**Proposal for Schusterman Foundation—Gap Year Program**

**Promoting Social Mobility among Young Arab Adults**

**Description of the social problem:**

The period of young adulthood, generally defined as starting at age 18 with the end of formal study in high school, is a formative period for the future of many young people throughout the Western world and, specifically, in Israel. An especially definitive year during this period is a gap year, a year in which young adults take a break from all formal frameworks that are part of a longer career-oriented path to gain volunteer, professional, and employment experience and to experience unique once-in-a-lifetime experiences (such as extended international travel).

One of the main characteristics of young adulthood, and especially of a gap year, is that it marks the start of a new chapter in life that entails taking independent decisions regarding the future. Our review of the literature indicates that the main areas in which most young adults find themselves making meaningful decisions involve romantic relationships, higher education, and career.

For young Arab adults in Israel, young adulthood is liable to be especially complex and challenging, considering the social, political, economic, and cultural obstacles they face. For Arab young adults, language is their primary obstacle, followed by employment discrimination, insufficient job availability in medical professions, and their exemption from compulsory military service. These obstacles lead to lower-than-average higher educational participation rates, transitioning into menial labor already from a young age, transitioning to academic study abroad, and a phenomenon of idleness.

The number of Arab young adults who are residents of Israel and are neither working nor studying is estimated at 56,000–71,000 (not including about 19,000 married women who are not working), amounting to 24–30% of all Arab adults in this age bracket. The integration of Arab society in the Israeli economy is one of the main potential economic growth engines for Israel and a means for minimizing societal disparities.

The income disparities between the Arab and the Jewish populations stem from obstacles that exist prior to entering the labor market—obstacles to investment in human capital—as well as obstacles connected to the labor market, such as discrimination, low levels of transportation and infrastructure, a lack of accessible employment areas, and the weakness of the Arab local authorities. Kasir and Yashiv (2018) show through a general balance model that, over time, there has been a decrease in the importance of the obstacles in the labor market itself along with an increase in the importance of the obstacles to obtaining much-needed human capital.

**Main assumptions**

In our view, the transformative value of a gap year spent at a preparatory academy, as is becoming increasingly common among Jewish Israelis, can prove meaningful and significant for Arab Israeli society as well. In order to influence Arab Israeli society’s long-term health, it is important that there be a relevant framework for the development of young adults’ personalities, worldviews, values, and visions of a positive future.

The basic principle guiding us is that it is possible to customize content and activities for every community with the school principal, regional director, and/or regional/municipal planning forum formed for the purpose of implementing the preparatory academy program.

There are significant differences between the schools in Israel’s center and north, on the one hand, and the schools in the Negev Bedouin “dispersion,” especially regarding culture, access to infrastructure, and Hebrew fluency.

This preparatory academy program is based on the idea that intervention as early as possible in the educational process leads to minimizing disparities already in twelfth grade, primarily in meeting admissions requirements for colleges—Bagrut (matriculation exam) units completed (14 units in English, math, and Arabic).

**Overarching goal:** To assist young Arab adults by guiding them through the transition period after completing high school to integration in society, academia, and employment, with the aim of providing direction, tools, and skills for employment and academia, increasing the sense of belonging, developing leadership skills, and preparing for adult life.

**Secondary goals** (which can be transformed into measurable objectives dependent on the number of participants and the regions in the country jointly selected):

1. To increase collaboration and partnership in implementing the program with representatives from Arab society, including heads of Arab local authorities and mayors of mixed Jewish-Arab cities.
2. To increase the number of young Arab adults who meet university and academic college admissions requirements.
3. To increase the number of young Arab adults who meet technical and engineering studies admissions requirements.
4. To increase and improve the quality of Arab young adults who obtain professional training adapted to the needs of industry and the economy.
5. To provide capabilities necessary for career development and skills adapted to the twenty-first century labor market.
6. To produce program graduates who serve as models of social and educational excellence, combining with volunteerism and contributing to society.

**Milestones in implementing the program**

1. A preliminary field survey with student groups to clarify needs and challenges.
2. A locality-level steering committee: This committee will include key figures from the local authorities, the Social Equality Ministry, the Schusterman Foundation, the program’s management, local school administrators, and representatives of the students’ parents. This committee will decide and consult regarding professional training tracks and volunteer projects, monitor implementation in the locality and assist in promoting the program while strengthening relationships between local authority officials and the young adults participating in the program.
3. Starting eleventh grade by exposing students and their parents to the preparatory academy program.
4. Mapping students’ professional needs and capabilities.
5. Creating a group framework that enables addressing the needs of 11th–12th graders searching for guidance in finding a direction toward the appropriate profession or field and exposing them to the variety of subjects available.
6. Training students in advance of their high school graduation and providing them with tools necessary for choosing a personal development path.
7. Integrating the students in courses and preparatory academies appropriate to their capabilities and the economy’s needs.

**Where do we seek to launch a gap year program for unoccupied Arab young adults?**

In every locality, with a preference for a pilot program in localities where we already run and operate schools:

Ramle, Lod, Akko, Tarshiha, Neve Midbar Regional Council, and Kuseife Local Council.

**What inputs are required in 11th–12th grades in the schools feeding the program?**

* **A life preparation coordinator:** In every school where we jointly decide to run a pilot program, an employment success coordinator should be appointed who will be focused solely on promoting this goal. The coordinator will be a person integrated inside and outside the educational system, whose role will be to call on and view every student from the point of view of a responsible and concerned adult. The role also includes organizing **meetups for making the labor market accessible** to be held at the school in collaboration with private companies, **tours of workplaces** outside the school, and running the approved intervention programs, while ensuring students’ participation in the program’s activities approved for them.
* **Emotional support:** Introducing activities to improve students’ emotional wellbeing—encouraging and promoting their motivation to study and engage in professional/employment training—and strengthening their internal, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral resources.
* **Spoken/professional Hebrew:** Integrating Jewish teachers/lecturers into Arab schools to enable students to practice spoken Hebrew, develop conversational skills, encounter Jewish role models, and learn about the other’s culture in a setting where they feel at home.
* **Motivation— “I have a dream”** for empowerment and building a future vision: Developing individuals who can independently from environmental influences, who can envision their future and focus their aspirations, who take responsibility for their actions today through a view of their actions’ long-term consequences on their own future, and who develop into economically self-sufficient citizens who contribute to and benefit society.
* **Gender workshops**—Training the young women in a unique social and study program will expand their knowledge of the employment skills necessary in the twenty-first century, provide them with personal tools pertaining to women’s empowerment and contribution to community, and contribute to their integration in the labor market through an emphasis on the community and traditional limitations they face and on the importance of delaying the age of marriage to enable them to develop personal skills and maturity and to acquire a profession that will lead to their independence, and, ultimately, a healthier society.

**Which tracks do we seek to offer the young adults at every school in the gap year program?**

We are guided by the principle that the tracks offered to the young adults must be selected in consultation with the principal of the school in which we jointly decide to run the program.

In terms of professional training, we will direct the selection toward relevant professions that offer participants clear skills for employment. Their employment is at the basis of the program’s measures of success. We are aware that high-quality employment is an important factor protecting against forces liable to negatively influence participants’ lives and pull them towards less beneficial directions.

Young adults in the gap year program will be directed into one of the following tracks:

 Track A: Preparation for university—improving Bagrut scores

 Track B: Preparation for university—preparing for the Psychometric/Yael tests

 Track C: Professional/employment training to prepare for certificate studies. such as cyber analyst, programmer, coder, etc.

 Track D: Training as a practical engineer / technician

Each group will consist of up to twenty-five young adults aged eighteen and up who have graduated twelfth grade.

**What are the supportive components we seek to include in the gap year program proposal?**

Employing a **“success and employment” coordinator** under the professional management of the preparatory academy’s director/dean, whose role will be monitoring the systematic visiting of the young adults and early identification of problems liable to lead to their dropping out of the program before the end of the gap year, including examining attendance records and locating “hidden dropouts,” identifying reasons for dropping out, and connecting participants at risk of dropping out to Ort Israel professionals.

**Training coordinators:** Ten annual three-hour training sessions will be held focusing on the program’s optimal implementation and on challenges, successes, failures, and practical ideas for optimal implementation of current and future projects. The sessions will be led by external field experts with expertise pertaining to Arab young adults, civic involvement, and social activism.

**Language course**—The gap year program will include study and support pertaining to bridging language and literacy disparities, both in participants’ native Arabic and in Hebrew.

**Twenty-first century skills**—Strengthening personal and interpersonal skills necessary for the contemporary employment world including teamwork, networking, creative thinking, and the like.

**What are we offering alongside professional training?**

**Social involvement—Tikkun Olam:** Participants will act as ambassadors to promote social-ethical messages while taking personal responsibility toward their own communities, and volunteer in settings they select together. The purpose of this component is to prepare them for “civilian service” in “thirteenth grade” and serve as an additional tool in group-building and transforming participants from a consumerist to a creative mindset, from survival to leadership.

**Social support:** Consolidating a social group, enrichment, and empowerment through social and group activities, such as ceremonies, lectures, workshops, relaxation activities, special evening events, as well as hikes and other activities to get to know the country and other parts of Israeli society—encountering the different narratives in Israeli society with an emphasis on the ability for partners in Israeli society to allow for space for differences.

**Activity with parents:** We are interested in students’ parents and families taking part in the process and serving as a meaningful part of our ability to successfully effect mindset and behavioral transformation during the program.

**Employment preparation:** Familiarization with industry, tours of workplaces, and conversations with graduates who have joined the workforce and the military.

**Creating an organization for Arab graduates and assisting them in job placement**

Creating a graduate association as a social network that assists in promoting high quality job placement and offering college and university students concrete examples of success stories. The association’s activities will include actively contacting all graduates of the college in the past three years, gathering resumes, constructing a database of potential employers, and conducting job fairs.

**Initial budget to be discussed:**

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| **Component** | **Cost** | **Details** |
| Preparatory academy director for 2–4 groups (50–100 participants) | 180,000 ₪ | Full-time position |
| Success and employment / life preparation coordinator | 80,000 ₪ | Part-time position for each group of up to 25 participants |
| Coordinator training | 15,000 ₪ | Annual training for coordinators |
| Mapping employment preferences (e.g., Holland questionnaire) | 5,000 ₪ | To be conducted during the high school stage for each group of 25 participants |
| Emotional support by a social worker | 7,200 ₪ | Cost for two personal support sessions per year for each group of 25 participants |
| Language course—spoken/professional Hebrew | 40,000 ₪ | 60 study hours—cost for each group of up to 25 participants |
| Motivation, gender, 21st century skills, and work world preparation workshops | 21,600 ₪ | 90 study hours—cost for each group of up to 25 participants |
| Social involvement—Tikkun Olam | 30,000 ₪ | Development of a social-communal initiative—each group will receive a budget for developing and launching a sustainable social-communal initiative. |
| Social support | 50,000 ₪ | Special evening events, hikes, activities to get to know the country, and activities to get to know other parts of Israeli society |
| Activities with parents | 5,000 ₪ | Refreshments and lecturers |
| Track A: Improving Bagrut scores | 50,000 ₪ | Math, English, and language—according to a mapping to be conducted in collaboration with the feeder schools |
| Track B: Preparation for Psychometric/Yael tests | 50,000 ₪ |  |
| Track C: Professional/employment training—certificate courses | Varying costs | The cost varies significantly depending on the type of course the participants’ groups undergo, between ₪ 30,000 to ₪ 110,000 for a group of 25. |
| Track D: Practical engineer / technician course | Varying costs | A cost of ₪ 7,000 per participant per year |
| Graduates association | 120,000 ₪ | Including salary for a coordinator (50% FTE) and the costs of launching a website, collaborations, and advertising—from the program’s second year on |