**Discussion of the Results**

In recent years, pursuant to the particular difficulty of young people to integrate into the global labor market, in jobs that pay an adequate salary (World Bank, 2015), there has been a call to invest in the field of employability among young people (ages 15 to 24) in general, and specifically among youth at-risk. This is part of a strategy to deal with this challenge of integration, equipping youth with abilities and skills that will help them integrate and succeed in the labor market and to advance (to create forward mobility) (REFS).

According to a human development approach REF, investing in and cultivating human capital in the global era is one of the central means used to increase job opportunities and ensure the successful integration of young people in jobs which enable them to adequately support themselves, live independent lives and strengthen processes of social inclusion. This philosophy emphasizes the commitment of the government, public institutions, and NGOs to collaboratively invest in and develop these fields. The Secure Future (*Atid Batuach*) pilot, the results of which will be presented in the current article, operates according to these principles and focuses on cultivating abilities and skills in the field of employability, assisting youth at-risk in the process of integrating into the labor market in the future. Note that this program, which was initiated and funded by the Israel National Insurance Institute, is operated in cooperation with the welfare and education divisions of the local authorities, for the purpose of ensuring its continued operation as well as its assimilation at the local authorities.

Secure Future is a holistic program that integrates investment in cultivating work skills, personal and interpersonal skills and supportive personal and group climate components. The findings of the program’s evaluation indicate two main approaches, currently prevalent among professionals working in the field of advancement of youth at-risk, in general, and specifically in the field of employment. The first approach is Positive Youth Development (PYD) REFS, which focuses on strengthening factors related to resilience and to personal, family and community-social capital as assets that assist with coping with risk situations, by strengthening, inter alia, personal-emotional and behavioral aspects (including self esteem, internal self regulation, an ability to adapt to various systems, personal and interpersonal abilities and creating interpersonal relationships in various frameworks), and academic hopeful future expectations. Consequently, this approach does not focus on reducing the impact of risk situations and addressing the indicators of risk behaviors of youth at-risk. The program is suited to the developmental stage of adolescence (ages 15-18), when young people are expected to invest in and strengthen their human capital, in order to integrate into the labor market as young adults in the future. The evaluation findings, as will be discussed in detail later on, indeed reinforce this positive approach.

The second approach according to which the program and its evaluation research were conducted, is promoting employability among adolescents. Here too, the evaluation findings reinforce recent initiatives, which indicate the need for integrative programs to promote employability among adolescents. They also support the trends found in the evaluation studies of programs that promote employability REFS. The employability approach identifies a number of main fields in which to invest. These include ensuring the continued integration in educational frameworks and imparting skills that facilitate integration in suitable employment (including professional and technical knowledge); making a variety of options available for attaining professional and academic training, enabling future integration into the workforce (through practical training courses or by expanding opportunities to integrate into post high school institutions in the future); teaching personal and behavioral skills that will ensure normative integration into the workforce (such as the ability to learn, interpersonal communication, team work and problem solving ability); active integration into society in the future (social inclusion and active citizenship); the need for focusing the interventions on at-risk populations; and combining the training with actual work experience in the labor market. Also important is collaboration between educational institutions and professional training and employers and creating a curriculum based on this collaboration.

**Central Trends**

The professionals who support the youth in each of the programs and who rated the participants’ level of functioning, both prior to the start of the program and toward its conclusion, are social workers and educators who are trained to evaluate adolescents. They observed their behavior during their participation in the program throughout the year of activity and measured the functioning of each adolescent who participated in the same group using a ‘uniform ruler’, which is crucial for understanding the process that took place in the different groups. The professionals’ report indicates that their exposure to the program for seven months significantly improved the level of functioning of the adolescents who participated in each of the four relevant fields for cultivating employability: integration in the workforce, acquiring relevant personal-emotional skills, writing a resume, and the participants’ chances for succeeding in completing a high school matriculation program and/or entering studies at an institution of higher education. The last field is of particular importance, in light of the concern regarding the educators’ inferior evaluation of the ability of youth at-risk to integrate in institutions of higher education and the labor market REFS.

In addition to the evaluation by the members of the professional staff, it was important to examine the point of view of the program participants, since it represents the adolescents’ subjective perception of the contribution of the various program components to their personal and professional development, through the lens of their personal and individual experience in the program activity REFS.

From among the variety of program components, the participants identified the work components (and particularly participation in the professional course) as the main contributors to advancement in their professional and personal development, followed by the components in the personal and interpersonal field (and primarily the group sessions led by a group facilitator), and finally, the program’s climate components. The findings of the hierarchical regression indicate that the parents’ employment is significant to the progress in all of the fields that were examined; the participation in the group sessions contributed to the participants’ progress in the personal-emotional field; and the lack of connection to the internet, a supportive climate between participants, reciprocal help and an ability to select the course helped the participants advance in the work field. Affiliation to the majority Jewish group influenced the progress in terms of chances of integrating in higher education frameworks in the future. The participants’ feedback and the regression findings helped us identify a number of critical components for creating a training and intervention program in the field of employability for at-risk populations, as detailed below.

*Working in a Group*

The adolescents emphasized the importance of the group sessions and their active involvement in these sessions; and the hierarchical regression also added supportive climate between the participants and reciprocal help between the group members as important to advancement, both in the personal-emotional field and the field of integrating into the workforce. These findings indicate that the group forum constitutes a valuable resource for youth at-risk participating in the program, and they offer advantages similar to those of group therapy, as cited by Yalom and Leszcz REF , and are of particular importance for at-risk youth REF. On the personal level, group therapy generates hope, creates a sense of universality regarding the personal problem, facilitates the acquisition of knowledge from the group facilitator and members of the group, encourages a sense of altruism, and creates a corrective experience with a sense of affiliation to the family forum. On the interpersonal level, the group offers an opportunity to experience interpersonal relationships and to develop techniques for friendship and learning interpersonal communication skills, such as attention ability, conflict resolution and receiving feedback regarding personal behavior from members of the group, as well as an opportunity to experience working in a group and coping with the need to solve problems REF . In addition, the group forum fosters group solidarity that encourages the formation of interpersonal relationships, the assumption of a role in the group and mutual support and acceptance REF. These advantages of working in a group are important to young adults in general, and disadvantaged young adults in particular, as a means to ensure social inclusion and enhance their further employment and learning/studies opportunities REF .

*The Parents’ Employment*

The regression findings indicate the central contribution of the parents’ integration into the workforce to all the relevant aspects related to the fields of adolescent employability. Earlier studies indicate that the parents’ involvement in their children’s development constitutes a protective factor that reduces risk situations in the future REFS. In the socialization process that transpires during the course of adolescence, the parents shape the employment-related values and aspirations of their children in the future REFS, such that the parents’ values and behavior influence the children and they serve as a role model for them REFS. The literature also indicates the importance of implementing programs for parents, so they can serve as a source of support for their children REFS, as well as the special importance of working with parents from low income families, in order to encourage their children to attend programs that promote employment, reducing their children’s cynical approach toward opportunities for joining the workforce and reinforcing their employment aspirations REFS. These findings indicate the need to expand the target population’s perception of programs in the field of employability for youth at-risk, so that family unit will serve as the intervention unit. They also indicate the need for possible joint intervention and collaboration between the departments that treat youth at-risk and the departments that treat their parents as part of the local treatment frameworks. The need to work with the parents and to consider them as a resource—both when the parents are employed and serve as a role model and when they are unemployed or are looking for a job—serves as an opportunity to examine the relevant issues and challenges involved in joining the workforce.

*Working Collaboratively with Adolescents*

Participants in the program were found to attribute importance to their active involvement in the program activity as well as their selection of the professional course they studied as part of the program. These aspects emphasize the need of youth at-risk to become partners in planning the program, to influence its content and become involved in shaping their own futures. They also highlight the advantages of the the therapeutic team, considering them as resource that is likely to influence the program’s success REFS. This finding is compatible with other findings in the literature REFS, which emphasize the importance of the adolescents’ participation in planning and implementing community programs and especially programs for integration into the workforce, as part of a strategy to strengthen personal and interpersonal abilities, encourage social involvement, influence decision making, and as a way to strengthen the adolescents’ development and resilience. This is achieved by the programs by offering opportunities for the adolescents to gain experience in presenting their ideas and to sense that their ideas are accepted and implemented in their relevant activity spheres. All these were found to contribute to strengthening self and social leadership, forming self and social identity and creating social trust.

*Work Components and Participation in a Professional Course*

Adolescents who participated in the program emphasized the importance of the program’s components to the employment field, and particularly the importance of participation in the professional course. These findings reinforce the evaluation findings of programs that foster employability among young people, which emphasize exposure to a variety of workplaces, while offering an opportunity to become familiar with the demands of the workplace and its organizational culture and a unique opportunity to gain actual work experience and to identify the participant’s strong fields as well as fields in need of improvement in order for him to integrate successfully at work (Brewer, 2014; Kechagias, 2011). The professional training course enables adolescents to gain professional expertise and find a job that is better suited to their talents and preferences and enables them to adequately support themselves (Wang 2012; World Bank, 2015).

*Digital Accessibility and its Complex Nature*

Cultivating technological skills—i.e., the basic tools necessary for the retrieval, storage, creation, presentation and exchange of information using computers, as well as communication and belonging to networks using computerized tools (Kechagias, 2011)—is one of the fields recommended by programs that promote employability REFS. However, contrary to earlier predictions, the present study indicated that an absence of accessibility to the internet contributed to the progress of the participants. In fact, recent studies REFS indicate the complexity of exposing young people in educational frameworks to digital accessibility and the disadvantages of digital accessibility which may distract adolescents from investing in their studies. With the global increase in internet use, these findings require focused attention in order to characterize the types of internet use that serve as a constructive factor in promoting youth at-risk, in contrast to the factors that serve as distractions or that inhibit progress in a different manner.

**The Program’s Social Context**

Recently, the professional literature has attributed increasing importance to the inclusion of cultural aspects in intervention programs designed to strengthen the resilience of adolescents that belong to minority groups in society REFS. This literature emphasizes the need to strengthen an understanding of the cultural context of the target population, the culture’s complexity and the contribution of its values and practices to the strengthening of social processes and the use of culture as an important resource in strengthening ties between the individual and society. In the present study, there are differences in the cultural context of each of three research populations and these differences are expressed in the results received in each of the groups. Evaluation of differences in the manner in which the program advanced the adolescents from the different sectors is likely to teach us both about the program itself, about the sectors and the manner in which such programs should be adapted to the cultural context. The present study indicates that the Jewish majority population has significantly advanced in almost all the fields that were examined, except in writing resumes. In contrast, the Arab population has significantly advanced in the field of personal-emotional capabilities, writing resumes and in the field of employment. However, no significant progress was observed in the evaluation of the chances of the participants’ success in completing high school matriculation or studies at an institution of higher education. The participants in the programs from the Ultra-Orthodox sector, exhibited significant progress in writing a resume, and an increase in the participants’ chances of success in completing matriculation or studies at an institution of higher education; however, only partial progress was reported in the personal-emotional field (specifically, progress was only reported in the ability for internal focus of control) and in the fields of employment (the ability to meet work requirements in behavioral terms). Moreover, participants from various sectors attributed different levels of importance to the contribution of the components to the work fields and the components in the personal and interpersonal field. The Ultra-Orthodox population placed a greater emphasis on the work components in comparison to the other two populations and the Jewish majority population gave a higher rating to the ability to approach someone when there was a problem and to the fact that the group facilitator believed in their abilities and strengths.

The Arab-Muslim society and the religious Ultra-Orthodox society are both traditional societies, whose members strictly adhere to a conservative religious lifestyle. However, both societies are undergoing processes of change and transition, following their encounters with modern western society (in the labor market, in higher education frameworks and in places of commerce). This process has influenced the individual’s and society’s values, the division of labor within the family and the patterns of integrating into the workforce REFS. Concurrently, the local authorities in these sectors are ranked in a low socio-economic cluster (Cluster 2 and below, out of 10), have limited budgets (primarily due to the low level of collections from the residents and local businesses) REFS; and the budgets that they receive from the government are relatively limited REFS.

Alongside these shared characteristics, both societies can be distinguished one from the other in their terms of their approach toward integration into the Israeli labor market, which apparently influences the nature in which the participants from the two societies adopted the tools they learned in the program. These two minority populations avoid general social forums and integrate less into institutions of higher education (whose alumni have higher rates of integrating into the workforce and work in more professional and academic occupations). The tendency of the first group is due to ideological-religious motives and the second group due to social-national and traditional motives and due to a lack of budgets and educational opportunities REFS. The religious Ultra-Orthodox society does not encourage its members, especially its men, to join the workforce and institutions of higher education; and it expects them to invest most of their efforts in the study of the Torah, while it instructs the women to go out to work to enable the men to do so REFS. The Arab-Muslim population, on the other hand, tends to encourage its women to remain at home in order to take care of their family REFS and it deals with the difficulty of integrating into institutions of higher education and the labor market, based on the low level of scholastic achievements of a significant portion of the population, the limited employment opportunities due to the low level of education (REFS and the lack of a good mastery of the Hebrew language (which is generally required in the Israeli labor market REFS, and is probably due to discrimination based on nationality) REFS .

This context also has implications for the adolescents’ risk characteristics REFS, the level of services received at educational institutions (for example the number of buildings, number of study hours, crowdedness in the classrooms, and the quality of the relationship between teacher and students), and the characteristics and quality of their teaching faculty. In the Ultra-Orthodox society, an adolescent who does not succeed in integrating into the *Torani* (religious) educational institutions (generally due to learning disabilities or a lifestyle that is not accepted by Ultra-Orthodox society) is left without an alternative educational track and without the possibility for professional training for the labor market. These adolescents enter a process of alienation from their family and society, which consider them as breaching the boundaries and threatening the integrity of the community REFS. The Ultra-Orthodox teaching staff generally acquires its training at religious *Torani* educational institutions and lacks current professional training in the field of education in general, and specifically in the field of employment education for youth at-risk. This faculty is committed and caring; however, for the most part, it lacks the relevant knowledge for working with this unique target population REFS.

In the Arab-Muslim society, a significant percentage of adolescents drop out of school in light of their families’ economic difficulties and due to the expectation that they go to work to help support the family. The teaching faculty in this sector has a higher academic education (since employment opportunities in the Israeli labor market are limited for this population); however, it lacks specific extensive training in the field of education and work with youth at-risk REFS. The limited investment of public resources in this sector’s infrastructure throughout most of the history of the State of Israel has led to a shortage of classrooms in the post-elementary educational frameworks and a particularly large number of students per class, which overshadows, inter alia, the relationship between teachers and students at the school REFS, and leaves a significant portion of the students as ‘hidden drop-outs’ that are registered at school, but whose level of achievements is particularly low. Most of them are absent from school and feel socially rejected and alienated by the school REFS. Note that in both societies, the informal education frameworks and frameworks for youth at-risk are limited, due to a lack organizations in this field and a lack of investment by the local authorities REFS.

Participants in the program identified the components that contribute to their professional development as the unique components that they feel are missing in the educational systems and in their family and community. Adolescents at the fringes of Ultra-Orthodox society need a professional channel that will offer them a full and independent life in a non-Ultra-Orthodox society, due to their lack of religious (*Torani*) education and support from family and community. Consequently, it appears that they rated the work components as very significant for them. Arab adolescents, who feel social rejection and a lack of opportunities for significant learning in the formal education framework, identified the personal and interpersonal components as the most significant in strengthening their sense of involvement and affiliation to society. In an indirect manner, these components helped them integrate into the labor market and adequately support themselves. Moreover, a lack of progress in the field of the youth’s aspirations to attend institutions of higher education perhaps indicates a general communal feeling of each of the groups with regard to the degree of success of its members in integrating into institutions of higher learning. Consequently, the evaluation findings offer the study’s various levels of operation דרגי ההפעלה השונים של המחקר ?? (in the field and on a general system level) an in-depth understanding of the program’s operating processes; and they heighten the need to expand the use of cultural-communal components of each of the groups in order to strengthen the personal and social resilience of the adolescents.

*Establishing Local Steering Committees and their Contribution*

One of the surprising findings of the present study is the absence of greater variance in the results between the three sectors, which have different and unique cultural contexts. The model that was used to create the program is a complementary model, which encourages the use of internal community resources and facilitates culture-sensitive work REFS with the people running the local education system and local professionals in the social services departments. It appears that the integration of a comprehensive and flexible national model along with the establishment of local steering committees—which incorporate all the locality’s professional treatment institutions in the fields of education, welfare and employment in each of the three sectors, while providing supportive professional assistance on a local and national level—enables each locality and city to develop the model that suits the characteristics of the adolescents to the resources and the needs identified in that locality. In this way, the model enables customization for each and every population while also creating dialogue and reciprocal learning in national forums. Additionally, the work, based on the needs that were identified by the teams in the localities, reduced the initiative of the program leadership by using complementary components that strengthen the ‘weak links’ - on the participants’ level and the level of the operating staff. Consequently, due to the understanding of the unique community-social needs of each of the minority groups, it is important to strengthen Hebrew fluency in the Arab sector in order for the participants to successfully integrate in their studies and into the Israeli labor market. In the Ultra-Orthodox sector, it is best to invest in imparting knowledge in the core subjects (Hebrew, mathematics and English), which are not taught in the Ultra-Orthodox formal educational system and are important for integrating into the workforce in modern society. On the level of the operating staff, complementary professional knowledge should be offered to professionals in the Ultra-Orthodox sector (who do not have a formal post-high school education). In the Arab sector, a greater investment should be made in expanding the professional tools used in personal and interpersonal work with youth at-risk by professionals (most of who have an academic education but have not specialized in working with youth at-risk). In addition, it is worthwhile identifying and utilizing the family’s resources (working parents in Arab society) and the community resources (volunteer work in the Ultra-Orthodox community, collaborations with local entrepreneurs and businesses), strengthening the connection between Ultra-Orthodox adolescents and the family and community, and positioning the status of Arab adolescents in the formal education frameworks.

Note that it is possible that significant progress among participants in the minority groups—the Arab and Ultra-Orthodox sectors—may be attributed to the limited resources invested in these sectors as compared to the resources invested in youth at-risk in the general Jewish population. Pursuant to the investment of the resources, there is an enlistment of professionals in the social services departments, as well as the parents and participants to maximize the invested public resources. Youth at-risk in other Jewish localities benefit from a wide variety of youth programs and professionals and parents and participants do not feel committed or feel the need to invest in this program.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The present study corroborates the importance of holistic programs that emphasize positive aspects to the advancement of employability. The study identifies specific components that are critical to programs that promote employability for youth at-risk and primarily emphasize the main importance of working in a group and the significance of work with the parents in cooperation with therapeutic institutions in the target population, collaboration with the adolescents participating in the programs and cultivating work components (such as becoming familiar with places of work, on-the-job experience) and participation in the program’s professional course. In addition, the findings also emphasize the need to cope with the issue of the digital gap, so the knowledge acquired in this field does not serve as a distraction, but rather an effective tool to locate relevant information needed to attain an education and find a suitable job.

The study also indicates that in order to maximize work with minority groups with unique cultural characteristics, the program must be flexible and work on two supplementary dimensions at the same time: top-down (through national steering committees) and bottom-up (through local steering committees), providing training for both of these levels, where the connection between the levels is mutually beneficial and helps to constantly improve the program and its dissemination to other spheres. In this field, it is likely that openness and complete flexibility necessitate complementary components, even where the leaders in the minority group do not identify them. These include strengthening components that make higher education more accessible (for example, visits to institutions of higher education, familiarity with role models in the community or initiating joint programs with academic institutions), in order to ensure the expansion of opportunities for employment mobility and fair salaries for these group in the future.

**LIMITATIONS**

The main limitation of the present study is that it primarily describes what takes place during the course of the program, while the data related to the program alumni are relatively few and gathered a short time (only one year) after the completion of the program. Consequently, most of the program participants have yet to actually experience extended integration in the labor market or at institutions of higher education. We do not have the data related to the percentage of those who have entered the workforce as adults, the percentage of those who attend institutions of higher education, the opinions of the program’s participants after its completion, etc. This limitation stems from two inherent problems of a study of this kind, in which the tools acquired in the program are supposed to be implemented long after--at times even a decade—the completion of the program. First of all, it is very difficult to locate the participants years after the completion of the program; and secondly, it may be expected that after so many years, the adolescents will have had many significant experiences and will not remember the components that were significant for them at the time they participated in the program. Another limitation of the study is an inability to select those who are exposed to the program in a random manner and the great heterogeneity (in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and geographic location) between the groups that were compared in this study. This limitation stems from the fact that it was only possible to conduct the study in sites where the program was actually implemented.