



אותם אנשים, אותו שדה - מודל קצת שונה

Same people, same field- a slightly different model



קרן הזדמנויות לקידום השירות האזרחי  
THE OPPORTUNITY FUND FOR CIVIC SERVICE

## Over the past 8 years, the unique philanthropic partnership we created invested some \$15m and changed the face of national service in Israel The results speak for themselves

Between 2012 and 2019, our investment in National Service enrichment programs and our work alongside decision-makers resulted in a fivefold rise in the number of National Service volunteers from disprivileged backgrounds around the country and a 3,300% increase in government funding of the programming to make this possible. The Opportunity Fund was established in 2012 as a partnership between seven donors from the United States and Israel: Revson Foundation, Gandyr Foundation, Ted Arison Family Foundation, UJA-Jewish Federation of New York, National Insurance Institute's Fund for Children and Youth-at-Risk, Littauer Foundation, and Ruderman Family Foundation.

### Changing the Face of National Service in Israel

Civic service (also known as National Service) is a vital social institution in Israel. Originally developed for Orthodox Jewish girls as an alternative to military service, it has evolved over the decades into an alternative gap year program for the scores of young people ineligible or exempt from service in the army. Whether disabled Israelis, at-risk-youth, or members of national minorities for whom the IDF is not an option, national service represents a unique program that provides a pathway for participants to gain life skills and develop personally while instilling a sense of belonging to the wider community. Unfortunately, the Service's infrastructure was not sufficiently developed to meet a growing demand from thousands of young people across country and funding was scarce, irregular, and insufficient to meet the special needs and challenges of these young people.

**In 2012, when the Opportunity Fund officially entered the field, government support for all of these groups combined amounted to a mere \$50,000. That year, there were only 1,400 such young people in the entire country enrolled in National Service.**

**The Opportunity Fund** was established in 2012 through a strategic partnership between American and Israeli donors as a consolidated platform to significantly improve access to national service for at-risk, special needs and minority youth. Following an intensive feasibility process, we defined the following strategic goals for our work to change the field:

**To substantially increase**, leverage and sustain the funding available for enrichment programs working in the field.

**To promote** government and policy processes designed to increase the service's infrastructure and capacity to accommodate the wider need for placements.

**To improve** service quality and professionalism across the field

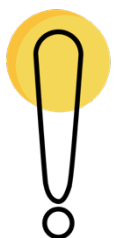
**To raise awareness** of the importance of these efforts among decisionmakers, potential participants and their families, and the general public

As a philanthropic partnership, Israeli philanthropic partners would be to leverage substantial additional funding from abroad, while U.S.-based partners—who have otherwise limited access to actors and forces that shape Israeli institutions—would have a platform through which to reach opinion leaders and decision makers in government and the Israeli public. Early on, we made a strategic decision to work in close cooperation with government—and specifically to give the Authority for National Civic Service a decisive role in setting the agenda.

## VA Unique Philanthropic Partnership

To ensure impact, from the beginning we established strategic principles for our work in the field. **A clear end goal** and an emphasis on **multi-sector collaboration** alongside principles of **flexibility, accountability, and transparency** were all identified as critical to securing a real and lasting impact.

**As a partnership between funds and foundations of different sizes and mandates** (from government funds for at-risk-youth to small private foundations), we felt it was critical to create well-defined structures and processes that would enable each partner to contribute fully, in an atmosphere based on **mutuality, respect, and equal voice**. Our emphasis on partnership as a value, along with equality, consensus and mutual respect, was fundamental to the process of mutuality and ongoing learning that would define our work for nearly a decade.



In a study we conducted among partnering organizations and stakeholders in 2015, 80% of respondents lauded the Fund's administration and effectiveness, with 92% commending the quality of the dialogue which we were conducting with partners in the field.

**Starting out in 2012,** we entered the field with a \$1.3m investment in local and enrichment programming, through which we would ultimately be able to leverage change in the institution of National Service as a whole. This substantial increase in the funding available to the field continued over ensuing years, amounting to a total of \$15m by 2020.

#### To improve government policy

we began by convincing government stakeholders of the substantial economic net benefit that would emerge from making national service more accessible to underserved populations (savings which if calculated over a lifetime would amount to, for instance, 504,000 NIS for every Arab girl integrated into the service and 200,000 NIS for every disabled Israeli young person). Working alongside the Authority for National Civic Service (with whom it would design a work-plan for operation at full expanded capacity) we helped it establish an inter-ministerial ‘roundtable’ composed of stakeholders from three sectors, which remains a leading body today. At the same time, we began making inroads with different ministries, assisting the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services to fund housing for volunteers from at-risk populations who were unable to live at home; working with the Ministry of Education to help the Authority open slots for additional ‘lower-risk’ youth not under Social Affairs’ purview, and developing a partnership with the Ministry of Finance to explore sustainable future budgeting of programs for Arab and minority Israelis. Perhaps most significantly, we began working with the Chair of the Labor, Welfare and Health Committee in the Knesset to promote a new National Service Law.

#### To professionalize the field

we began supporting professional training programs for staff in partnering organizations (where national service participants volunteer) and published a manual outlining best practices for work with volunteers from underserved or special needs groups and communities. At the same time, we established the *Forum for the Promotion of National Civic Service*, a platform comprised of 30 partnering organizations and national enrichment organizations in the field, designed to help them share information, formulate agendas and give them a place in the policy process.

#### To raise awareness

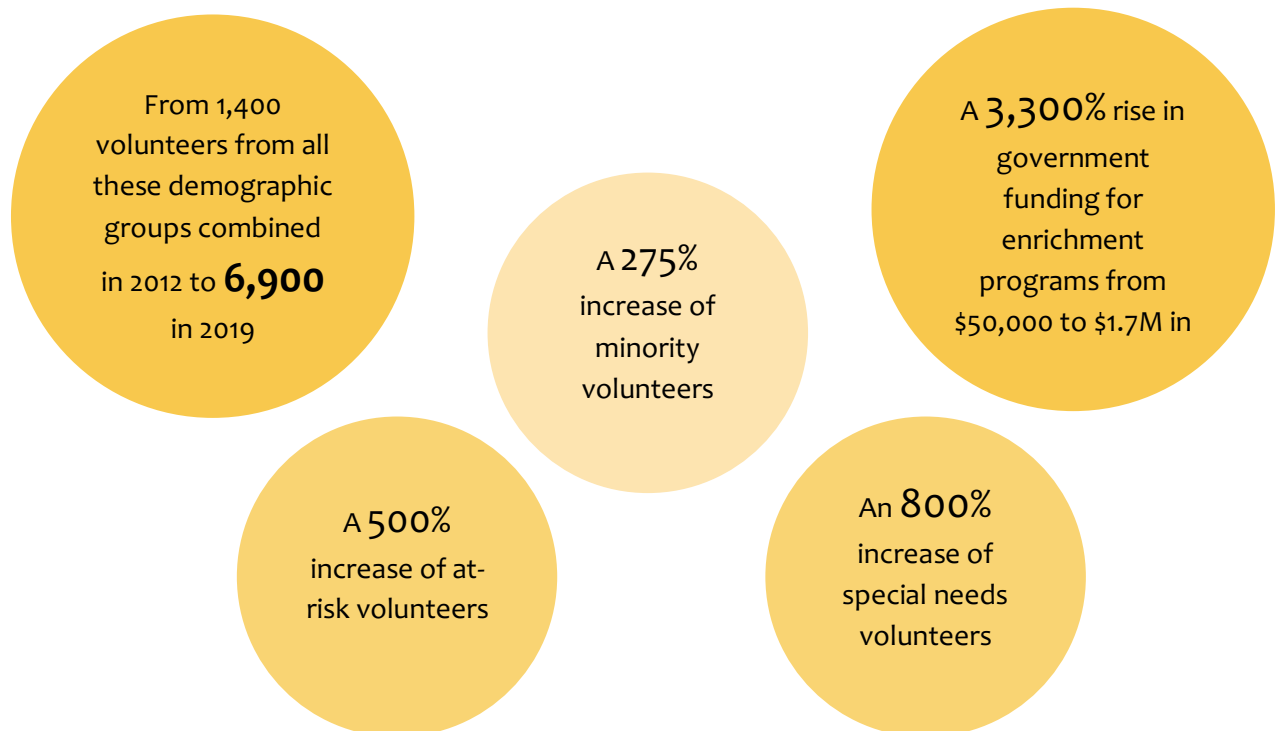
we embarked on a combination of social media campaigning, outreach, and public policy work—from biennial employment fairs to creating 18 videos launched online for the wider public and nine position papers for government stakeholders. Our 2015 “I’m Your Best Investment” campaign, for instance, was critical in leveraging government support for our work. A parallel effort launched by Link20 the Movement for the Advancement of Young Adults with Disabilities, a Ruderman Family Foundation initiative, had two groups of national service volunteers developing additional video content and campaigns.

# The results speak for themselves

As of 2020, our efforts have revolutionized the field. Among our achievements:

- **The National Service Law**, which we championed with government partners, was passed into law in 2017. The law vests the Authority for National Civic Service with the responsibility and power to formulate and implement policy that benefits volunteers from at-risk and special needs populations (the first legislated recognition of that Agency's status).
- The multi-sector **roundtable**, which we helped start with the Authority, today numbers over 50 members, and is the leading agenda-setting platform on these issues in the country.
- A **multi-year agreement** we drafted with the Authority and JDC-TEVET ultimately resulted in the launch of the *Ma'ana* program designed for volunteers from the Arab and Druze communities and which today oversees some 4,500 such volunteers per year.

**The result of all these efforts has been an exponential increase in the number of at-risk, special needs and minority national service volunteers in Israel.**

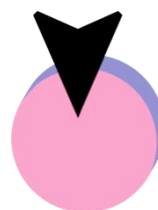


**As we look towards 2021 and beyond**, it is to a reality in which over 7,500 young adults, from disadvantaged population groups in Israeli society, will each year have the opportunity to integrate into the National Civic Service framework—funded by government—and to participate in programs which help them develop the personal skills that will boost their social mobility and advancement in society.

The robust arrangements and infrastructure we were able to create in order to make this possible has in turn proven its resilience. Throughout the COVID-19 shutdowns this infrastructure remained intact and in operation—a testament to its long-term viability. Our current initiative with our partners in government and the Authority for National Civic Service, **Opportunity 20-22**, builds upon these results.

## We're proud of what we've achieved

But mostly, we are proud of the mobilization, collaboration, and commitment shown by our partnering organizations, the Authority for National Civic Service, our partners in government and above all—the thousands of young people who are now part of national service in Israel. Together, we are working to build a more prosperous society based on diversity, engagement and a commitment to giving back.



## Contact us

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