

The Amishav Program for Olim Youth

- **Background**

Bnei Akiva has a rich history of working worldwide to promote Jewish and Israel identity and ultimately aliya. The formal aliya support framework provided by Bnei Akiva ends at the door of the aircraft as it departs from the terminal to deliver the new olim to Israel. The Amishav Program addresses the need to continue providing support for olim youth after their families make aliya, to help each oleh youth with a successful entry into Israeli society and to make aliya a positive life experience.

- **The Reality**

Olim often settle in communities with other olim who share a common culture and language. This can be helpful in the aliya process while it can also create barriers for the children's successful entry into Israeli society. Involvement in the Bnei Akiva framework after aliya can be a wonderful aid to a positive acclimation process. However, sometimes the oleh youth does not feel comfortable entering the dynamic of the Bnei Akiva group and at times the native Israeli participants are not welcoming to new olim. The Amishav Program addresses these challenges.

- **Our Vision**

The Amishav Program creates an additional framework within the existing Bnei Akiva branch to attract and work with olim youth on a personal level, plan special activities for the olim youth, integrate them into the regular Bnei Akiva groups and ensure a welcoming and supportive atmosphere within the Bnei Akiva group.

Goals of the Amishav program include:

- Creating a feeling of belonging and equality
- Personal growth and confidence in themselves and in their surroundings
- Better understanding the traditions and values of the State of Israel
- Filling in cultural gaps

- For the staff to act in an advocacy role within the school and community where appropriate
- **Our Framework**
- One counselor (“madrich”) in each group in the Bnei Akiva branch is designated as the “Oleh Madrich” and it is their responsibility to focus on the new olim and work with the regular group to assure understanding and a proper welcome.
- The Oleh Coordinator works with these special madrichim and in parallel to the Komonarit (director of the local Bnei Akiva branch).
- The Madrichim are the key to the success of the program. Their responsibilities include:
 - Locating olim by working through schools, batei kneset and community representatives
 - Working on an individual basis with each oleh, dealing with specific issues and ensuring a positive experience. The oleh’s success is the oleh madrich’s primary responsibility!
 - Working with parents to ensure proper expectations, understanding and support of the process as well as helping with logistical issues like registration
- The Oleh Madrich organizes special activities for the olim (during regular Bnei Akiva meetings and at other times).
- The oleh youth also participate in regular Bnei Akiva meetings at which time the Oleh Madrich keeps a special eye on the olim.
- The Oleh Madrich works with native Israeli participants to explain the difficulties of being a new person in a group, the challenges facing the oleh youth and the importance of being accepting and supportive.
- The program is structured so that the participants feel like full-fledged members of the Bnei Akiva branch and not part of an outside “project”.
- Madrich profile – a Bnei Akiva graduate who speaks the language and understands the culture of the olim, and is committed to the success of the program

- **Our Progress**

The Amishav Program currently functions in four locations – cities with concentrations of olim.

- Sep 2011 - the first program started in Raanana targeting olim youth from English speaking countries. The Program succeeded in integrating fifty olim youth into the Bnei Akiva framework.
- 2012 – new branches opened in Modiin (English), Raanana (French) and Netanya (French)

Programming is divided by age groups starting with fourth grade, and including leadership training workshops for high school age participants.

- **Our Success**

The success and value of the Amishav Program is seen through the progress of each individual participant, one person at a time. We have seen success in our participants and also in the willingness of native Israeli participants to be more open and accepting of new members.

One story that speaks volumes

Josh, a new oleh in eighth grade, was having difficulties in school. Josh was frustrated - he wanted to return to the United States and he made little effort on the social side and in his studies. Josh's mother sought ways to improve the situation and spoke to the Komonarit for ideas. The Komonarit and the eighth grade madrichim contacted Josh and created a personal relationship through phone calls, home visits, visiting his school, and taking a continued personal interest. As Josh became active in Bnei Akiva, his attitude improved and his self-confidence increased, he invested in his school work and started to succeed academically, and he was accepted socially. Josh's mother called the Komonarit at the end of the school year with heartfelt gratitude.