



Engelberg Center for Children and Youth

## Preparing Ethiopian-Israeli Youth for Military Service

Dganit Levi ■ Anna Reznikovski-Kuras ■ Paula Kahan-Strawczynski

This research was made possible by a special grant from Bader Philanthropies

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Editor: Ronit Ben Nun

English translation: Evelyn Abel

Graphic design: Anat Perko-Toledano

**Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute**

Engelberg Center for Children and Youth

P.O.B. 3886

Jerusalem 9103702, Israel

Tel: (02) 655-7400

Fax: (02) 561-2391

Website: [brookdale.jdc.org.il](http://brookdale.jdc.org.il)

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# Abstract

## Background

Many Ethiopian Israelis regard military service as an opportunity to raise their sense of belonging to Israeli society and to further their integration. Studies have shown that Ethiopian-Israeli boys are highly motivated to enlist, and the overwhelming majority do so. However, they face difficulties such as fear of service, lack of knowledge of the army screening process and the service itself, and low scores on screening tests. In addition, the male soldiers are characterized by a high rate of dropout from the army, incarceration and a low proportion of command positions. Military representatives believe that preparatory programs for army service help reduce the difficulties facing Ethiopian Israelis, especially the boys, and enable them to complete their service much more successfully. In 2017, Bader Philanthropies asked the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB) to examine the topic.

## Goals

To identify programmatic directions and recommend policy to improve the preparation of Ethiopian Israelis for military service, and thereby lead to improved quality of their service.

## Method

Interviews with head-office personnel, directors, staff, participants and graduates of pre-army programs and preparatory frameworks. The study surveyed the four main national programs that are directed at Ethiopian Israelis or that make special efforts to engage them: two community programs aimed at high-schoolers – After me! To the Army, and Jumpstart (*Aharai Latzava* and *Zinuk Baaliya*, respectively); and two pre-army, preparatory frameworks in a dormitory setting for high-school graduates: Yemin Orde and Gal.

## Findings

1. The main needs of Ethiopian Israelis are familiarization with, and preparation for, the screening process and additional knowledge of army service; strengthening personal identity and a sense of belonging to Israeli society; finding ways to respond to family needs and simultaneously follow army rules; receiving tools to deal with peer pressure against military service or pressure to serve in a less meaningful position; coping with predictable conflicts during service; and expanding their knowledge of Israel.
2. The community programs focus on preparation for the screening process. The preparatory frameworks focus on screening for military positions and on the service itself. According to participants and graduates, the programs helped them understand common situations in army service, develop personally, improve their physical fitness, and prepare for adulthood. The main contributions cited by the staff were providing knowledge on the screening process; raising motivation for meaningful service; developing skills and abilities; consolidating knowledge of Israel; creating a sense of pride in one's personal identity and strengthening the sense of

belonging to Israeli society; forming a relationship with a significant adult; and participating in positive recreation.

## **Conclusions**

While the community programs and preparatory frameworks vary in terms of goals, focus of activity and intensity, both types of programs achieve their goals, and provide an appropriate and comprehensive response to the challenges facing Ethiopian-Israeli boys as regards military service. It is recommended that the programs be expanded to additional potential participants; the relationship between the programs and the participants' parents be strengthened; support for graduates be expanded during and after military service; army commanders be trained in multi-culturalism; and the proportion applying for command positions be increased.

The data presented in the report will serve organizations promoting Ethiopian Israelis – particularly the directors of the programs examined – as a basis for improving the army preparation of Ethiopian-Israeli boys, the quality of their service, and their integration into Israeli society upon discharge.

# Executive Summary

## Background

Compulsory conscription in Israel sees most Jewish boys serving in the military. Military service has long-term social and professional significance, since discharged soldiers benefit exclusively from various state rights. Army service is thus perceived by immigrant groups, including many Ethiopian-Israeli youth, as an "entry ticket" into Israeli society. Through the army, they hope to increase their sense of belonging to Israeli society and to integrate. Studies have shown that Ethiopian-Israeli boys are highly motivated to serve in the army and the overriding majority do enlist. However, as potential conscripts and soldiers, they face a range of difficulties. These include fear of military service, lack of knowledge of the screening process and army service, and low induction (*kaba*<sup>1</sup>) scores. The boys are also characterized by a high proportion of dropout and incarceration, and a low proportion of training for command and officer positions.

Over the past two decades, various programs have been created to prepare potential conscripts for full and meaningful military service, and to encourage volunteering for combat units and command and officer positions. These programs are aimed at all potential enlistees to the security forces, including Ethiopian Israelis, and break down into two main types:

**Preparatory programs for military service** (hereafter, community programs): community programs implemented in the afternoon hours and aimed at 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>- graders.

**Pre-army preparatory frameworks** (hereafter, preps): implemented in a dormitory setting for a full year, and aimed at high-school graduates deferring their military service for a year.

A study conducted at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB) in 2016, and funded by Bader Philanthropies, analyzed the social integration of Ethiopian-Israeli boys. In most of the areas examined, gaps were found in their disfavor vis-à-vis both Ethiopian-Israeli girls and non-Ethiopian Israeli boys. At the time, discussions were held with representatives of the IDF's Education Corps responsible for dealing with special populations. In their assessment, preparation for military service helped mitigate the problems faced by Ethiopian-Israelis, particularly the boys, and subsequently also helped them complete their service much more successfully. In light of this, in 2017, Bader Philanthropies asked MJB to examine the existing programs preparing Ethiopian-Israeli youth (boys) for military service.

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<sup>1</sup> The score for *Kaba* (Hebrew acronym for "quality group") is used by the IDF for the initial placement of soldiers in regular service. It ranges from 41 (lowest) to 56 (highest). Its calculation is based on a combination of elements measured at the recruitment office, including: cognitive ability, determined by psycho-technical testing; level of education; and suitability for military service as reflected in a personal interview. The *Kaba* score, along with additional data, is the minimum requirement for candidates for elite units, and affects assignment to military positions and officer training.



## The Study

**Study goals:** to identify programmatic directions and propose policy to improve the preparation of Ethiopian-Israelis for military service. The study focuses on the preparation of the boys and the means of improvement, through examination of existing programs. The findings will serve various organizations promoting Ethiopian Israelis, particularly the directors of the programs reviewed in the study, as a basis to improve their army preparation and the quality of their service, and to advance their integration into Israeli society upon discharge.

**Study design:** the study used the qualitative method – relying on interviews with the directors of the army-preparation programs, the staff, participants, graduates, and key figures involved in developing services. It reviewed the four main nationwide programs, which either target Ethiopian Israelis exclusively or make special efforts to include them as participants: two community programs – "After Me! To the Army!" (*Aharai Latzava!* – hereafter, After Me!) and "Aliya Jumpstart" (*Zinuk Be'aliya* – hereafter, Jumpstart, as well as two pre-army preparatory frameworks – "Yemin Orde" and "Gal" (hereafter, "the preps").

The difference in the scope of activity between the community programs and preps dictates the varying format and intensity of the work, as reflected by the breadth and depth of content covered, and the type of experience provided to participants. Furthermore, since the community programs address high-school students in the midst of army screening, they mainly offer preparation for this process, including for the first call-up. The preps, in contrast, take older youth who have already had their first call-up. So, their activities focus on preparation for screening to various units and for military service itself. With the exception of Yemin Orde, which works only with boys, the other programs work with both boys and girls. Thus, even though the study focused on army preparation for boys, on the whole it was difficult to distinguish patterns of activity by gender.

## Main Findings

### a. Needs and Challenges of Ethiopian Israelis before and during Military Service

The interviews revealed the complex needs and challenges of Ethiopian-Israeli youth during army screening and military service: they are unfamiliar with the screening process and preparation for it, and require more knowledge of the army service itself than their non-Ethiopian-Israeli counterparts; their personal identity and sense of belonging to Israeli society need strengthening; they have to find ways to respond to family needs and, at the same time, follow army rules, avoiding conflict between the two; they require tools to cope with peer pressure against army service or against meaningful service, and with the predictable conflicts during service; and they need to expand their knowledge of Israel.

### b. *Modi operandi* of the Programs

These are the main *modi operandi* of the programs to meet the needs and challenges of Ethiopian-Israeli youth before military service. Note that the activities are aimed at all participants – Ethiopian Israelis and non-Ethiopian Israelis alike.



### **1. Recruiting Ethiopian Israelis to the Programs**

The programs adopt various methods to recruit Ethiopian Israelis, including: implementing community programs in localities with a large concentration of Ethiopian Israelis; special activities to attract Ethiopian-Israeli participants; hiring Ethiopian-Israeli staff members; and introducing content unique and relevant to Ethiopian Israelis.

### **2. Main Topics Dealt with by the Programs**

To prepare participants for army screening and service in an optimal manner, the programs impart knowledge and practical information on both; deal with developing personal skills relevant to army service; prepare soldiers mentally for service; and provide tools to cope with predictable dilemmas and challenges in the course of service. The programs also expand the participants' knowledge of Israel.

### **3. Type of Activity in the Programs**

The programs combine various *modi operandi*, each of which emphasizes a different aspect of preparation for the army: personal support from a significant adult; group activity; experience of independent adult life, mainly in the preps; improved physical fitness; navigation; visits to various army units; lessons, lectures and studies; volunteering and community involvement.

### **4. Contact with Parents**

A large proportion of Ethiopian-Israeli participants are the first members of their family to be called up for military service. Their parents have either little or no knowledge of the army, nor any experience in coping with the procedures and demands of a military framework. Moreover, many parents are insufficiently aware of the importance of army service, its impact on their children's future, and the soldier's needs for emotional and practical family support during service. Thus, it is important that program staff work with the parents. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees said that the programs have no formal, ongoing contact with the parents as a whole, although one-off activities are held for them.

### **5. Contact with Army Representatives**

The staff at all the programs maintain formal, ongoing contact with army representatives to help participants receive call-ups to tryouts and teambuilding days for combat units or specific positions or units. On behalf of participants with a low *kaba*, who do not manage on their own to receive the army placement they want, the staff help with recommendations.

### **6. Maintaining Contact with Graduates of the Programs**

All the programs are interested in maintaining contact with graduates during and after army service. Contact is maintained through a graduates' unit in the After me!, a voluntary sector organization (which runs the After me! program and the Gal prep) and in Jumpstart; and through personal contact initiated by the program and/or the graduates themselves, including even after their discharge from the army.

## **c. Difficulties in Operating the Programs for Ethiopian Israelis**

The staff of the programs face various difficulties in their work: in recruiting participants, retaining

participants and coping with dropouts; particular problems specific to Ethiopian Israelis that affect the program's implementation (e.g. the need to gain the participants' trust; their adjustment to the framework; peer pressure against participation; counselor burnout; and trouble with involving parents). There is also the difficulty of maintaining contact with graduates (mainly in initiatives without a graduate unit). Some of these difficulties may arise in working with non-Ethiopian participants as well.

#### **d. Perceived Contribution of the Programs**

Participants and graduates perceived the contribution of the program differently from directors and staff. Participants and graduates said that their participation had contributed to their knowledge and understanding of predictable situations in army service (e.g. preparation for coping with new situations and how to conduct oneself in a group); to personal development; to physical fitness; and to preparation for adulthood. For the staff, ultimate success meant a participant's full and meaningful service, preferably in a combat unit and/or training for command and officer positions. In addition, they listed many program contributions and successes, related both to army service and other areas of the participants' lives: providing knowledge of the army screening process; raising motivation for meaningful service in combat or training for command and officer positions; developing abilities and skills; consolidating knowledge on topics of Israeli society, Zionism, Judaism, and Israeli geography and history; creating a sense of pride in the participants' personal identity and strengthening their sense of belonging to Israeli society; forming a relationship with a significant adult who serves as a positive role model; and participating in positive recreational activities.

#### **e. Programmatic Directions**

Despite the variation between the preps and the community programs in goals, *modi operandi*, and intensity – the study showed that both types of program achieve their goals and provide an appropriate and comprehensive response to the challenges facing Ethiopian-Israeli youngsters before army screening and service. It is recommended that:

- The programs be expanded to additional potential participants;
- Contact between the programs and the participants' parents be strengthened;
- The support of graduates be broadened, both during and after army service;
- Military commanders be trained in multi-culturalism;
- Strategies be undertaken to increase the proportion of soldiers applying to command and officer training.

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# 1. Introduction

Compulsory conscription in Israel sees most Jewish (youth) boys serving in the military. Military service has long-term social and professional significance, since discharged soldiers are entitled to various rights from the state and numerous workplaces avoid hiring young people who did not serve in the army. Army service is thus perceived by different immigrant groups, including many Ethiopian-Israeli youth, as an "entry ticket" to Israeli society. It is the main route to familiarization with Israeli society – its mentality, history and culture – and to a deeper knowledge of the country, physically. Through military service, immigrants hope to increase their sense of belonging to, and integration into, Israeli society; they perceive the army as a major arena in which to express their citizenship (Koch-Davidovich, 2011; Shabtay, 1999). Various studies have shown that Ethiopian-Israeli boys are highly motivated to serve in the army (Kahan-Strawczynski et al., 2012), and that the overriding majority (89%) do enlist. This proportion is even higher than for non-Ethiopian, native-born Israelis (74% – according to cohort data on recruits born in 1993 [Ben-Yehuda, 2015]).

Alongside the high motivation and high proportion of enlistment, various indicators point to difficulties experienced by Ethiopian-Israeli army enlistees – actual and potential – especially boys:

- Many potential conscripts voiced fear of military service, noted that they lacked knowledge about the service, and requested preparation (Kahan-Strawczynski et al., 2012).
- Of the Ethiopian-Israeli enlistees (Ben-Yehuda, 2015; Koch-Davidovich, 2011):
  - 52% enlisted with a low score for *kaba* ("quality group"): below 47, vs. 23% of all male conscripts
  - Of the cohort recruited in 2014, 24% did not complete their service vs. 15% of non-Ethiopian, native Israelis
  - In 2010, 53% were incarcerated at least once during their service vs. 25% of all the soldiers discharged that year
  - The proportion assigned to minor commands was significantly lower than for the total conscripts (some 8% vs. 14%). The same was true of officer positions (2% vs. 7% respectively).

In the past two decades, various programs were created to prepare potential conscripts for full and meaningful military service (including combat and command positions), and to encourage volunteering for combat units, elite units, and training for command and officer positions (Zaira, 2013; Koch-Davidovich, 2011). These programs are aimed at all potential conscripts into the security forces, including immigrant youth and native-born Ethiopian Israelis who face special problems before and during their service.

In 2016, a study conducted at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB), and funded by Bader Philanthropies, surveyed the social integration of Ethiopian-Israeli boys (Kahan-Strawczynski et al., 2017). In most of the areas examined (e.g. education, social status, and identity), gaps were found in their disfavor vis-à-vis both Ethiopian-Israeli girls and non-Ethiopian Israeli boys. At the time,

discussions were held with representatives of the IDF's Education Corps responsible for dealing with special populations. In the latter's assessment, preparatory programs for military service helped mitigate the problems faced by Ethiopian-Israeli conscripts, particularly boys, and subsequently helped them complete their service more successfully.

As a result, in 2017 Bader Philanthropies asked MJB to examine the existing initiatives preparing Ethiopian-Israeli boys for military service. The study shed light on the importance of preparation, especially for Ethiopian-Israelis.

## 2. Study Description

### 2.1 Study Goals and Research Questions

The goal of the study was to identify programmatic directions and propose policy to improve the preparation of Ethiopian-Israelis for military service, which will lead to improved army service. The study focused on the preparation of boys and the means of improvement in light of the many difficulties faced by this population group, before and during service. It examined the initiatives for them with respect to the following questions:

1. What are the needs of Ethiopian Israelis in preparing for military service?
2. What are the goals of the programs in preparation for military service?
3. What are the *modi operandi* of the programs, and do they manage to respond successfully to the needs of Ethiopian Israelis?
4. What are the implementation difficulties faced by the programs?
5. What are the perceived contributions to participants?

### 2.2. Study Design

The study collected data from four military preparatory programs: two community programs aimed at high-schoolers – "After Me! To the Army!" (*Aharai Latzava!* – hereafter, After Me!) and "Aliya Jumpstart" (*Zinuk Be'aliya* – hereafter, Jumpstart; hereafter, "the programs"); and two pre-army preparatory settings for high-school graduates – "Yemin Orde" and "Gal" (hereafter, "the preps"). These community programs and preps were selected either because they are the main national programs for Ethiopian Israelis or because they make special efforts to include Ethiopian Israelis. Indeed, a high proportion of Ethiopian Israelis participate in them, particularly boys.

Table 1 presents the data sources and methods of collection:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, numerous and extended efforts were made to receive approval from the Ministry of Defense to interview participants and staff of Jumpstart as well as the Ministry person in charge of organizing Ethiopian-Israeli parent groups on the topic of army preparation. Unfortunately, the Ministry withheld approval.

**Table 1: Data Sources and Collection Methods**

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data Collection Method</b>
Directors	4 in-depth interviews
Staff	2 focus groups and 3 in-depth interviews
Ethiopian-Israeli participants and graduates	3 focus groups and 3 in-depth interviews
Key personnel in the development of military preparatory programs	3 in-depth interviews

### 3. Preparatory Programs for Military Service

Below we describe the chief differences between community programs and preps:

1. The community **programs** for military service are community courses given twice a week during the school year and are aimed at 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>- graders.
2. The pre-army **preps** are given in a dormitory setting, for 10 months and are aimed at high-school graduates, thereby deferring their military service for a year.

The difference in the scope of activity dictates the varying format and intensity of the work, as reflected by the breadth and depth of the content covered, and the type of experience of participants. Furthermore, since the community programs address high-school students in the midst of their army screening, they mainly offer preparation for this process, including for the first call-up. The preps, in contrast, are designed for older youth who have already had their first call-up, and activities focus on preparation for screening to various units and for military service itself.

Below, we describe the four programs included in this study. The activities and content of these programs is presented in Section 5.

Note that Yemin Orde works only with boys, while the other programs work with both boys and girls. Thus, even though the study focuses on boys, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the *modi operandi* by gender.

Note, too, that none of these programs base participation on acceptance criteria. Commitment, however, is warranted: participants are asked to be involved and take responsibility for what transpires.

#### 3.1 Community Programs for High-School Students

##### a. After Me! To the Army! (*Aharai Latzava!*)<sup>2</sup>

The After Me! voluntary sector organization was established in the mid-1990s, following the

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<sup>2</sup> The data sources are interviews with program managers and the organization's website (26.7.2017): [www.aharai.org.il](http://www.aharai.org.il)

assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, with the goal of narrowing gaps in Israeli society. Its flagship program is **preparation** for the army and it is aimed at all youth (boys and girls) ages 16-18, in grades 11 and 12, in the social and geographical periphery. It strives to empower and integrate youth, with special emphasis on such populations as Bedouin, Druze, Ethiopian Israelis, *Haredim*, and school dropouts. Its objectives are to raise the proportion of enlistment in meaningful service, strengthen a sense of social belonging, teach personal skills, provide education, and encourage active citizenship and community involvement. It also operates community programs for 9<sup>th</sup>- and 10<sup>th</sup>-graders, preps for high-school graduates,<sup>3</sup> a gap year of volunteer service prior to the army (*shnat sherut*), and offers support for soldiers during and after their service.

The program operates on a yearly format. Every week, there are two afternoon sessions revolving around physical training, instructive classes, and group discussions of current events and heritage topics. It also furnishes information on the army screening process and preparation for service. Activities are conducted by instructors who formerly held IDF command positions and serve as role models, and every participant receives personal support. Activities include workshops on fieldcraft, navigation and leadership, visits to military bases, community volunteering and sports days.

In localities with a large concentration of Ethiopian-Israeli youth, efforts have been made to create heterogeneous groups of participants and to ensure that one of the instructors is Ethiopian-Israeli, so he or she can readily serve as a role model. Currently, the program numbers some 500 Ethiopian-Israeli youth (boys and girls) countrywide.

#### **b. Jumpstart<sup>4</sup> (*Zinuk Be'aliya*)**

Jumpstart is a joint **program** of the IDF, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Defense, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, and the Aluma organization.

The social coordinators are Ethiopian Israelis who hold an undergraduate degree and have completed meaningful military service (most were officers or combat soldiers). The program is held in 12 localities and targets both youth planning to go into army service and soldiers already serving, as well as their families (Ministry of Education, 2014).

The coordinators pursue several avenues:

1. Personal support for 3,700 Ethiopian Israeli youth at the start of their army service – during the IDF screening process and in preparation for service
2. Group work, open to all neighborhood youth – both Ethiopian Israelis (who also receive personal support) and non-Ethiopian Israelis
3. Preparation for the first IDF call-up in grade 11, for all students in that grade
4. Developing support systems for parent groups.

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<sup>3</sup> For purposes of this study, the Gal prep was reviewed.

<sup>4</sup> Data source: interview with former program manager.



## 3.2 Pre-Army Preparatory Settings for High-School Graduates

As noted, **preps** are army-preparatory programs lasting a year, in a dormitory setting.

### a. Yemin Orde Prep<sup>5</sup>

The Yemin Orde **prep** was established in 2000 and since 2009, has been affiliated with the organization Derekh Kfar – Education Programs. Every year it takes in about 80 participants (boys only), mostly Ethiopian Israelis. The objective is to bridge financial, social and cultural gaps – barriers to their integration into both army and civilian life.

The preps operate as an independently functioning community, via committees for various areas: life style, nutrition, cleanliness, culture, logistics and excursions. Alongside personal mentoring and sports, the army preparation includes a variety of classes and courses: geography/history of Israel, leadership and facing audiences, Israeli society (Jewish and Israeli identity, issues of church and state, Israeli culture), personal identity, lessons on family, and other activities: visits to different army units, navigation and survival on the ground, meeting combat soldiers, battle heritage, and community volunteering. Staff offer participants close support, at a ratio of one staff member per seven participants.

### b. Gal Prep<sup>6</sup>

The Gal **prep** was established in 2008 at the initiative of Merkaz Maasseh and in cooperation with After Me! It operates four branches, in Acre (two), Haifa and Kiryat Bialik. The goal is to develop leadership skills among youth from the geographic and social periphery, while reinforcing readiness for meaningful IDF service. Every year, the prep takes in some 100 participants (boys and girls). The absorption of Ethiopian-Israeli participants is one of its flagship aims. In 2016, about one third of the participants were Ethiopian Israelis, spread throughout the different branches, due to the importance attributed to integration and heterogeneity.

The prep program includes physical and mental preparation for military service: for the screening process, teambuilding and tryouts for various units, for officer and command positions, meetings with senior commanders from all the corps, navigation and survival training; educational content such as leadership, decision-making, heritage, initiative, Judaism, identity, and geography. In addition, the prep encourages contributing to the community and social involvement through regular volunteering and work on projects. Participants are partners in decision-making processes related to prep life and tasks are divided into different work groups.

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<sup>5</sup> Data source: interview with prep director and website (1.8.2017): [www.mechina-yeminorde.co.il](http://www.mechina-yeminorde.co.il)

<sup>6</sup> Data source: interview with prep director and prep website (1.8.2017) [www.mecinatgal.org](http://www.mecinatgal.org)

## 4. Needs and Challenges of Ethiopian-Israelis in Advent of Military Service

This section presents the needs of Ethiopian Israelis as cited by study participants. The information makes it possible to understand the challenges faced by the program developers in planning activities. It also serves as a basis for examining whether, and to what extent, the activities offered by the different programs are adequate and appropriate to the participants' needs. In the process of army preparation, the youths' needs change over time. The needs of youth who have not yet begun the screening process (before the first call-up) are markedly different from those of youth who have already gone through the process (at least the first call-up) and require rather more preparation for military service itself. Besides these differences, many needs are common to all Ethiopian Israelis at the start of military service. The main ones, which emerged from the interviews, were:

### a. Need to Prepare for the IDF Screening Process

One main need that arose from the interviews was for knowledge about the army screening process and preparation for it. In principle, the process is similar for boys and girls; for those wishing to serve in a combat unit, the medical examination is broader. The process includes the first call-up when potential conscripts must report to the recruiting office at an appointed time to complete a computerized test (*dapar* – Hebrew acronym for "initial psycho-technical grade")<sup>7</sup> and undergo some medical examinations. The screening process of the first call-up cannot be repeated in order to improve results. The screening also includes determination of the physical health "profile", which indicates a candidate's fitness for certain positions. The ensuing profile may be appealed, for purposes of raising or lowering it. Based on all the tests and examinations, a score is assigned for *kaba* (Hebrew acronym for "quality group"). This score, alongside other data (such as the profile), marks the minimum requirement for tryout invitations to elite units, the possibility of attending officer training, and placement in a military job or profession. At a later stage, every potential enlistee receives a list of possible choices based on the *kaba* score, the profile attained, and IDF needs, and is asked to grade them by preference. Candidates whose attributes are good enough are then called in for additional screenings and tryouts for specific positions and units.

Given the complexity of the process, the youngsters should prepare for the first call-up. Subsequently, when completing the preference forms, it is important that they have basic information on the jobs and units offered them. To follow the process of personal screening, they require guidance on navigating their way through the IDF computerized system.

The interviews revealed that many of the participants arriving at the pre-army programs after the first call-up had been unfamiliar with the military requirements of the screening process, sometimes not

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<sup>7</sup> The *dapar* is the **initial psycho-technical test** administered as part of the first call-up. The score achieved is part of the *kaba*, the highly important rating of quality group. The *dapar* score directly affects assignment to prestigious positions

even knowing that it is compulsory. Moreover, even if they had received basic information on it, they often failed to understand its significance or how it would affect their military placement. Thus, for example, because they had not understood the reasons for the computerized testing, participants noted that they had related to it with disdain; had they been aware of its importance, they would have taken it far more seriously. Another example concerns the screening for elite units: according to staff, some Ethiopian Israelis are unaware of the aspects measuring suitability or unsuitability for these units and therefore do not know how to conduct themselves to improve their chances of passing.

Their lack of knowledge of the screening process may stem from the fact that, at times, they are the first members of their family to be called-up for military duty; their parents have neither the knowledge nor the experience to advise them. In addition, the tendency of the Ethiopian-Israeli community to live in socially homogeneous neighborhoods precludes the community's acting as a source of knowledge on military service and the screening process.

Some program directors believe that, in addition to efforts to provide preparation for the screening process and existing testing, the screening tests should be adapted to Ethiopian Israelis since, as they come from a different culture, background and conceptual world, their abilities do not come to the fore in current testing. As a result, they score low on the *kaba* and *dapar* which, as noted, affect the positions they are offered and the subsequent nature of their service. Moreover, the fear was raised that the receipt of a low *kaba* score also impacts the youths' self-image and labels Ethiopian Israelis as low-functioning, thereby compounding the harm.

#### **b. Need to Deal with Uncertainty over Military Service**

Directors and staff of the various programs noted that Ethiopian-Israeli youth lack knowledge of military service, as well as of the screening process. As noted, since the potential conscripts are often the first generation in their families to be called up for service, they cannot get relevant information from them. Participants and graduates noted that before joining the program, they had felt unprepared for military service. They voiced anxiety about the positions they would serve in, the conduct of commanders, their physical abilities, their failure to meet personal goals (such as recruitment to a sought-after unit), and the uncertainty over moving from a familiar framework (school) to a new framework – the army. As one participant said: "*There is some anxiety about what will be. 12 years of school-friends-home. Now the framework is much tougher, much more grown-up... leaving a framework is frightening.*" The directors and staff added that often, the participants do not know what awaits them and are mentally unprepared for service.

#### **c. Need to Strengthen Personal Identity and Sense of Belonging**

The interviewees noted that among Ethiopian-Israeli youth, there are feelings of confusion about their identity; they try to both understand their background and identity as belonging to the Ethiopian-Israeli community and at the same time are interested in integrating into Israeli society. Many interviewees claimed that Ethiopian Israelis, particularly those born in Israel, need tools to help them understand and more clearly define their personal identity, and appreciate the strengths attributed to their origins. One key figure said: "*An Ethiopian boy born in Israel – on the one hand, unpleasant and discriminatory remarks*

are made to him; on the other hand, he has no grasp of this (his Ethiopian background), he is not even connected to it apart from his color... identity crises are very common." As regards army preparation, the boys' sense of personal identity should be examined with them and strengthened – however complex. Besides the formation of identity, the interviewees also mentioned the need to strengthen the boys' sense of belonging to Israeli society. The interviewees believe that the absence of a sense of belonging among Ethiopian Israelis prevents them from integrating into the army and later, from promotion. One staff member put it this way: *"The main thing required is a change of consciousness so that they feel like an equal among equals. Because they come from a place where they feel like the underdog, as if they were somewhat outsiders... I understand why this prevents them from training for command positions since they don't see themselves at all as 'part of', so certainly not as leaders."*

#### **d. Need to Cope with Family Expectations**

Program directors and staff said that ways had to be found to respond to the needs of the family and, at the same time, to military rules, to avoid clashes between them. The youth often help their immigrant parents with various aspects of life, especially if they are the oldest son. According to the interviewees, family demands – whether latent or open and direct – sometimes cause the conscripts to ask for placement near home to help out if necessary, thereby serving in less meaningful positions than their capabilities would permit. One director noted: *"They have to reconcile their outlook – people who care very deeply about family – with the demands of the army. It's good that they care about family, they should take care of their parents, so they can't do army service as it should be done. They have to help out financially or take them to the health clinic. So the army falls by the wayside... "; "he should be shown that there is another way. Or, if I am not given leave for some family event, what do I do? I break the rules because family is more important? ...to show [them] that to refrain from AWOL does not mean that you don't care about family ... "*

#### **e. Need to Cope with Peer Pressure against Army Service**

Programs staff said that sometimes candidates are pressured by peers outside of the preparatory programs to skip army service or to serve in less meaningful positions: *"... if I go into [a] combat [unit]<sup>8</sup>," am I seen by my friends as a 'sucker' doing full service because – 'What does the state give us? Why are you going to volunteer for the 'utmost' position ... do your daily<sup>9</sup>, (you should) fill a lame position.' Even if they do have the motivation to serve in the army, they come back to the neighborhood and they know that it is considered unacceptable."* In other words, the programs should impart tools to deal with this peer pressure and to change perceptions of the army.

It is common among Ethiopian-Israeli soldiers to break the rules when they do not manage to have their requests met. One of the graduates explained: *"When I was in the army, if I would speak of an*

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<sup>8</sup> Combat service demands a greater physical and mental effort than non-combat (such as an office job, sometimes at bases close to home – open bases that permit sleeping at home). Also, combat soldiers do not have leave every weekend.

<sup>9</sup> Go home every day.

*incident of clashing with the commander, many friends would look at me, 'pack your bag and go home, why are you even arguing with him?' ... Those who talk about arguments with commanders, do so proudly, 'the commander did so-and-so, [and] right away I packed my bag and left.'* The programs should give the boys the tools to deal with conflicts within the army while respecting accepted norms, without situations becoming extreme and leading to punishment (or even imprisonment), which adversely affect the remainder of their service.

#### **f. Lack of Knowledge about Israel**

It was reported that the participants often lack general knowledge about Israel: familiarity with its geography, heritage tales, history and songs. This lack poses a barrier to training for command positions. The programs attempt to bridge the gap by various means, as explained in the next chapter.

#### **g. Need to Help Boys with Criminal Records, whom the Army does not Wish to Recruit**

On the whole, boys with a criminal file cannot enlist in the army and this has a long-term effect on their lives. The army is aware of its social importance in deciding a youth's future in Israel and, in some cases, is prepared to enlist boys who have committed minor offenses or gone through rehabilitation. The programs can play a significant role in writing recommendations to the army and rehabilitating these boys. While the various programs do not define youth offenders as their target population, some participants fit the category and the programs try to help them.

## **5. The Modi Operandi of the Programs**

The programs employ the following *modi operandi* to meet the needs and challenges of Ethiopian Israelis in the advent of military service, as elaborated in the previous section (section 4). All the data on the *modi operandi* have been collated in Table 2, at the end of this section.

### **5.1 Recruiting Ethiopian Israelis to the Programs**

The programs operate in varied ways to enlist Ethiopian-Israeli participants:

- **Implementing community programs in localities with a large concentration of Ethiopian Israelis.** Jumpstart addresses Ethiopian Israelis in particular and thus functions in neighborhoods with a high concentration of community members. After Me! functions in socially peripheral neighborhoods and, as such, in neighborhoods with many Ethiopian Israelis.
- **Recruiting Ethiopian-Israeli participants.** All the community programs recruit participants from localities, neighborhoods, schools and youth villages with a high concentration of Ethiopian Israelis. After Me! and the preps are open to all youth, although they make a serious attempt to attract Ethiopian Israelis. In contrast, Jumpstart is directed primarily at Ethiopian Israelis, by offering personal mentoring. Concomitantly, other parts of the program address all youth in the neighborhood (group activity) or at school (instruction on the army screening process).
- **Employing Ethiopian-Israeli staff.** As part of efforts to recruit Ethiopian-Israelis and adapt the activities to them, Ethiopian-Israeli counselors are employed. According to the interviewees, this

has many advantages, such as familiarity with the community, and understanding the culture and the components of identity. Another important aspect is that they are more readily seen as role models by the participants.

- **Relating to content unique and relevant to Ethiopian Israelis.** In response to the existing confusion among the youth over their identity as Ethiopian Israelis and as native-born Israelis, the programs invest considerable effort in strengthening personal identity. This is done by deliberately emphasizing their background, culture, and personal stories, along with the personal stories of their community, such as the courageous journey of the *aliya* to Israel: "*At the heart of the educational process, the story of Ethiopian Israelis is given pride of place [...] community figures are given center place, such as Farede Aklum— for both participants and counselors*"; "*It can't be that I'll come and talk about '48 [the 1948 War of Independence], the Holocaust, Israel's wars and omit topics such as the Ethiopian aliya. At the closing ceremony, they deal with Sudan [the Ethiopian-Israeli aliya to Israel via Sudan]*"; *in a heterogeneous community with other, non-Ethiopian 'guys', it often creates team spirit, they can come and speak of Ethiopia or bring their families*; "*... many of them return to their Amharic names during the prep*"; *also, Ethiopian food is cooked, the ability to listen to their music with pride, to give them room to actualize their identity as they are.*"

The activities are common to all the participants – Ethiopian- and non-Ethiopian Israelis alike.

## 5.2 The Main Topics Dealt with by the Programs

To prepare participants for army screening and service in an optimal manner, the programs deal with the following topics:

- **Providing knowledge and practical information on the army screening process and service** to meet the need to understand what the army demands of conscripts in the screening process and service.
- **Developing personal skills relevant to army service.** As part of the mental preparation for service, the staff and directors furnished examples of various aspects of the participants' personal development which received attention from the programs:
  - **Adjusting to the rules of conduct and the daily schedule of the preps:** discipline poses a serious challenge in the preps (especially at the start): "*Often, guys will bring norms with them that are unacceptable at prep, such as alcohol [drinking] or failure to stick to the times of a schedule, they are testing the boundaries.*" To prepare them for the demands of army service, the preps emphasize the importance of instilling clear rules of conduct and adhering to a regular, compulsory time schedule.
  - **Developing personal responsibility:** "*They tend to pass on the responsibility to somebody else for everything that happens to them. They have to take more on themselves, how they can help themselves, and how not to blame someone else.*"
  - **Cultivating self-esteem:** "*We work with them mainly on self-esteem – how far I can get. At the start of the process, you see that their expectations are not high, despite the potential of every*



*one of them"; "often, it means, 'opening them up', to get them to state their opinions."; "and facing an audience and coping with stage fright: to reach a position of command, you have to stand before an audience. As part of the preparation for the IDF... we have a weekly course at each meeting, at which someone else gets up to speak."*

- **Expanding knowledge of Israel:** the programs deal with such topics as battle heritage, history, Israeli society, Zionism, the economy and politics, as a way to bridge the knowledge gap between Ethiopian Israelis and participants from longer-standing families in Israel. One interviewee said: *"We have a course on getting to know the country, which includes classwork and a lot of field work, and often they themselves [the participants] do the guiding... the next time that he will be there at an army post, he will know what he is guarding. Sometimes he will also be able to tell his commander what you see on the map – this already changes the attitude toward him."*
- **Mental preparation for service, and for dilemmas and challenges expected in the course of service,** such as:
  - **The difficulties of combat service:** the importance of group work and the role of the individual in the group
  - **Social dilemmas:** coping with diversity in the group
  - **Family dilemmas:** the place of the family and of the army, and the connection between them – how to mediate between army demands and family needs

### 5.3 Type of Activities in the Programs

The programs combine different *modi operandi*, each of which emphasizes another aspect of preparation for service:

- **Personal support from a significant adult:** Every prep participant has a support person from the staff of counselors. Every month, the support person holds personal talks with the participant and together, they construct a process of personal progress. Similarly, in the programs, participants receive personal support. In Jumpstart, personal support is offered only to Ethiopian-Israeli participants.
- **Group activity:** Apart from personal support, most programs activities are conducted in groups.
- **Experiencing independent, adult life:** This form of work is more prominent in the preps where participants live throughout the year. In Yemin Orde, the participants lead a community life and conduct themselves independently – they prepare their own food, clean, manage cultural life, see to logistics, go on excursions etc. There are committees responsible for managing the various aspects of life for all the participants in the prep. At the Gal prep, life is cooperative, managed by groups of 4-5 participants for the different areas, such as food (budget divisions and management), responsibility for the physical compound, setting the rules that organize collective life, setting the contents of joint learning, inviting lecturers, fieldwork and training in the advent of conscription.
- **Physical preparation and improving fitness:** This is done through sports, preparation for screening for special forces, treks, fieldcraft etc.



- **Daytime and night-time navigation on the ground**
- **Visits to different army units**
- **Excursions, lectures and studies** on a variety of topics, as elaborated above
- **Volunteer activity and community involvement:** In response to the need to boost a sense of belonging to Israeli society, the preps hold regular volunteer activities in such frameworks as boarding school, after-school settings and schools. The programs include community volunteering as well, mostly on a one-time basis, such as preparing packages for soldiers.

## 5.4 Contact with Parents of Participants

As noted, since a large portion of Ethiopian-Israeli participants are the first members of their families to be called up for army service, their parents lack the knowledge and experience to help them cope with procedures and demands of a military framework. Moreover, according to the interviewees, many of the parents do not have sufficient awareness of the importance of army service in the present and its implications for the future, or of a soldier's need for emotional and instrumental support from the family, during service. Thus, it is important for the staff to work with parents. Yet many said that they have no formal, ongoing contact with the parents, although one-time activities are held to foster contact.

- **Yemin Orde Prep.** Before the start of the prep, staff visit every participant at home to explain the prep to the parents. In addition, the parents are invited to the prep twice a year – for the closing ceremony of "survival week" and the concluding ceremony of the year.
- **Gal prep.**
  - As needed, house visits are made to the participants' homes before the start of the prep: *"If we see youngsters having difficulty coming [to the prep] in advent of the year [course], we make house visits because sometimes we find opposition from the families... our staff include Amharic speakers who, if need be, go to talk to them."*
  - Parents Days: Parents are invited to the prep for two family meetings – before the start of the prep, for a meeting with the staff and with participants finishing their prep year, to hear what their children may expect; and some two months after the start of the prep.
  - The parents are contacted, as needed, if a problem arises with a participant.
  - Invitations to ceremonies: Parents are invited to the concluding prep ceremony. Some parents come to the prep on the Sig holiday to tell the story of their trek from Ethiopia to Israel via Sudan.
  - There are WhatsApp groups for all the parents.
- **Jumpstart**
  - Parent groups: In the framework of the programs, parents can participate in a group that operates throughout the year and deals with content related to their sons' expected service: *"Thought is given to how the parents may become helpful to their children: to convey information, to understand the language of bureaucracy, to understand where problems arise,*

*to understand what awaits their children, the first call-up, communication with the army about problems, and conditions of service."*

- Gadna,<sup>10</sup> Day for parents: to illustrate to parents the nature of military activity, they are invited to participate in a Gadna Day. They are introduced to an army base, a dining room, a ceremony and military discipline.
- Parents are able to purchase an equipment kit for soldiers: *"We prepared a kit that parents may purchase for a child, prior to induction. This sends a message to parents that they are responsible for their child, and it increases the parents' involvement. We explained the equipment in the kit to the parents so that they could explain it to their children."*
- An annual parents' evening.
- **After me! To the Army:** House visits are made to the homes of participants, if need be, and counselors contact the parents should there be a problem or cause for concern.

## 5.5 Contact with Army Representatives

All the programs maintain ongoing formal contact with the army. The following are examples of help to participants vis-à-vis army personnel:

- **Placement assistance for a job or unit on behalf of participants with a low *kaba* who did not manage on their own to receive what they wanted.** The staff try to help such participants by forwarding recommendations to the army. *"We take steps for them to enter meaningful positions, whether it is a change of position by means of recommendations [or] the welfare NCOs<sup>11</sup> if necessary"; "The scores of the Ethiopian guys are very low. In Grade 11, a large portion of them did not make an effort [in the army screening process]. In Grade 12 or during the prep, they realized that they wanted to do something meaningful in the army, and we help them. We have connections with the army and we help them do repeat tests, to appear before the committee deciding exceptional cases."*
- **Assistance with receiving a summons to teambuilding/tryout day for an elite combat unit (Special Forces Day), for boys who did not receive a summons due to a low *kaba* or profile, or boys who went through one teambuilding day and failed.** *"There was a procedure of contacting the army, they issued an irregular summons to Special Forces Day for Ethiopian Israelis. We prepared a list of our participants, and some received another summons, some had not received a summons to start with, and some tried out [again] as they had not passed the first time."*

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<sup>10</sup> Gadna (Hebrew acronym for Youth Regiments) – As part of the preparation of youth for the army, the army invites 11<sup>th</sup>-graders, through the schools, to an orientation week at IDF bases. During this week, the students wear uniforms and are given a taste of military experience and discipline.

<sup>11</sup> A commander who is not the officer responsible for the service conditions of soldiers.

## 5.6 Maintaining Contact with Graduates of the Programs

All the programs strive to maintain contact with graduates during their army service, and even afterwards. This is done through:

- **A graduates unit:** In the After Me! organization (which runs the After me! program and the Gal prep), and in Jumpstart, there are units of graduates. Towards the end of the year, the counselor assesses the frequency and type of support a participant will need during military service, and updates the graduates' unit.
- **Maintaining personal contact at the initiative of the program/prep**
  - The program staff who had supported the participants initiate contact with all the graduates once a year. In the Gal prep, there is a staff person responsible for maintaining contact with the graduates: *"To pick up the phone, to send out birthday greetings, to understand the status and situation of each one in the army and in civilian life."*
  - Maintaining contact on WhatsApp to impart information and consult on difficulties in the army
  - The Yemin Orde prep hosts Sabbath days and seminars for graduates that include lectures and discussions on command-related questions and values, and workshops prior to discharge on continuing studies and so forth.
- **Maintaining personal contact at the initiative of graduates**
  - Staff members invite the graduates to stay in touch after the program ends, particularly if problems or difficulties arise in the army and they need to consult someone: *"The prep is for the graduates and for anyone who finished here, we're the Magen David Adom [Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross first aid organization]. There are difficulties with the commander, things aren't going well, the person who makes the connection will save the 'wounded' youngster; ... the basic assumption here is that we're family."*
  - Some graduates are in the habit of visiting the prep or dropping in for emotional support. As one graduate said: *"There are graduates who say that it is hard for them in the army... who come here to draw strength and then return to the army... when you come here and see the [pre-army] participants and say 'hi', it gives you strength. It really braces you."*
- **Contact after army service**
  - Instruction by graduates at the program: Some graduates choose to be counselors for the participants in fieldcraft activity, workshops and lessons at the prep or to lead a group in a program for high school students.
  - Financial aid for academic studies: The Yemin Orde prep and the Gal prep (the latter through its partner, the Merkaz Maasseh organization) established scholarship funds for higher education for the graduates.
  - Graduate apartments: The Gal prep places an apartment at the disposal of graduates where they may live for a few months while organizing their next steps as civilians after the army: *"There are guys who do not have strong family backing, so they see the prep as a place where they can be."*

**Table 2: Summary of *Modi Operandi* of the Programs**

		Preps		Community Programs	
		Yemin Orde	Gal	Jumpstart	After Me
<b>Integrating Ethiopian Israelis</b>	Operating the program in localities and neighborhoods with a large concentration of Ethiopian Israelis			√	√
	Recruiting participants in localities, neighborhoods, schools and youth villages with a large concentration of Ethiopian Israelis	√	√	√	√
	Employing Ethiopian-Israeli staff members	√	√	√	√
	Strengthening personal identity by relating to special, relevant substance for Ethiopian Israelis	√	√	√	√
<b>Substance</b>	Imparting knowledge and information on the army screening process and service	√	√	√	√
	Developing personal skills relevant to army service	√	√		√
	Expanding one’s knowledge of Israel	√	√		√
	Mental preparation for army service and preparation for predictable dilemmas and challenges	√	√	√	√
<b>Type of Activity</b>	Personal support from a significant adult	√	√	√	√
	Group activity	√	√	√	√
	Experiencing independent adult life	√	√		
	Improving physical fitness	√	√		√
	Navigation	√	√		√
	Visits to different army units	√	√		√
	Classes, lectures, studies	√	√	√	√
Volunteering and community involvement	√	√	√	√	
<b>Contact with parents of participants</b>	Sporadic one-off activities (no ongoing formal activity)	√	√	√	√
	Parent groups			√	
	Visits to participants’ homes	√	√		√
	Contact surrounding a specific problem with a participant		√		√
	Invitation to ceremonies, e.g. end of survival week, end-of-year closing ceremony	√	√		
	Parents Day		√		
	Gadna Day for parents			√	
	Enabling parents to purchase an equipment kit for their children in the advent of conscription			√	
WhatsApp group for parents		√			

		Preps		Community Programs	
		Yemin Orde	Gal	Jumpstart	After Me
<b>Contact with army personnel</b>	Ongoing formal contact	√	√	√	√
	Assistance in contact with army, e.g. providing recommendations for summons to teambuilding/ tryouts for combat units or placement in a desired job or unit	√	√		√
<b>Contact with graduates</b>	Graduates unit		√	√	√
	Maintaining personal contact at the initiative of the program/prep: through telephone conversations, WhatsApp. and inviting graduates to events	√	√	√	√
	Maintaining personal contact at the initiative of the graduates, and graduates visiting the program	√	√		√
	Graduates acting as counselors at the program after army service	√	√		√
	Scholarship funds for higher education	√	√		
	Graduates apartment		√		

## 6. Operational Difficulties in Programs for Ethiopian Israelis

Staff at the programs for Ethiopian Israelis face various difficulties in their work: recruiting participants, retaining participants and preventing dropout, coping with additional specific problems, and the difficulty of maintaining contact with graduates. Some of these difficulties may arise in working with non-Ethiopian participants as well.

### 6.1 Difficulty in Recruiting Participants

- **A closed community.** At all the programs, the staff of counselors and directors faced the difficulty of recruiting participants. *"Ethiopian-Israeli neighborhoods are very closed... apart from their not mixing with the [general] population, they are very closed within themselves so it is difficult to approach them and provide them with knowledge and tools."* Each program adapted its own solutions to cope with this difficulty:
  - **Community programs:** The counselors come to school and recruit participants from the classrooms. In *Aharai!*, every group has two counselors, a regular counselor and a focus person – the latter an Ethiopian Israeli focusing on reaching out to participants as *"the regular counselor [alone] is not enough to bring [in] Ethiopian Israelis."*
  - **Preps:** The staff and graduates come to neighborhoods, boarding schools, and regular schools with a high concentration of Ethiopian Israelis, and subsequently host days exposing the youngsters to prep activity: *"We work hard to get them to come to prep because we know what the prep year does."*

- **Low socio-economic status of the participants at the preps.** Many participants come from a low socio-economic background. Many work during high-school to help out with the family income or to support themselves. This poses challenges for potential recruits to the preps, the costs of which are high. One director explained: "*Suddenly a family has to cope with someone who not only isn't working, but may also need financial help.*" The preps deal with this situation by various means: "*... for those unable to pay, there are stipends, or permission to work occasionally. We enlist the entire support system for this.*"

## 6.2 Retaining Participants and Preventing Dropout

- At all the programs, counselor staff and directors grapple with the difficulty of retaining participants and preventing dropout.
  - **Community Programs:** There is no charge for participation. Moreover, as in the preps, participation is voluntary. It is therefore impossible to compel participants to remain: "*It is very hard to retain participants of the group as they are under no obligation to attend... We finish training at nine... and these are also the hours of work and studies.*"
  - **Preps:** As there is a charge for participation, the dropout rate is lower. Nonetheless, dropout does occur, for two reasons: (a) The boys need to work and help their families, especially in times of family crisis. "*... The majority come from a more complex socio-economic background, from homes where often the oldest son plays a significant role and is needed, and if there is a crisis, I will go out to work and leave the prep.*" (b) Due to the negative influence of their neighborhood friends: "*... when they go home and friends say to them, 'You're just wasting your time', it can have an effect... dropout is high at the beginning... they don't really know what they want for themselves, and then they conclude that this is not the place for them.*"

The solution to the problem, offered by the preps, is to make home visits and attempt to help participants by focusing attention on the reason for their desire to dropout: "*At the start of year, there are youngsters whose homes we go to... and if there is a problem with money, we help with stipends. There is a good deal of dialogue on dropping out from the framework, and we work intensively to reduce it [the occurrences].*"

## 6.3 Additional Difficulties in Working with Ethiopian Israelis that Impact the Operation of the Programs

- **The need to gain the trust of the participants** who show reluctance and caution in relations with strangers.
- **Participants' difficulties in adapting to the demands and rules of the framework:** punctuality, performance of tasks and duties, respecting the ban on drugs and alcohol etc. "They often try to stretch the boundaries... some of them find it hard to abide by everything we demand because there is no ongoing supervision"; "At the start of the year, the difficulty of Ethiopian Israelis to adapt to a framework, is greatly felt, for a variety of reasons: the framework demands



compliance to many things, to study, to participate and be active, this is not something they always find easy..."

- **Coping with negative influences from neighborhood friends.** As noted, the participants are exposed to negative influences from neighborhood friends. The latter may undermine their motivation to enlist in meaningful service. This poses a challenge for the staff who must carefully and steadily raise the participants' motivation and moderate the influence of their neighborhood environment.
- **Emotional burnout of counselors.** Dealing with some of the participants demands considerable time and emotional resources of the staff: "They take more out of you, they demand more support".
- **Difficulties of involving parents in activities.** Apart from the parents' insufficient understanding of the significance of the army screening process and the service itself, and the need to balance family needs and the demands of the military framework, as presented above – there are also difficulties in involving parents in activities. On the parents' part, there is a lack of financial resources and time. On the part of the program, there is a need to bridge cultural gaps and, above all, to define parental involvement as an objective of the program and find suitable ways achieve it.

## 6.4 Difficulties of Maintaining Contact with Graduates

As noted, not all the programs have a graduates unit or sufficient resources to work with them in an orderly fashion: "... Graduates are a target of the prep. I'd like there to be personnel whose role is to support graduates, to consider the process they're going through, whether in the army, or in anticipation of discharge or studies, or in the period of choosing a community and family. To work through processes as adults. This would require several more staff members to deal solely with graduates."

# 7. Perceived Contribution of the Programs

This section presents the perceived contribution to participants from different points of view.

## 7.1 Contribution of the Program from the Perspective of Participants and Graduates

- **Acquiring knowledge and understanding of predictable situations of military service.** The participants said that they had received knowledge to help them understand what to expect:
  - **Preparation to cope with new situations:** One participant described the preparation as a "toolbox" to cope with situations that might occur during military service. He said: "*It's like when I fight, I go into combat with something especially strong. Here, they give you all the tools to defeat him, regardless of what he may 'pull out' or use to surprise you... you get a backpack to cope, a kitbag from which you pull out things...*" Early acquaintance with such situations during the prep allows participants to optimally plan for them in advance: "*Because there are simulations of all sorts of army things, you often feel that the situation is not so*



*strange to you. We had a paratroop week, or all kinds of things that simulate a week of basic training. After that you get feedback on your performance, what was better and what less so. So that when you get to the army, you feel confident, because you feel that you won't 'fall', you feel like an equal among equals, which is no trivial matter in our ethnic community."*

- **How to behave in a group:** *"There's a lot of talk about the army, the future. What you are getting into is explained to you. There is talk about working together as a group, to advance you have to do [things] together and not drop out. It is explained to you that you do not work alone, you are not the only one, you have a whole group and if you want to succeed, you need to work with everyone.."*
- **Personal development:** Participants and graduates attest to the change they feel that they have undergone in personality and behavior: *"The most important and meaningful change has to do with personality...they make you strongly conscious that it is you who is responsible for your life, and that nothing happens of itself if you don't move things on your own"; "I was sure that it was all physical fitness... but when you come here, everything changes. Fitness is dealt with, but it is not the main thing. Primarily, you deal with yourself. There are lessons here and you work on yourself, mindfulness and facing an audience... it's all related to you – things that help you develop and achieve your goals."*
- **Improved physical fitness**
- **Preparation for adult life:** Participants and graduates noted that as far as they were concerned, one of the prep's most significant contributions is preparation for adult life at the end of army service: *"They already prepared us for how to study, what to study, and then to marry... how to properly manage a family, how to remain with the right woman. How not to give up on yourself... , how to advance to be a student and really respect yourself."*

## **7.2 Contribution of the Programs from the Perspective of Staff and Directors**

The staff of the various programs noted that in terms of army service – success, in their eyes, meant completing full, meaningful service, preferably in a combat unit, and training for command and officer positions: *"Some of the participants arrived here with problems: we have had former detainees or [boys with] criminal files. For me, such a participant – if he completes three years or full service without prison, without problems, and without conflicts, I regard this as success... there are (also) participants who are expected to train as officers and commanders, and advance as much as possible. Success here is per participant.";* *"As regards the recruits, I have had a number of guys whose heads were really not there, who planned to let the three years just pass. In the end, they enlisted in good units... there are some such guys who were not attuned to this and I'm sure that after the three years, other options that had not been there before opened up before them."*

The staff and directors enumerated the many contributions and successes for participants:

- **Providing knowledge on the process of army screening,** for example: *"I had a girl who didn't even know that army service is compulsory, and she simply didn't show up for her first call-up. She is the oldest daughter, her parents don't speak Hebrew and she had no one to learn from."*

- **Raising motivation for meaningful service in combat units and officer training**
- **Developing personal skills and abilities:** Participants go through a process of personal development and empowerment in the programs, and experience success: *"There is a 180 degree turnabout. Within months, we see change – in outlook, behavior, resilience, worldview, openness, ability";* they develop self-confidence and a sense of personal efficacy: *"In the activities themselves, the participants work hard, sweat, and it is a lesson for life. They gain a sense of competence and the readiness to make an effort in life";* they develop personal responsibility and learn to conduct themselves independently: *"From the start, we work with them on independence, they themselves manage the prep, choose the chair people and the committees... and also receive tools for life: how to be independent, how to open a bank account, how to find work, what my goals are in the army";* they have successful experiences, which raises their self-confidence: *"...(for example...) the group decided to hold a party for the recruits. The program offered them a two-session workshop on setting up projects. In July, there was a conference attended by 150 youth slated to go into the army. They did it all themselves."*
- **Consolidating knowledge of topics related to Israeli society, Zionism, Judaism, and Israeli history and geography**
- **Creating a sense of pride in their own identity and in their families:** *"At the start, there is ambivalence about their original culture, they don't use their Ethiopian names... in the course of the year, one process that occurs is that they return to their original names... very gradually, they start to invite their families [to come], something they're very ashamed of at the beginning... very gradually, they feel more confidence and pride in their families."*
- **Reinforcing the sense of belonging to Israeli society:** This is done through the encounter with participants from different backgrounds, new friendships, teambuilding and creation of team spirit: *"One of the main things that I as a counselor can impart to them is a feeling of family, group, connection with people and friends that they would not have met otherwise in any situation because they don't go to school with them. They attend separate schools for boys and girls, and they don't hang out in the same recreation spots, because these are Ethiopians, and these are Russians, and these are Kurds, they just don't meet. So I give them, I daresay, a miniature melting pot." "Sometimes they grow up in very homogenous schools and neighborhoods. The prep is heterogeneous, and suddenly they have friends on kibbutzim, on moshavim and in town, in all sorts of different places."*
- **Forming a connection with a significant adult who constitutes a positive role model:** *"The relationship with the counselor, a positive adult, was something the youth [sometimes] lacked at school and in the family, and at the prep it completes the puzzle that the youngster needs."*
- **Participation in positive recreation (in the programs):** *"... So that they won't be shut up at home. What is there to do at home? To be at the computer, to hang out outdoors, to drink alcohol in the evening... "*

## 8. Programmatic Directions

Despite the variation of the preps and programs in goals, focus of activity, and intensity – it emerges from the study that both types of program achieve their goals and provide an appropriate and comprehensive response to the challenges facing Ethiopian-Israeli youngsters in advent of the army screening process and army service itself.

This section presents programmatic directions that might improve the preparation for army service and expand the opportunities and possibilities of meaningful service for Ethiopian Israelis. The directions are the product of an analysis of the aggregate data collected for the present study.

1. **Increasing the number of participants taking part in the community programs during high school:** The community programs currently provide a response to some 4,000 Ethiopian-Israeli youth. This report indicates numerous and significant ways in which they improve readiness for army service, especially in regards to knowledge about the screening process and the army service. To increase the number of youngsters realizing their potential in military service and to prevent dropout from the army, it is recommended that efforts be stepped up to expand the programs to additional Ethiopian-Israeli candidates.
2. **Increasing the number of participants of pre-army preps:** Some 200 participants attend the preps annually. Participation in the intensive year-long program in a dormitory setting constitutes an opportunity for maturation and significantly changes one's perceptions, abilities, skills and conduct. Moreover, the preps impart tools that will serve participants later in life as well, as adults, e.g. how to cope with conflict. For this reason, it is important to increase the number of participants, and encourage additional preps to include Ethiopian Israelis.
3. **Strengthening the relationship between the programs and the participants' parents:** Given the importance of parental involvement in supporting their children during this period of their lives, it is recommended that the programs strengthen their relationship with parents, to achieve two goals: (a) to increase parental involvement in their children's lives and thereby contribute to the participants' perseverance at the prep; (b) to prepare the parents to serve as a source of support for their children during military service. It is important that the relationship with parents be structured and ongoing, rather than limited to one-off activities.
4. **Expanding support for program graduates during and after army service:** During army service, the graduates cope with difficulties and problems, and they need a place to turn to for advice or assistance. After army service, they find themselves in a situation where, for the first time, they are not part of a structured framework, and it is therefore highly important to continue to offer support in the transition to the next stage of their lives. In the programs that have a graduates unit, there is room to strengthen it and deepen the relationship with graduates. Where the relationship is based more on personal initiative and one-time activities, there is room to create a structured mechanism for ongoing contact with graduates.
5. **Training army commanders in multi-culturalism:** There is general agreement that the proper functioning of Ethiopian Israelis in the army depends primarily on their understanding of the

framework and their ability to adjust to it. The commanders, however, also have a significant role to play in successfully integrating these boys into the army framework. It has been reported that the commanders need additional tools and knowledge to understand the difficulties and problems typical of some Ethiopian Israelis, and to cope with them; much like the training received by staff at the programs. It is therefore recommended that specific instruction on how to command Ethiopian-Israelis soldiers be given in all courses for commanders, especially for those commanding these soldiers directly.

6. **Development of strategies for raising the proportion of Ethiopian-Israeli boys training for positions of command:** Despite the many efforts of the programs to lead Ethiopian Israelis towards meaningful army service, including command and officer positions, the directors of the programs reported disappointment at the low proportion of Ethiopian-Israeli male soldiers who ultimately become officers. This proportion is low in comparison with both the proportion of Ethiopian-Israeli boys who become squad commanders<sup>12</sup> and the proportion of Ethiopian-Israeli girls who become officers. The topic deserves serious review in order to lead to a significant increase in the proportion of Ethiopian-Israeli boys training for command and particularly for officer positions.

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<sup>12</sup> A squad commander is not an officer.

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