



# Challenge Centers – Evaluation Study

## Executive Summary

October 2014

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### **Program Description**

The Challenge Centers were established with the goal of equipping youth at risk (8th-9th grades) with tools and skills for normative and productive lives. The program operates in two centers in Netanya and Herzliya, four to five times a week after school hours. The activity includes homework preparation with the assistance of college students, followed by various relaxation activities that emphasize extreme sports (water sports, judo etc.); workshops and lectures on diverse subjects; trips and special activities (visits to army units, educational sites, museums, and more.)

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of the research was to examine the effectiveness of the program, with an emphasis on personal and educational empowerment. Other issues that were examined include the reduction of risk behaviors, and the perceived contribution of and satisfaction from the program among the participants.

### **Methodology**

The research used questionnaires that participants answered in the middle and at the end of the 2013/4 school year, reporting about their educational achievements, learning performance, self-esteem, vision of the future, satisfaction from the program and its perceived contribution. In the middle of the year, 8th grade students were asked to report retrospectively about their opinions and behavior at the end of 7th grade. At the end of the year, the same students again answered the questionnaire and reported on their opinions and behavior at that time (end of 8th grade). The 9th grade students also answered the questionnaire at the end of the year. In that way, three groups were compared: end of 7th grade (N=65), end of 8th grade (N=41) and end of 9th grade (N=19).

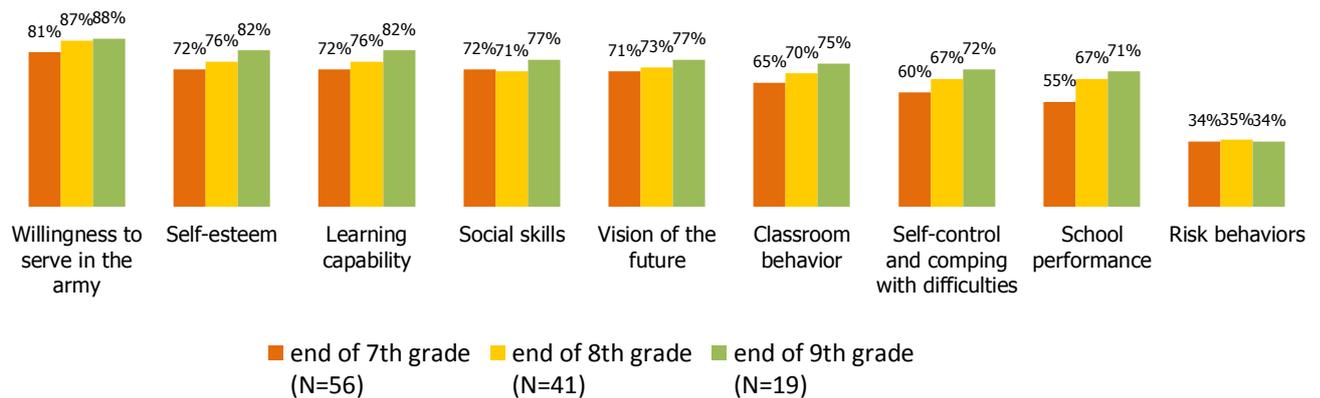
### **Main Findings**

- An average improvement of 30% was found in overall learning performance. For example, 58% of the 9th grade graduates reported that they do their homework on time, compared with 42% at the end of 8th grade and only 10% at the end of 7th grade. Similarly, 53% of 9th grade graduates reported that they listen to the teacher, compared with 34% at the end of 8th grade and 15% at the end of 7th grade. With

respect to educational achievements, 47% of the 9th grade graduates stated that their achievements are higher than those of the average students in their class, compared with 33% at the end of 8th grade and 14% at the end of 7th grade.

- Furthermore, an increase of 14% was also found in learning capability. For example, at the end of 9th grade, 68% of the students felt that they were capable of succeeding at school, compared with 44% at the end of 8th grade and 39% at the end of 7th grade.
- In the social skills indicators there was a moderate increase of about 8%. For example, 63% of the 9th grade graduates claimed that they participate in social activities at school, compared with 44% at the end of 8th grade and 29% at the end of 7th grade. In contrast, the percentage of students who do not feel embarrassed to speak in public decreased slightly, from 51% at the end of 7th grade to 42% at the end of 9th grade.
- An average increase of 20% was observed in self-control and coping with difficulties. For example, at the end of 9th grade, 47% of the students claimed that they can control themselves in confrontations with others, compared with 20% at the end of 8th grade and 24% at the end of 7th grade. Despite the significant increase, the indicators still remained relatively low.
- The indicator for self-esteem increased by an average of 14%. For example, 68% of 9th grade graduates reported that they are satisfied with themselves, compared with 56% at the end of 8th grade and 32% at the end of 7th grade. The participants' perception regarding their cognitive abilities (intelligence) did not change and remained low, so that only 32% of 9th grade graduates feel that they are intelligent, similar to the graduates of 7th and 8th grades.
- No change was found in the indicator for risk behaviors, but its components changed. For example, loitering decreased substantially as opposed to an increase in smoking. Nevertheless, the decrease in loitering is encouraging because its prevention is one of the program's main goals.
- A consistent increase was found in all the indicators for vision of the future, which becomes clearer and more positive over time. For example, 53% of the 9th grade graduates believe that in the future they will work in a profession that requires university education, as opposed to 49% at the end of 8th grade and 39% at the end of 7th grade. Throughout the years there is a strong desire to serve in the army.
- The satisfaction and perceived contribution were also relatively high. For example, 77% of the participants claimed that they would warmly recommend that a close friend join the center. The primary contribution that participants report is making new friends, alongside empowerment, acquiring tools for coping and enjoyable recreation. A higher contribution was seen in the Herzliya Center.

## Summary Success Indicators - differences between participants by length of time in the program



### Conclusions and Recommendations

- The research shows that the program is effective in achieving its goals. Thus, a significant improvement takes place in the participants' overall learning performance, as well as in their self-esteem and in the way that they cope with difficulties. However, the social skills indicator showed only a moderate improvement. Similarly, despite the impressive increase in the indicators of school performance and coping with difficulties, they remained below the desirable level.
- Almost all of the participants report high satisfaction with the program, and about half stated that they acquired tools for coping with the difficulties and life's challenges.
- It is recommended to examine means and methods that might result in more students viewing themselves as intelligent.
- It is recommended to consider operating a program for prevention of smoking, since more than a quarter of the students in 9th grade smoke on a regular basis - far more than the national average.
- It is recommended to provide activities for coping with difficulties and anger since the majority of students report they do not succeed in controlling themselves in a confrontation with others and "do not remain calm in stressful situations."