Tel- Aviv. Both centers are open, in principle, to all those who left the Haredi community, with no pre-conditions, aiming towards assisting the ex-Haredim to adjust to the general society.

The Special Enterprises Fund of the National Insurance Institute, together with the Service for Youth at the Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Services, are supporting the YLA enterprise, and asked it to be followed by an evaluation study throughout the first three years, 2019-2021. This research report presents the main results of the requested evaluation study.

### Research goals:

- To identify the theory behind and the work-principles of the two Centers.
- To delineate the socio-cultural and standard-of-living characteristics of the participants in the Program.
- To describe patterns of participation in the Program.
- To identify changes in management approaches and patterns of participation throughout the research period.
- To follow up new participants in the Program and identify possible transitions in their standard-of-living throughout the research period.
- To evaluate the organizational aspects of the Program.

While the present study focuses particularly on the YLA Program, the embedded goal was to learn and examine service patterns, principles and characteristics required for similar organizations operating in this field, in general.

In order to obtain rich and varied information about Placement and Community Centers for ex-Haredim, this evaluation study was based on mixed research methods – quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative study was conducted at two points in time – in the summer of 2019 and in the summer of 2021; the quantitative study was also conducted at two points – in the first half of 2020 and in May-August 2021.

### Main findings:

Some 35,000 young adults aged 20-39 have left the ultra-Orthodox (U-O) sector in recent years. They comprise about 13% of those aged 20-64 (Regev and Gordon, 2020). Regarding our study, towards the end of the first measurement in the quantitative study (July 2020), about 600 ex-Haredim were registered in the YLA database. At the beginning of the second measurement in the quantitative study (May 2021), close to 1,500 people were registered in

the YLA database; And currently (January 2022), about 2,700 people are registered within the YAL lists.

The data indicate a significant change in the scope and share of participants in the activities between the two measurement periods. An estimate of the number of actual participants in activities with some frequency, based on the sampled data, indicates an increase from 2020 to 2021 by nearly 4 times: From about 190 to about 760. However, a certain decline was found in the percentage of participants out of all registered: While in early 2020 (before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic), about 70% of those registered participated in activities at least once a month, in a measurement conducted during 2021, only a third of the registrants participated in activities at this frequency. Moreover, in 2020, the rate of those not arriving at all or participating in activities in the Centers was negligible, compared to 40% in 2021.

The findings indicate gaps and deficiencies with which YLA service consumers are dealing: Images from the world of immigration are prominent in the narratives of the interviewees; The sense of loneliness and depression are exhibited markedly both in quantitative data (compared to CBS data from 2020 for Jews aged 20-34) and in personal interviews; Similarly, there are marked gaps in income, education, and satisfaction with the economic and employment situation (compared to CBS data). Conversely, high satisfaction is evident with regard to the process of leaving the ultra-Orthodox world.

Indeed, the work theory of the YLA, as reflected by the Centers' staff members (predominantly in the second measurement), is to focus their attention and activities to the "functioning components" of those individuals entering their gates. They encourage the joining of those ex-Haredim who are motivated to and capable of promoting themselves and subsequently contribute to the community.

The intervention practices of the Centers invite their members to take an active part in their personal advancement and in the advancement of the community. The concept is to prefer giving 'rods' over 'fish'. Providing service 'at eye level' -- which eliminates the familiar hierarchy between 'expert' service-providers to so-called 'needy' service-consumers -- is also a cornerstone in the YLA Centers. The Open Space, as a concept, constitutes the main infrastructure for the working theory of the Centers and the primary leverage for the personal development of the individual.

Most of the exposure to the YLA Centers occurs through the social media. At the top of the activity list, in terms of participation rates, is the "Off to Studies" program, followed by art courses and workshops, courses in 'reducing education gaps' and personal placement counseling. As far as dealing with emotional-mental difficulties -- such as processing the 'exit' from the U-O community and the experiences of transition, shaping the new identity, handling personal crises and re-building a new self-image -- these are mostly provided via indirect processes: For example, by adhering to a language based on principles of competence, normativity and empowerment, as well as by applying group activities rather than individual processes. When more in-depth interventions are needed -- the preference is to refer to professional agencies outside the Center.

Both the quantitative and the qualitative data, as accumulated over the course of the three years of the study, indicate a high degree of congruence between the vision and principles of action of the YLA association regarding the operation of the Centers and the practices

implemented in the field. In addition, the quantitative and qualitative studies indicate a high and stable level of satisfaction on behalf of the ex-Haredim who have utilized the various services of the Centers throughout the three years of the study. The most prominent experience of those registered in the Centers is their feeling that they are part of a community. Notwithstanding, in the in-depth interviews conducted during the second measurement, several critical themes were also raised: A sense of discomfort with the dynamics of relations between the sexes conducted within the Centers; and some reservations regarding the maintenance standards of the Centers, especially with regard to the Jerusalem living room (the "salon").

Regarding differences in standard of living measures of the Centers' participants between the two measurements – it became problematical to arrive at valid conclusions, mainly because of the Covid 19 epidemic that broke out during the second year of the study. In practice, there were no differences found, except one: An increase in the number of low-income (under 5,000 NIS) members – due, most probably to the Corona 19's consequences.

The findings also pointed to differences between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: The Tel Aviv 'salon' is characterized by a more secular atmosphere, compared to the Jerusalem 'salon', which is more diverse in terms of the religious orientation of its members. The average age of the Tel Aviv registrants is higher than that of the Jerusalem's, and so is the average income. The Tel Aviv center is stronger characterized by a core participant who play a central role in leading, managing and executing events at the center, thus encouraging initiatives that grow from below; It seems that such a nucleus has not yet been formed in the Jerusalem 'salon'. It should be noted that during the research period (2019-2021) there were frequent changes of managerial positions at the Jerusalem 'salon'. Consequently, some adjustments in the operating model of the Jerusalem 'salon', distinct from those in the Tel Aviv 'salon', might be considered.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

- The impressive increase in the number of registrants to the YLA Centers, despite the coinciding Covid-19 crisis, certainly indicates the need of supportive services for those departing from the ultra-Orthodox community. Furthermore, the success of the YLA association to position itself as a key organization in this field, including its unique principles and work practices, speaks for itself.
- The findings of our research suggest that the strategy and the theory behind the work-principles of the YLA association in offering services to the "disadvantaged-but-functioning" population in the two Centers -- is basically correct and justified to the first years of activity of the Centers. This strategy enabled the YLA association to establish its own narrative – to strengthen the self-efficacy and sense of competence of ex-Haredim doing their first steps outside the U-O sector and to encourage their contribution to the community. The modeling of success demonstrated in the YLA Centers may be relevant to anyone who seeks to embark on a similar journey of change.
- However, the research team suggests that consideration should be given to opening and expanding the population groups that receive services from the YLA Centers – because there is a significant need in this field. The YLA association is strong enough

today, after several years of activity, and it is capable of responding to this challenge. Yet, the opening of services to additional population groups must be done with measured and careful steps in order not to damage the delicate community fabric that has been laboriously formed in recent years, which plays a very important role in the success of the two Centers.

- In view of the differences in composition between the population in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and in view of the difficulties observed in operating the Jerusalem Center, it is necessary to consider adjustments in the operating model of services for ex-Haredim, which will be distinct from the operating model in the Tel Aviv Center.
- It seems that the current program's operating model and the Association's organizational culture – which invite active participation in the community and encourage self-efficacy – enable YLA to continue to provide the expectations of their 'customers', despite the processes of institutionalization of the Association and the dramatic increase in the number of registrants.
- In one central area, there is a significant deficiency of services in the YLA Centers (as well as in the work-theory of the Association) – and that is the emotional-mental care at the individual's level. Both the quantitative and qualitative research findings point to the fact that many members face complex emotional-mental difficulties, such as depression and loneliness. Although the YLA Centers have developed a variety of indirect ways to support and empower the individual, as mentioned above – there are still many who visit the Centers in need for emotional support that is 'tailored' to their individual needs.
- Our findings show that the YLA Centers continue to be relevant to 'veteran' ex-Haredim – those who seek their services even a few years after they had done their "immigration" out of the U-O community. The ability of the YLA association to provide a variety of responses to both those in the initial stages of exit as well as to older veterans – demonstrates organizational strength and contributes to the social capital of the ex-Haredim community. These findings also attest to the existing need for services to ex-Haredim even several years after their 'exit'.