# A Year to Remember:
# Students on Yearlong Programs in Israel
# During a Time of Crisis

## Report I: Post-High School Students

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**Abstract**

This report is the first in a series of two reports that will be published on the topic of students who come to Israel on yearlong programs during a time of crisis. The present report is based on the experiences of post-high school students and their institutions in Israel, and the forthcoming report is based on the experiences of post-college students and their institutions in Israel. While the body of each report is based on findings from data collected on the specific age group, the major findings, methods, population, policy recommendations and concluding remarks incorporates the data and findings on both age groups. Each report is based on narrative interviews with program directors and students who attended yearlong programs in Israel during the 2001-2 school year. Among the students who were interviewed, half completed their programs while the other half left early as a result of the security situation.

The current report is set up in a manner which explores the students' decision-making processes to go to Israel and to stay in Israel during a time of crisis; how students negotiated boundaries of safety while in Israel; the various support systems that were in play for the students and their families during the year; and the differences between students who completed their programs to those who left early. Throughout the report, the dynamic interplays between students, parents and the institutions are highlighted.

This research was commissioned by the Research and Development Unit of the Department of Jewish-Zionist Education of the Jewish Agency in April of 2002. It was commissioned as a result of the security climate in Israel at that time, and the results of the climate on educational programs for overseas students in Israel. The hope is that the report will invoke a response and set up a dialogue between educators working with young Jews coming to Israel during times of crisis, and other professional and lay people interested in Israel Experience programs.

**Major Findings**

(1) The greatest challenge facing participants on yearlong programs in Israel was making the decision to participate in the programs. Once they made the decision, and after the initial settling-in period, participants found it much easier to be in Israel.

(2) Regardless of the age differentials, the influence of parental opinion was a very significant factor in the decision-making process. Furthermore, parental opinion played an even more significant role in helping participants deal with the situation emotionally. In cases where parents were unsupportive of their children's decision to be in Israel, students felt a constant distress during the year as they placated their concerned families, while simultaneously trying to personally cope emotionally with the stressors of being in Israel under such trying circumstances.

(3) Regardless of their age, participants of all programs relied heavily on the guidance and security briefings of their respective program administrations. It was clear that participants on programs needed to feel 'looked after' and 'cared for' by their programs during the period of crisis.

(4) When negotiating boundaries of safety, such as where to go and what to do, many participants relied on the information that was given to them from Israelis (i.e., staff of their programs, Israeli friends and relatives, and Israelis who they encountered throughout the year in Israel.) Participants also followed their own instincts. Yet despite these influences, none of the students could articulate *how* they made their decisions in maintaining their personal security.

(5) Despite extreme variance between the two approaches, students from each of the two post-high school programs agreed with the ways in which the administration of their particular institution chose to relate to them in terms of rules and regulations placed on them. Furthermore, responses from post-high school participants were generally quite similar, regardless of their specific program.

(6) All participants were more disturbed by attacks that occurred in places where they could see themselves, that is, in places “close to home” and in places they frequented. They felt especially vulnerable in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, while they felt safer in more remote areas of Israel.

(7) The more involved participants became with Israeli society, the more they felt a sense of belongingness and the less they felt a sense of isolation. Witnessing the daily fears and deliberations made by Israelis, many participants felt that their own fears were validated and their anxieties were normalized. Meaningful interactions with Israelis also helped participants learn different coping techniques.

(8) All of the participants who chose to remain in Israel claimed they developed a stronger commitment to Israel and a greater understanding and closeness to Israelis.

(9) Most of the participants who left their program early displayed unresolved feelings over the decision to leave.

**Introduction** Participants on yearlong programs in Israel during the 2001-2 school year arrived in Israel in the midst of the *Al-Aqsa Intifada* (uprising) which began in October 2000. These students embarked on their programs several months after the July 1, 2001 *Dolphinarium* attack in Tel Aviv (in which 21 young people were killed and another 120 were wounded) and within weeks following the August 8, 2001 *Sbarro* bombing in Jerusalem (in which 15 people, including 7 children were killed and 130 were injured)[1]. While deciding to spend a year in Israel, these students were well aware of the untenable security situation within the country, and the improbability of the situation improving before they arrived, and perhaps throughout the time they were in Israel.

Yet, inasmuch as these students were conscious of the security climate in Israel before they arrived, none anticipated the extent of the attacks that would occur, or the close proximity of these attacks to their daily lives. From September 2001 through June of 2002, close to 200 individuals were killed, and more than 1500 were injured in various suicide and car bomb attacks throughout the country. Among these attacks, 14 occurred within Jerusalem, some within the near vicinity of those students based in Jerusalem. For example, a suicide bomber detonated himself on King David Street next to the Hebrew Union College campus while classes were in session. Another attack on downtown Jerusalem occurred during a vacation time when families of students were visiting from abroad. The family of one student was caught in a suicide bomb attack and several family members were injured. The attempted attack on Gaffit in the German Colony, a neighborhood full of English speaking permanent residents and students, occurred in the midst of a large convention of Reform rabbis, some of whom were sitting in the café when the attempt occurred. The attack on Moment, a popular café in Rehavia frequented by overseas students, was near the homes of several post-college students, some of whom heard the explosion, and some of whom witnessed the horrific scene. A group of post-high school students also witnessed the

[1] All data on terrorist attacks were taken from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/mfa/home.asp

scene when their bus accidentally passed the café in the aftermath as they were returning from an organized Shabbat weekend with their institution accident.

It is within this framework of insecurity and terrorism that students took part in their yearlong programs in Israel. Throughout the year, students learned how to negotiate boundaries of safety within their personal spheres of proximity, and students sought out networks of support for being in Israel during a difficult time. Still, some continued to struggle with being in Israel, either because of personal fears or because they were receiving pressures from their families to return home, especially as the security situation intensified and worsened. Although there were bombings throughout the year, within the month of March there was an upswing in suicide and car bomb attacks in Jerusalem. During this period of time students, their families and their institutions were inevitably forced to reconsider the final months of their programs. Though the majority of students chose to stay and complete their programs, others decided to leave early. Some of those who left did so on their own accord, while others felt their parents forced them to leave early. Still others chose to go only after the institution officially ended the program.

Who are these students and who are the families of students who chose to come in the midst of this situation? How did they decide to come and what was the process they went through during the year as the situation continued to worsen? How did they negotiate boundaries of safety while in Israel? How did some decide to stay throughout the year, while others hit a breaking point that led them to decide to leave early?

Following the Methods and Population sections, the body of this report is divided into five sections: The decision-making process to go to Israel during time of crisis; Negotiating boundaries of safety while in Israel; Support systems; Students who left early in relation to those completing their programs; and a Final remark on a developmental stage within a time of crisis. These sections are further divided into sub-sections that analyze the interplay between specific forces, most notably, between students, parents and the sponsoring institution. These subdivisions reflect findings from data analyses which accentuate a symbiotic relationship between participants and their parents, and the influence of these relations on institutional policy. In the

case of the 2001-2 school year, how these institutions set policy concerning restrictions and how they set up support systems for their students were directly in-line with such parental influences.

**Methods** This report looks at the experiences of students on four yearlong Israel Experience programs, two which cater to post-high school students, and two which cater to older participants. Interviews were conducted with four participants from each program and the directors of each program. The four directors, interviewed in person, provided the names of several students who completed the program and who did not complete the program but left early due to security and safety factors. Two students from each program who finished their respective program in Israel were interviewed towards the end of their program and shortly before returning to the United States. Another two participants from each program who left early were interviewed over the phone. The exception was one institution where only one student who left early was interviewed. This was the result of a refusal by one student to take part in the interview and unsuccessful attempts to contact three other participants.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics involved in the individuals' decision-making process, the researchers chose to conduct a qualitative narrative study. Open-ended, non-structured interviews with a small sample of participants were conducted. In these interviews, participants were asked to explain their decision to come and remain in Israel during a time of crisis and conflict. The researchers were interested in hearing how the participants made meaning of their year in Israel, and of the decisions that they made throughout the year. Although the sample cannot be considered representative, the researchers were able to draw broad conclusions based on similarities of responses within interviews conducted with participants from four distinct programs that varied greatly from one another.

The researchers found that the open interview was more difficult to conduct with interviewees over the phone. In most cases, phone interviewees needed more direction and prompting. This also may reflect the difficulty for these interviewees to communicate their often-unresolved feelings about leaving Israel earlier than planned.

Both researchers conducted all interviews with the program directors and most of the interviews with the students in Israel (though due to time constraints, three students were interviewed by only one of the interviewers). Half the phone interviews with students were conducted together while the other half were done by only one of the interviewers. All interviews were carried out in June and early July 2002.

**Population** Each program is distinct as is its populations. The two programs catering to older participant are Project Otzma and the Hebrew Union College (HUC) rabbinical and cantorial training program. Project Otzma is a volunteer program for individuals who graduated from college and choose to spend a year in Israel before embarking on future educational and/or professional paths. Most of the interviewees from this program had previously spent time in Israel. They enjoyed these earlier experiences and thus choose to spend additional time in Israel. Most of the interviewees displayed a strong commitment to Israel, and some of them were using their time on Otzma to gauge the possibilities of moving to Israel permanently. The Director of Otzma in Israel, Yossi Smadja, also indicated that what distinguished this years participants from other years, was the higher participation rate of Israeli-born or children of Israelis in the program.

HUC's Israel program is a compulsory component of its rabbinical and cantorial graduate programs. Therefore, HUC participants did not voluntarily choose to be in Israel during the past academic year. Two of the interviewees had never been to Israel before, expressed no prior feelings of commitment to the country, and yet left with a greater sense of belonging and affiliation. The other two interviewees had been to Israel before, one of whom was strongly committed to Israel, and was attempting to stay in Israel for another year after the program was over. The Director of Student Services of the program in Jerusalem, Rose Ginosar, explained that many of the first year rabbinical students do not have a strong affiliation with and connection to Israel. This is one of the reasons behind HUC's educational philosophy of holding the first year of its program in Israel; to help the students develop a greater sense of peoplehood. None of the interviewees were Israelis or born to Israeli parents.

The two post-high school programs, Young Judaea's Year Course and Midreshet Lindenbaum Overseas Program, are qualitatively different from the adult programs

discussed above. Young Judaea is a Zionist youth movement, and its Year Course, an unequivocally Zionist program, is seen as the pinnacle of participants' Zionist education and commitment to Israel. Active Young Judaeans are strongly encouraged to spend a year in Israel as part of their leadership training and according to the Year Course Director, Keith Berman, those who come are very committed to being here. The participants are generally Zionist youth who have relatively strong educational backgrounds in Jewish history through the movement, and have a close attachment to Israel. Some of those interviewed expressed a desire for *aliyah* (immigrating to Israel) in the future. All of those interviewed had been to Israel at least once previous to Year Course, though none are the children of Israelis.

The young women who participate in the Midreshet Lindenbaum program are mostly graduates of the Orthodox day school system in North America. These women are affiliated with the Orthodox movement, observant of Jewish law, and have solid backgrounds in Jewish history and traditional Jewish texts. They are connected to the Jewish community and often have strong feelings of commitment to Israel. According to Tova Rheine, Director of the Overseas Program, the students often know throughout high school that they will spend a year learning in Israel after they graduate. Similar to Year Course, the year in Israel is seen as an extension of their high school education and the pinnacle of their Jewish studies. Previous to their time at Midreshet Lindenbaum, all of the young women interviewed had been to Israel at least twice before, and most of their parents have spent time in Israel as well. Though none of these women are the children of Israelis, at least two of those interviewed expressed an intention to seriously consider aliyah in the future.

**Post-High School Programs: The Institutions**

This first report is based on interviews with the directors and participants of the two post-high school programs mentioned above. Each program dealt with the current security situation in a manner that reflected their institutions philosophical outlook. These approaches differed dramatically from one another and therefore provided useful comparisons. And yet despite their differing approaches, both programs cater to eighteen-year-old participants who are in the midst of a developmental stage in which they are discovering and creating their own identities and social networks.

Thus, although each program's policies varied from the next, students' reactions to their institutions and their experiences throughout the year were often quite similar.

Both Year Course and Midreshet Lindenbaum maintained relatively high numbers of participants, despite the security situation. This is in contrast to other yearlong programs where participant numbers were dramatically reduced. It should be noted that most of the Orthodox learning programs (yeshivot and seminaries) maintained a relatively high level of participation among their programs during the 2001-2 school year. This is in contrast to most non-Orthodox programs where participation dropped off dramatically. Year Course is an exception among these non-Orthodox programs. [Zvi will give me stats on other one-year programs later this week].

*1. Young Judaea's Year Course*

Year Course is a 10-month Israel program for post-high school graduates from North America and England. Young Judaea is an international Zionist youth movement sponsored by Hadassah. Participants spend the year in Israel studying in Jerusalem (where they can earn college credit), working on kibbutz, volunteering in chosen fields and locations throughout the country, and hiking and exploring the country. Year Course is considered a leadership program for active movement participants who develop and strengthen their leadership skills while involved in various activities throughout the year. It is also a program focused on strengthening ties to the land and people of Israel. The program has been running since **19XX.**

The participants are broken into sub-groups for modules of activity, and each group is accompanied by *madrichim* (counselors) throughout the year. While on the Jerusalem campus of Beit Riklis, teachers who are often licensed tour guides and educators are responsible for a core curriculum and several other courses for the academic part of the program.

According to Keith Berman, Year Course Director, the program has grown in recent years as a result of strategic planning which began five years ago. Because of the current situation in Israel the numbers have not risen as dramatically as anticipated.

Still, in the 2001-2 year, there were 242 students and 160 registered for the following year (as of June 2002).[2]

*2. Midreshet Lindenbaum's Overseas Program*

Midreshet Lindenbaum is an intensive yearlong study program for female high school graduates from English speaking countries. It is associated with the Ohr Torah Stone programs in Gush Etzion and has been in existence since **19xx**. The women generally come from religious high schools and Torah observant families. In addition to intensive study on the Jerusalem campus, there are opportunities for travel, volunteering, and exploring both the land and people of Israel. Students live in the building where they study along with their madrichim and a 'house mother' who is a licensed social worker. Their education is the responsibility of rabbis and scholars of Jewish texts who also accompany them on school-sponsored trips. ML has the reputation of promoting independence for their students, both in their thinking and in their decision-making. ML students tend to go on to Ivy League or other academically rigorous universities after their year in Israel.

According to Tova Rheine, Director of the Overseas Program, the overseas program at Midreshet Lindenbaum has grown slightly in recent years. In the 2001-2 school year, there were a total of 105 students and 95 were registered as of June 2002 for the following school year. **[how many arrived for the 2002-3 school year?]**

**Post-High School Programs: The Participants**

Participants in both post-high school programs tend to be highly devoted to the ideology or values of their movement. Part of each program's ideology is connected to Zionism and living in Israel and each of these yearlong programs offers them a 'taste' of living in Israel. Participants come both for the actual components of their specific programs (e.g., learning Torah in Israel; learning Hebrew and working in Israel) and also to experience living in Israel.

Each of the directors noted the high level of dedication among their students to being in Israel for the year. In both cases, the participants have often thought about coming

[2] As of the start of the 2002-3 school year, there are 120 Year Course participants.

for the year between high school and college for several years, as it is a crucial step in the logical sequence of their ideological movement. It is clear from talking to the students themselves that these are individuals who, despite (and perhaps also in spite of) any political or security situation, are devoted to being in Israel for the year after high school. Students viewed their programs and their experiences while on them as ones they might not have the opportunity to get later or elsewhere. That is, they view their programs as providing unique learning and living opportunities for their particular age group, opportunities the students see as useful in laying a foundation for their futures. These are experiences that, according to most students, cannot occur elsewhere and which they believe are most opportune during the year between high school and university. Furthermore, many of the participants from both programs indicated that their year in Israel was a precursor to future plans for aliyah.

For many young women from Midreshet Lindenbaum, spending the year "learning in Yerushalayim" after high school is a normal path within their communities. Many come out of Orthodox Jewish high schools where the majority of graduating seniors come to learn in yeshivot and in seminaries for the year. For many of the young adults who enroll in Young Judaea's Year Course, spending the year in Israel is also viewed as a normal step in their life process. Many of these participants were youth leaders with the movement, having sat on boards and having taken part in a plethora of Young Judaea experiences. They have heard the stories of their former counselors and friends who have participated in year course and are primed for their turn.

Students who came to Israel in the 2001-2 year not only display a high level of dedication to being here, but these students also invested a high level of energy in getting to Israel (for this particular year). It was by chance that the particular year that these students graduated high school was an exceptionally difficult time for Israel, but it is far from chance that these students actually made it to their programs in Israel in the 2001-2 school year. Each student who arrived in Israel at the beginning of the school year did so through sheer perseverance as many (if not most) of the participants fought with parents and other family members to allow them to go to Israel for this particular year.

Keith Berman stated that because students worked so hard to get to Israel, their allegiance to staying throughout the year was stronger than in past years. This meant there were less behavioral issues because the participants viewed getting kicked off the program as a failure. Because they worked hard to get here, it was important for them to prove that being here was okay. Tova Rheine noted an increased intensity in the learning as a result of the environment this year. Some students could barely leave the building (as a result of their parental restrictions) so if the learning was not their central focus, there was no reason for them to be here. Even for those who had few restrictions, travel and socializing in town were inevitably limited based on the situation, and thus learning was more central and intense.

## I. The Decision-Making Process to Go to Israel During Time of Crisis

Inasmuch as participants on Young Judaea's Year Course and on Midreshet Lindenbaum's Overseas Program represent a highly committed and Israel-oriented population within the American Jewish community, and inasmuch as they are described as dedicated to spending a formative year of their lives on particular programs in Israel, even these students were forced to go through a *decision-making process* to go for the 2001-2 school year as a result of the current climate in Israel. They did not go through this process in isolation, but rather it was a dynamic process involving their parents, their extended families, their home communities and their hosting institution in Israel. The following section looks at the players involved, the decision-making process itself and the outcome of this process.

*1. Students' own decision-making process*

For many post-high school students who take part in yearlong programs in Israel, the decision to go to Israel for the year before university is one that occurs often years before graduating from high school. Ari, a Year Course participant, noted that he grew up in a Zionist youth movement where he emulated the leaders, many of whom lived in Israel. Students from both institutions expressed a loyalty to their movement and ideology, which they felt made coming to Israel "a simple decision" (AR). Nevertheless, each student who came to Israel during the past year had to decide personally that he or she wanted to be in Israel during a period of unrest, an unrest

that was likely to lead to modification of their experiences in relation to past years of their programs (years they had heard about from older friends, siblings and camp counselors) because of safety and security factors.

Some students indicated that because they had actually made the decision to spend the year in Israel before the current Intifada even began (in the fall of 2000), the decision was already a part of their reality. Thus by the time they were beginning to prepare for their upcoming year, the question became "how am I going to deal with the fact that I am putting myself into this situation" (AR). Daniella, a young woman on Year Course, suggested that it was an easy decision because "once you just say 'I'm going to do it' and make the decision it just gets the ball rolling. You just start getting a comfortable feeling in your head." By the time the situation had gotten worse, her decision was already strong and this made it easier. "Anything is easy if you are dedicated to it" (DR).

Even with high levels of dedication and resolve to be in Israel, students from both programs understood that they "had to make a conscious decision that Israel was the place we wanted to be for the next year, given everything we knew that was going to end up happening" (AR). Several students noted that the bombings throughout 2001 made coming to Israel a *real* decision rather than a given assumption. Most notable are the bombings that occurred during the summer of 2001. In interviews, several students spoke about the *Dolphinarium* bombing in Tel Aviv (June 1, 2001) and the *Sbarro* bombing in Jerusalem (August 9, 2001) and the place of these attacks in their decision-making process. They related to these incidences both in terms of the timing (i.e., near the time they were scheduled to come to Israel) and in terms of the human factors involved (i.e., the devastation of the bombing itself, the fact that young people, like themselves, were killed in places they might themselves visit and their personal fears arising from these incidences). As Aliza, a Midreshet Lindenbaum student pointed out, "The [Sbarro] bombing was a few days before we were suppose to come. That was a little hard to leave with and I think everyone went through a process there" (AV). Ari mentioned that these two summer bombings along with one in early September (in which 20 people were injured by a suicide bomber) led him to question his coming to Israel for the first time. "I remember the week before going…I remember thinking to myself, 'do I really want to go through with this?'…Thinking to

myself and then with my parents the pressure was there and that was difficult" (AR). These bombings inevitably forced the students themselves to sit down and think about the possibility of canceling their year in Israel and going straight to college.

Despite hesitations, fear and questioning of the decision to go in the months and weeks leading up to their departures, the students interviewed for this report all decided to go to Israel during the 2001-2 school year. In explaining their decision, students gave a range of answers. Several of the women from Midreshet Lindenbaum spoke in terms of it being "the right thing to do, as a Jew" (NG) and their dedication to Torah Judaism. Students from both programs spoke in terms of their love for Israel and their feeling that "it would have been hypocritical not to come (AV)," as they were devoted to a particular ideology which includes or is based upon Zionism. Others felt that they "owed it to myself [and] to Israel" (MR) and spoke about their obligations and priorities in relation to Israel. Many students specifically used the term *commitment* in describing their decision to be in Israel during a difficult time. Yet others believed they only came to understand the concept of commitment in relation to Israel as the year went on and they experienced difficult periods in which they were forced again and again to weigh and decide whether they should remain or leave Israel.

Not all students viewed their reasons for coming to Israel as purely ideological. Daniella talked about her coming to Israel as something she wanted to do personally as part of gaining a "real life experience before going to college" (DR), while Dana, also from Year Course referred to it as a "year off" before university (DK).

*2. Students in negotiations with their families*

Although students on the yearlong programs each had to decide personally that they wanted to be in Israel for the year, none of them made this decision in isolation. All students report some type of discussion or negotiation with their parents in the months and weeks leading up to their coming to Israel for the year. For some, this occurred as a sit-down, one-time conversation, while for others it was an on-going negotiation they continued up to the day they left. In all cases, the negotiations with parents led to an empowerment for the students themselves, not necessarily because they left with

the full support of their parents, but because through these discussions they came to understand the extent of their desire to go to Israel.

Students described a variety of ways in which their parents dealt with the possibility of sending their child to Israel for the year. On one extreme, were Aliza and Ari (one from each program) who both described a process involving supportive exchanges with their parents. Aliza's parents told her, "'if you don't want to go then you have to be brave enough to make that decision, but if you do want to go, then you should also be brave enough to make that decision'. So they weren't going to push something on me" (AV). Similarly, Ari's "parents [were] all in all supportive through the whole thing… My mom would say, we are okay with you going to Israel but we [as a family] can always make the decision up to the day you are getting on the plane" (AR).

Other students described a more arduous negotiation between themselves and their parents. Several revealed that in the weeks leading up to their departure, their parents threatened to pull them from the program. Most of these students described how they had to "fight for it" and as a result, some made specific deals with their parents in order to gain permission to go to Israel. For example, Daniella agreed to a deal in which she would go for three months, come home for the school vacation at Chanukah and then re-evaluate the situation as a family. Others agreed to restrictions in order to receive parental permission to go to Israel. For example, Mindy and Naomi from Midreshet Lindenbaum were not allowed to leave the campus of their program unless they told their parents where they were going and received permission to go. Some students described a highly difficult negotiation process in the days and weeks before they left as their parents turned towards refusing to let them go. Mindy described how she threw tantrums and refused to go to university if her parents would not let her spend the year in Israel. Leah from Year Course claimed, "I nagged my parents until they finally said yes" (LG).

Eventually, all students interviewed were allowed by their parents to go to Israel for the year, whether they had to fight for it or not. In addition to the aforementioned terms of agreement, many of these students came knowing their parents felt that they could pull them off the program at anytime. For some, the negotiation to stay

continued throughout the year, and especially as things became more tumultuous. For some, the initial victory was eventually overshadowed as they were compelled to return home as a result of on-going discussions and negotiations with their parents (see section IV).

*3. Parents in negotiation with their communities*

On their own, many parents were themselves nervous about sending their child to Israel during the past year. Several students spoke about how their parents "were nervous that they were putting their kid in danger" (MR), and yet despite their fears, these parents considered and ultimately decided to send their child to Israel for the year. However, it should not be overlooked that just as students did not make their decision to go to Israel in isolation, neither did their parents make the decision to allow their child to go in a vacuum.

As reflected on by the students and the directors of these programs, parents' decision-making occurred in conjunction with other family members (most notably, grandparents), friends and other parents within the community. These additional people were often highly influential in the decision-making process, and in many cases, they made the process more complicated and challenging for the parents. Several students described their parents as having to deal with pressures and criticism from their extended family as they were making the decision about whether or not to send their child to Israel for the year. Mindy noted, "My entire family, my grandmothers, my cousins, were calling. My family was basically telling my parents they were stupid for letting me go… My parents didn't know what to do" (MR).

Others felt the criticism more from their friends than their family. Dana from Year Course mentioned that, "Everyone was giving my mother grief…People asked, 'why are you letting her go?' 'You are a bad parent'" (DA).

While some parents benefited from being a part of a community of parents who were also deciding to send their children to Israel for the year (a sort of positive peer pressure), others were in communities where several parents decided to keep their children from going. Mindy came from a Jewish Day School in a major city where all

the other girls in her high school canceled within the two weeks before coming to Israel. Thus, her parents found "little support…from their peers" (MR).

Whether because of the criticism and pressure from family and friends, or because of the difficulty of trying to make a decision against the communal grain, many parents questioned themselves as parents. "Already my parents didn't want to put their kid in danger, feeling like they were the only ones sending their kid to Israel. They couldn't understand why they were doing it…" (MR). Furthermore, many wondered if they were "bad parents" for allowing their child to go to Israel during a period of political and security crisis.

From interviews with the students and the directors, it is clear that all parents worried about their children at particular times throughout the year. But for some, the anxiety and stress of the situation combined with pressure and criticism from friends and relatives became too much for them to cope with, and they eventually requested that their child return home.

*4. Understanding the desire to be in Israel*

The struggle to get to Israel during the 2001-2 school year proved to be an empowering experience for many students and their families. First, students had to decide personally that Israel was *really* a place they wanted to spend a year even as it was in the midst of turmoil, and second, many of them had to struggle with unsupportive families and/or communities to win the privilege to go. Through these difficult decision-making processes and negotiations, some students began to more fully grasp the extent of how important it was for them to spend the year in Israel. For some, a fuller understanding of their commitment to Israel and to coming to Israel developed as a result of these long discussions and arguments with parents and communities. Several students talked about their resolve to go:

> …Only at the point where they said I couldn't go did I realize how badly I wanted to go. I threw tantrums. I just explained that it was imperative that I go to Israel, like I owe it to myself, to Israel…To be honest, I was pushing so hard to come to Israel, I didn't know why. It wasn't just because my parents said I couldn't go. It was more loaded than that. I didn't know why. (MR)

> My parents once said [while I was at camp] 'you're not going.' But this made my stance stronger. I was very dedicated. Once they tried that, I knew that I was definitely going and I definitely wasn't coming back. Because I had to really fight for it. (DR)

For many, the negotiation did not stop once they got on the plane to Israel, but continued during stressful times throughout the year. This continued negotiation, combined with the experience of being in Israel during a period of insecurity and hardship also proved useful for the students in understanding their commitment to Israel.

**II. Negotiating Boundaries of Safety While in Israel** As mentioned above, among students who arrived in the fall of 2001, many fought hard for the opportunity to spend the year in Israel. Once they were granted this opportunity, they began a new struggle involving the *negotiation of boundaries* while in Israel. This negotiation began while students were still in North America and continued throughout their time in Israel. As with the decision-making process to go to Israel, it involved an interplay between dynamic players; in this case, the students, their parents and the institutions they were attending. The following section explores ways in which each of these players was part of the negotiating process and how *restrictions of movement* and *boundaries of safety* were established based on this process.

In exploring ways in which students negotiated boundaries of safety while in Israel, it is worth exploring policy modifications and restrictions of movement at the institutional level and at the parental level before looking at the students' own boundaries, as each level essentially preceded the next. That is, parental restrictions were generally above and beyond any restrictions or guidelines given to the students by the institutions and similarly, students' own boundaries of safety were beyond any restrictions placed on them by the institutions and/or their parents.

*1. Institutional policies, guidelines and restrictions of movement*

Within both institutions, the program directors expressed a lack of conflict in bringing students to Israel during the past year, as they are themselves living and raising

families in Israel. Tova Rheine of Midreshet Lindenbaum added that she believes Israel is where all Jews should be, though she emphasized that she understands a parent who hesitates sending his child and does not view that individual as any less of a Jew or Zionist. Keith Berman indicated that the he felt comfortable bringing students to Israel at a difficult time as he recognized the students' alternative. That is, these students defer acceptance to University in order to spend a meaningful year in Israel. Directors of both programs articulated an understanding of what it means to be a young student on a college campus at a North American University, highlighting the security and safety dangers surrounding university life. They compared and contrasted these dangers to the risks facing their students while in Israel. Whereas the current situation in Israel infringed on what can be considered the students' *external* sense of security, each director seemed to find solace in knowing that his or her program provided the students with an *internal* sense of security that is not necessarily available on college campuses.

> To myself, I think that the number one thing that kills college students is drinking and driving and I don't have that issue on year course. Suicide is a big issue on campuses. We don't have that issue here. We know the kids; we are in touch with them. They are not feeling alone… My kids are not going crazy with the drug issue… On college campuses, it is often dangerous for women even in their dorms or walking around campus… (KB)

Although the directors felt no conflict around bringing students to Israel during an insecure time within the country, the institutions still had to contend with how to keep students safe and feeling secure while on their programs. These institutions also had to convince both students and parents that their efforts to keep students safe were bona fide, high priority and of high standard so as to keep the students on the program throughout the year. Although the task at-hand was similar, each institution chose to manage it in different manner reflecting not only security considerations, but also ideological or philosophical principles of the program, pressures from the institutional movement, pressures from the students' families, and other considerations based on the particular age cohort of their participants. The combination of these considerations led to specific modifications of existing institutional policy and practice, and also to additional guidelines or restrictions of movement on the participants.

*a. Ideological considerations*

Midreshet Lindenbaum is generally less restrictive than other post-high school yeshiva and seminary programs. “In general, for years the ideology of the institution has been, for the most part, to try to treat our students as adults…or semi-adults who need a lot of love and care and guidance”(TR). For example, the students at ML do not have a curfew, though there is an expectation that the students will return at a time that reflects “safe and responsible behavior” (TR). In establishing boundaries of safety for their students during the 2001-2 school year, ML administrators followed this ideological agenda, along with a general educational position which encourages students to make informed and independent decisions. “That is a long time educational philosophy that we’ve had here and I just think we felt that this was the next logical extension, even though we never had to deal with a similar situation” (TR).

The main safety guidelines for ML students were that they could not go anywhere in which Israeli citizens were restricted from going, and that they were expected to honor any restrictions or guidelines established by their parents. Beyond these policies, the ML administration felt they could not give other restrictions. “Because by implying that you can go to one certain place, we are implying that we can assume their daughter’s safety in that place. And by saying ‘you can’t go here or there’ we are implying that you can go somewhere else. So we said ‘that is not our decision to make’” (TR). They felt that beyond restrictions put on Israeli citizens generally, “your judgment call is as good as ours” (TR). Yet, the administrators and teachers did try to help students make informed decisions. For example, students were given times in which the news was broadcast in English, the Jerusalem Post was delivered daily to the school, and the staff told students what they would or would not do personally. The director also indicated that there was at least one occasion in which staff suggested that students not to go to specific locations (e.g., large supermarkets) as there had been a series of attempted or actual attacks on those sites.

Tova mentioned that several parents wanted more restrictions of movement at the beginning of the program and felt that the school was trying to absolve itself of responsibility. But as time went on, “I think and know that in the long run, the vast majority came to appreciate that very much. Because they felt that it gave their

daughters the tools to be able to understand the situation as best as anyone can." The students themselves concurred with this position (see sub-section 4 below).

In contrast to the less restrictive policies of ML, Young Judaea and Year Course prepared very specific guidelines and restrictions concerning the security situation. YC followed the guidelines laid out by the Jewish Agency's educational department, and added their own restrictions based on pressures or understandings of comfort levels from their New York office and from the participants' families. However, Keith Berman revealed that he believed the key to success of these security guidelines was not holding the reigns too tightly. That is, he was aware that over-restricting the participants could backfire and ultimately lead to rule breaking. In addition, the participants on Year Course normally have the freedom to travel and visit places throughout the country. Though they were much more limited this year, they still needed to travel as that is central part of the program, not only as a means to enjoyment but for also for the participants' work projects. Keith stated that his goal was to maintain safe boundaries while allowing enough freedom of movement to keep participants from partaking in risky behavior. Additionally, he needed to know that if something were to happen, he had taken all the precautions necessary.

*b. Changes in vacation policies and procedures*

Because of the heightened security situation during the 2001-2, Year Course changed its policy and allowed participants to go home, specifically to their parents' home during the winter break vacation. Standard YC policy states that students can leave Israel only for rare exceptions, such as a bar mitzvah or a wedding of an immediate family member. According to the director, YC's preference that students stay in Israel throughout the year reflects an ideology promoting a full year experience, both in terms of experiencing Israel for a year (without Christmas and with all the Jewish holidays in Israel), and in terms of a maturation process away from families.

Keith Berman indicated that his staff received pressure to let participants return home for the *Pesach* (Passover) break, but they decided against it as they felt that they would lose students (i.e., these students might not return), especially as the security situation worsened in Israel during this period of time. The staff believed that if the students returned to their parents' homes during Passover, they would again have to

fight with their parents to return to Israel, and this time they might lose the fight. The staff felt that the participants had fought too hard and come too far to risk losing now.

According to Tova Rheine, Midreshet Lindenbaum changed their general vacation policy several years ago. At that time, they decided that they did not want to decide for their students what was an "important enough" (TR) reason to go home (e.g., what was a worthy family celebration). They therefore instilled a policy in which each student has ten school days in which she can miss in order to go home. It is up to the students to prioritize and decide. Thus, those who wanted to go home at any time during the year were free to do so as long as they did not miss more than ten school days.

In relation to the Passover break, this is a customary time in which many ML students (and students in yeshiva and seminary programs generally) return to the states. Because of the escalation in terrorist acts during this past period, there was fear among the various religious programs that they would lose students who went home for the holiday. During the break, the ML staff sent e-mails to the students' parents indicating that they supported any decision the families made in relation to sending their daughters back to Israel. They also told the families that they felt that they could offer a safe environment in which their daughters could continue to learn and finish off the year in Israel. Finally, the staff expressed support for parents choosing to delay their daughter's return if parents felt that they needed extra time to make the decision. It is worth noting that ML also signed a statement with other yeshiva and seminary programs concerning the importance of maintaining a connection to Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael during this difficult time. Nevertheless, ML chose not to send this joint letter out to their students' families because this was not the message they wanted to send (even if they did not mind being signatories to this message). Rather, they sent out their own letter reflecting the message they wanted to send to their families.

*c. Changes in policy regarding the territories*

In past years within both programs, participants have spent official program time over the green line. However, in the past year both programs chose to cancel all institutionally sponsored programs to these areas. The YC director acknowledged that this was difficult for them educationally. "It is difficult to educate kids on Zionism

about the settlement issue without ever seeing one in your whole life… It is difficult to educate about Islam and Temple Mount without going there" (KB). Because of this policy, YC modified their itinerary in order to teach about these issues within the green line. "Instead we went to Abu Ghosh and a different mosque there. (KB)

While some past YC participants have done volunteer projects in the territories, this opportunity was canceled over the past two years. Furthermore, YC participants were completely forbidden from traveling in the territories on their own during free time. In contrast, although Midreshet Lindenbaum canceled all official school programs over the green line, their students were allowed to visit the territories on their own, as long as they had parental permission. Those students with parental approval chose to travel to the territories, especially to Gush Etzion to spend time with their teachers and other families.

*d. Considering the parents: limitations on being the 'bad guy'*

Although both programs respected parental limitations and showed a desire to support parents who wanted additional restrictions for their child, some parents were nevertheless dissatisfied with the program's approach and wanted more restrictions to come from the program itself. But in some cases, program administrators chose not to give in to parental pressure and demands. In the case of YC, administrators felt that their guidelines were restrictive enough without being too overbearing. As noted earlier, this was important as they felt that too many restrictions would push their participants to break the rules. In the case of ML, administrators felt that their guidelines reflected their institutional ideology and the reality of the situation.

Directors of both post-high school programs referred to the phrase "being the bad guy" in reference to parental demands to set more guidelines and restrictions on participants at the program level. The issue is one in which the parents fear they will be seen as the "bad guy" if they restrict their child more than others, or if they pull their child out of the program early, whereas if the program restricts all participants or ends the program early, the parents can "wash their hands clean" (KB) and not become the bad guy. The YC director viewed the issue as one in which the parents do not want to get into a conflict with their child, because they fear repercussions to their long-term parent-child relationship (KB). The ML director viewed the issue as one in

which the parents felt that the institution was trying to absolve itself of responsibility by not setting specific restrictions on their daughters.

*2. Restrictions of movement based on parental concerns*

Within both programs, there was a vast range of comfort levels among parents in regards to boundaries of safety for their individual child. Whereas some parents were constantly nervous and wanted their child confined to the program's base, others were comfortable with their child traveling throughout the country. Although safety guidelines and restrictions were enacted in completely different manners within each of the two post-high school programs, both programs expressed an unequivocal respect for parental limitations and a desire to support individual parental restrictions of movement for their child.

As noted above, one of the two main safety guidelines for ML students was an expectation to honor any restrictions placed on them by parents. These restrictions varied greatly between the individual students. Whereas some students could not go anywhere but the local *makolet* (corner grocery) or a school-sponsored trip, others were free to travel wherever they pleased. Inasmuch as this was difficult for specific students ("it was hard for me because I was one of the people with more restrictions" (NG)), it was a policy that reflected both the ideology of the institution, and a respect for the relationship between the parents and their child. In Tova Rheine's words, "They knew we were going to back up anything their parents told them. Also, when they asked us a question-- do I think it is safe? The first thing out of our mouths was 'is it okay with your parents?'" (TR). Moreover, students were welcome to spend Shabbat with their teachers in Gush Etzion only if their parents allowed them to travel there.

In setting safety guidelines and restrictions for the participants, the YC administration was generally aware of parental fears, and took these fears into account when setting policy. Nevertheless, some parents wanted restrictions above what the program set. The staff encouraged parents who were nervous to individually restrict their child and "told parents we would back them up" (KB). Although they told parents that they could not enforce individual disciplinary procedures on participants who did not heed their parental restrictions, YC staff promised that they would sit down with a

participant and explain his/her parents' anxiety and also the expectation that the participant honor his/her parents' restrictions.

*3. Negotiating personal boundaries of safety among students*

Even with particular parameters set by adult forces, and regardless of the tightness or flexibility of these parameters, each student had to negotiate and create *personal* boundaries of safety. Yet even within their personal negotiations, post-high school students still sought out advice of program staff, and also thought about their boundaries in regards to their parents' comfort levels. In addition to adult influences on their personal decision-making, participants still had to establish their own boundaries based from within, and on what was comfortable or appropriate for them personally.

*a. Institutional influences*

In both institutions, students used the program's guidelines and restrictions as a clear basis for establishing their own boundaries of safety. Though Year Course participants found their program's policies to be restrictive enough, these participants (along with those from ML) sought out further recommendations and general information from adult figures in their institution. For example, several students from both institutions indicated that they tried to avoid crowded places, open-air *shuks* (markets) and large supermarkets. These were places specifically referred to by program directors as places they or other staff had suggested to avoid, even if they were not necessarily "off limits" according to the rules.

Personal boundaries reported by participants reflect an influence from program staff. For example, Ari listed places he would not sit or hangout. "I won't sit at the entrance of a restaurant". Avoid sitting in the middle or the front of the bus" (AR). He also listed specific times he would not visit certain areas. "Don't go downtown Jerusalem on Fri afternoon or Saturday night."(AR). Mindy established the mall with the Mega supermarket as off-limits because of an early suggestion she received from an administrator of her program. Aliza mentioned that she only took public buses to the Gush Etzion region in order to visit her ML teachers in their homes (implying that she would not have visited this area had her teachers not been there).

Students also noted that they were in Israel on a well-structured program and not just on vacation. To some extent, their boundaries were set by the busy nature of their schedules. As Leah pointed out, "Being in school helped. There were always people around and homework to do" (LG). Participants on both programs spent long hours learning, volunteering and working on other program-related projects.

*b. Parental influences*

Most students revealed that while establishing personal boundaries they kept their parents in mind. Mindy mentioned, "I had to balance [where I went]…with what my parents felt comfortable with" (MR). Similarly, Ari stated that he did not mind "breaking a restriction here or there…if I thought my parents would approve" (AR). Even if their parents did not bar them from a specific location or activity, participants understood their parents' fears and thus played a sort of informed guessing game (within themselves) to establish parental boundaries within their own personal boundaries. They adhered to their parents' fears especially at the beginning of the year when they did not know enough to establish informed boundaries of safety on their own.

As time progressed however, many students became more comfortable personally in their surroundings, and thus began to widen their safety boundaries, even when they knew their parents might disapprove. "I took a bus last night and I was hoping my mom wouldn't call during it so I wouldn't have to tell her I was on a bus from Haifa to Jerusalem" (DR). Some students would tell parents after-the-fact as a way of easing them into their widening boundaries without causing their parents too much fear.

> At the beginning, I was not allowed to go anywhere. Slowly, I would be on a bus and they would call and I would say, 'I just went on a bus. It was fine. I am going to start taking buses.' Then I went on BenYehuda and I called them and told them 'it was okay and I am going to keep going there.' I kept doing like that, slowly, slowly, slowly. (MR)

In many cases, students felt that as time went on, they understood their surroundings better than their parents who were basing their decisions on a distant vantage point that did not provide a realistic picture of their surroundings. That is, whereas these students felt they had the needed tools to negotiate and establish their own boundaries

of safety, they felt that their parents' restrictions were uninformed, and based primarily on fear and biased television reporting.

> My parents, they didn't really know what to ban me from…because they didn't really know anything about Israel. They knew buses and BenYehuda but they didn't really know anything. And so, I just saw myself, like I am going to Emek Refaim, like I just saw myself going to places and realizing every place is the same. I know at the beginning I only went to hotels. Like my parents didn't know. So basically they worried over something they didn't know very much about. They just knew it was dangerous. I was placed in a situation where my parents were really really scared and they would tell me not to do things but they didn't really know. So I was really left to make the decisions for myself, trying to take into account what my parents would be happy with me doing but I didn't really know. (MR)

For students whose parents visited Israel during the school year, establishing personal boundaries of safety while keeping parents in mind was much easier than for those students whose parents did not visit (see section III).

Generally, students tended to be most receptive to parents' fears in regards to establishing personal boundaries at the beginning of the year, when they themselves did not know much about their environment, and at the end of the year, following intensification in terrorist activities and in sight of the final stretch before they returned home. For example, Mindy decided not to go to Ben Yehuda Street because "Right now I would go to Ben Yehuda, but right now my parents have asked me to please not to—go anywhere else, just not there—and I am respecting that" (MR). In contrast, Ari chose to go to Ben Yehuda, "because I had shopping to do, but we got in and we got out" (AR). These participants shared a sense of understanding and respecting their parents' limitations while simultaneously balancing it with their own needs, especially at a time after they have lived in Israel for close to a year. "I am going to make certain decisions that they may not agree with, but they know that everything is taken with both safety aspect and keeping my head up straight aspect" (AR). For each student, the negotiation between parental needs and their own needs differed, depending on their individual relationship with their parents and their own personal comfort levels.

*c. Personal considerations*

Beyond the influences of their institution and their parents, students used their own judgment in establishing boundaries of safety. Three major considerations in negotiating personal boundaries surfaced during interviews with the students. First, students spoke in terms of "just do[ing] what makes you feel comfortable. Its not so much, I think, if it is safe or not, but whether I feel comfortable or not (AR)." For some, this meant not taking public buses all together, while others took buses but avoided cities or city centers at particular times of the day or week. It also meant sitting away from the entrance of a café or in a gated restaurant. For most, feeling comfortable meant avoiding crowded areas and making sure there were security guards at places they frequented. As Aliza succinctly put it, "Everyone does things to make themselves feel comfortable" (AV).

Second, students spoke in terms of doing things, even if they were scary but which they deemed "appropriate and necessary". Aliza described feeling scared but choosing to travel to the territories to visit her teachers.

> I wouldn't do things just to go out, but if I thought something was worth it then I would. You know, [my teachers] come in here everyday from [Gush Etzion] and people travel on those roads. And I felt that they had a purpose in being there so I didn't think that I should shut myself off from that. So I did certain things that in the immediate were scary, but I felt they were appropriate and necessary. (AV)

Mindy described being scared (and also concerned about her parents' fears) but eventually choosing to do things to be with her friends and to live as a resident of Jerusalem.

> In some senses it was the positive influence of peer pressure. My friends were going places and I wanted to go too. I guess in the beginning when Israel was the unknown, I was scared of the names. I was scared of Ben Yehuda. As soon as I started to realize what these places were and what they were in relation to the places I was going, I realized that Jerusalem is Jerusalem and it is all pretty similar… Also, I started being a resident of Jerusalem and I needed to live my life and I needed to go places. And also it started to become a little philosophical. I started to believe that this is Jerusalem and I have a right to be here and I need to go places". (MR)

In contrast, there were students who *did* let fear stop them from going places that might have liked to visit. Naomi from ML mentioned that she would go to Ma'ale Adumim but not Gush Etzion because she was "too scared to go there" (NG).

Finally, students spoke in terms of understanding their boundary negotiations as something that is ultimately illogical or irrational, as one cannot be completely rational when it comes to terrorism.

> I can't expect my boundaries to be rational because I am judging something completely irrational. (MR)

> Obviously nothing is rational when you are viewing the situation because you don't really know anything logically, you don't really know anything for sure. So I think the best thing you can do is to create boundaries for yourself and say 'this is what I feel comfortable with' and that is the most you can do. (AV)

In describing their considerations in negotiating personal boundaries of safety, students exuded a sense of confidence. This confidence appears to have developed throughout the year as students' awareness of their surroundings grew, and as they acclimated to the insecure situation in which they lived.

> I think that is one thing I know now, I have learned to keep my eyes open. One of my parents' initial fears at the beginning of the year was that I just don't know what to look out for… I just feel like now I am in-tune to things a little more. I look around myself. I guess I know what I am looking for now. (MR)

> The risks here now I have accepted as part of my culture. If you live here, you have to do certain things to be sane. And my parents have kind of accepted that too. (AR)

*4. Participants' agreement with institutional policies regarding safety*

Inasmuch as parents from both programs had difficulty with policies and restrictions of movement set by the respective institutions, the students themselves appreciated these policies and restrictions. As mentioned earlier, Midreshet Lindenbaum and Year Course each managed the security issue in a completely different manner than the other. And yet, each of their student populations praised the particular ways in which their program dealt with it.

In the case of Year Course, the students indicated that they agreed with the institutional guidelines and restrictions. They felt that the institution's boundaries were inclusive enough so that most parents did not place additional restrictions on them, and students also felt that the guidelines were helpful in negotiating their own boundaries of safety. Furthermore, they felt the policies were broad enough without being too limiting. "The program was very strict and I agreed with their restrictions… They did not put restrictions on us that they didn't have to" (LG). Despite the general agreement with restrictions, students still complained that at specific times the rules became overbearing and illogical. Ari pointed out a "lockdown" at Beit Riklis in Jerusalem. On a particular weekend, students were not allowed to go to family or friends via public transportation or personal car and were therefore stuck on campus for Shabbat. He felt that this restriction did not come from Jewish Agency *hatra'ah* (warning), but that "it was a bad week, they didn't know what to do and they needed blanket policies to the parents" (AR). However, this was an exception to the general positive response among students to the ways in which Year Course dealt restrictions. Some students also admitted to breaking rules on occasion if they thought they would be safe.

In the case of ML, students expressed gratitude for being treated like adults by the institution. Although some students admitted that they had a difficult time with the lack of restrictions at the beginning of the year (especially those whose families were less familiar with Israel), all indicated that they came to value the school's approach as the year progressed and they became more acclimated to their surroundings. Students expressed an understanding of the individual in creating notions of safety and an appreciation it being given the opportunity to create their own boundaries.

> People have to be able to make their own decisions and besides from that, you can't create someone's notion of safety. You can't say, I am the dean of the school and therefore I know where you are allowed to go and not allowed to go. Nobody knows. Clearly, if you stay in the building maybe that is a little safer, but I'm not going to stay in the building the entire year. So I was very happy that they didn't try to treat us like children. (AV)

> So, at the beginning I know everyone was really frustrated because they weren't telling us what happened or where we should go or what we should do, and all the

> other schools were not allowed to go places. Our school seemed to be being nonchalant about it and a little apathetic. But as time progressed we realized that they were just being realistic…. I guess the fact that we had so much freedom was scary a little bit and frustrating. But also a great lesson. It taught us, we live in Israel and made our own decisions. We went places we felt were comfortable... They are just realistic. They are not going to create a façade of having control of the situation or knowing what is going to happen. (MR)

For the young women whose parents placed heavy restrictions on them (such as not being able to leave the building for periods of time), ML's lack of restrictions was more difficult because they felt left out as their friends experienced the surrounding areas. Still these women understood the policy and believed it represented the school's philosophy at-large. Naomi, who did not return to Israel after the Passover break, maintained that, "ML is unique as it maintained independence within the situation (NG)". Though she did not have the opportunity to complete the program, she still appreciated the institution staying true to its philosophy.

**III. Support Systems** Interviews with participants on yearlong programs in Israel during the 2001-2 school year revealed the importance of *support systems* in helping students stay in Israel during an insecure year. Support came in many forms (emotional, informational, monetary) and from various people (family, friends and institutional staff). While some participants credited well-entrenched support networks for their being and staying in Israel, others indicated that their support systems were weak or lacking, and in some cases, the reason for their leaving Israel before the end of the program (see section IV). In addition to the systems that were in place to support students while in Israel, support systems were also necessary and available for the students' parents. These support systems comprised their child's institution, other parents with children in Israel and the parent's child in Israel. In addition, parents felt supported by their child as they processed the situation with him or her. All these systems were important for parents in regards to the ways in which they were able to turn around and support their child and also in regards to whether or not parents pushed their child to return home. This section looks at the various support systems for the students and their parents and focuses on the interplay between these bodies of support.

*1. Supporting the participants*

Students who come on yearlong programs in Israel after high school are coming at a formative juncture in their lives. They are legally adults, a new status that they are only beginning to understand and construct in meaningful manner. Developmentally, they are struggling with issues of identity, and seek some sort of balance between their independence and uniqueness, and their social and familial identifications. Similar to their friends who are going off to college while they are coming to Israel, they are leaving the safety of their parents' homes and venturing into the world, often for the first time (other than in a closed summer camp environment). They are struggling between seizing this new freedom and accepting their fears and trepidations about being out in the world alone. For students who choose to come to Israel rather than go straight on to college, this point in time can be more intensive as they are further from home and their known support systems. Furthermore, although their ideological convictions are quite strong, they are on unfamiliar terrain where they often do not speak the language nor know their way around.

For students in Israel during the 2001-2 school year, the juncture was perhaps even more complicated as they not only contended with the normal struggles, but they were in an unfamiliar place at a time of great difficulty even for local residents. Well-entrenched support networks were thus even more important for these students. These support systems played a crucial role in getting them to Israel, in helping them remain in Israel throughout the year, and in generally helping them acclimate to their program and developmental processes. These networks consisted primarily of the students' parents and their institution, and secondarily of their friends and family in Israel. Friends and other relatives in North America played a minimal role in their feeling supported.

*a. Parental support for their child*

During the 2001-2 school year, there was a range in experience regarding parental support for students being and staying in Israel. Some participants benefited from completely supportive parents, while others received mixed messages of support, and still others found their parents to be unsupportive. Levels of parental support played a significant role in the students' year in Israel, not only in the decision-making process to come and to stay, but also in how they negotiated boundaries of safety and

maintained internal stability. Below are three categories describing parental support. These are not necessarily static categories; as for some participants levels of parental support were fluid. In most of these fluid cases, parents who were less supportive of their child coming to Israel became more supportive over time. It should be noted that the present discussion surrounding parental support for their child is solely framed around the security situation in Israel. How supportive these parents are generally is not the concern of this report, nor was it implied in the interviews conducted.

*Complete parental support*

On one end of the spectrum are students who arrived with complete parental support. Their parents were initially supportive in the decision-making process to go to Israel, not by encouraging a specific decision, but by articulating a support of any decision their child made (see section I). Not only did they support their child before coming to Israel, but these parents continued to be supportive while their child was in Israel by encouraging them to use their own best judgment in negotiating their boundaries of safety, by supporting their child as they struggled to decide whether or not to stay in Israel as the security situation intensified and by availing themselves to their child in any other ways they needed while in Israel. Aliza, whose parents were unusually supportive sums up her parents' level of support:

> So my parents, I was glad that they were always supportive…because I think that was a big part of my year…[B]eing able to talk over everything with my parents and not having to deal with them saying 'maybe you should just come home' or them not at all supporting what I was doing. That definitely helped in being here. Besides from that, when you know your parents agree with what you are doing, there are enough doubts that you might have about this yourself that you don't need other people weighing down on you. They were so supportive of it. Not that they weren't open to me saying I want to come back, I don't feel comfortable here. They were just supportive. So many things give you internal stability and once you have that, you don't need the external stability, though it is nice to have that as well. That would be ideal, but you don't need it. You can say 'this is my life, I am going to be here anyway'. (AV)

Ari, whose parents were also highly supportive, also talked about his experience. "My parents have just wanted me to do what has made me the happiest and most comfortable" (AR). He continues to describe how his mother was willing to fight for

him to be able to come home for a week during one of the harder periods of time during the year (against the program's policy) if this is what he needed to do.

> My mother said she would fight the NY office if I wanted to come home for Pesach if it was something I needed to do. Before she had thought it important to stay and then she said this, and also that it was fine if I needed to go home 'because you need to do what is best for you'. (AR)

*Ambivalent parental support*

Other students describe ambivalent parental support. In some cases, this categorization indicates ambivalent parental support generally, while in other cases it indicates a combination of a parent who was more supportive with a parent who was less supportive of their child coming to Israel. That is, at least one parent was uneasy or hesitant about their child coming to Israel. Students whose parents were ambivalent in their support arrived in Israel after a highly negotiated decision-making process which included heated arguments and/or deal making (see section I). While their child was in Israel, ambivalent parents often voiced concerns, and some even encouraged their child to come home early as the situation worsened. In terms of supporting their child in negotiating boundaries, some parents questioned if their child was permitted to do something, suggesting either a distrust of their child's decision-making ability, or fear and a lack of knowledge of the area.

As a result of parental ambivalence, participants admitted to editing reports of their whereabouts to their parents and withholding information about their fears.

> I have always told them everything but now I leave things out. Or I feel guilty when I am doing things. I took a bus last night and I was hoping my mom wouldn't call during it so I wouldn't have to tell her I was on a bus from Haifa to Jerusalem. It is the first time I felt I have to look out for my parents instead of them looking out for me. To make them feel safe and dumb it down to make them feel better about it. I guess everyone has to go through it at some point in their lives. Maybe me a little bit sooner than most. (DR)

> …At that point I just really didn't think I was going to make it out of the country. I was scared. But I never told my parents that. (MR)

In interviews with students whose parents showed ambivalence in support, many revealed feelings of conflict about their parents' level of support. On the one hand, they seemed grateful to their parents for ultimately allowing them to go to Israel, but on the other hand, they were disappointed by the level of support they received from their parents, a support they were accustomed to receiving. And yet despite their disappointment, they understood their parents' unease with having a child in Israel for the year. Daniella and Mindy each spoke about this conflict.

> The whole way they have offered me to come home. It kind of upsets me because I wish I had their support. I wish they said, 'Daniella stick to it' because everything in my life they have told me to stick to it. That's the way it usually is with good parents. This is the first time I am doing something and they have not supported me entirely. But I guess understand what they are going through. I think we are mature enough to understand that it is going to be really hard for them, that they are going to have a few more gray hairs. (DR)

> It was also hard for me being here, I mean my parents supported me being here but they always wanted me to come home. My parents didn't want me to feel bad that I was here so they would always say, "if you ever want to come home, you just hop on an airplane and you can come home." But they never pushed me and they never made me feel bad. Once I was here they supported it, which I have to say I am really thankful for because it made it a lot easier. But they were still just so nervous. (MR)

Generally, parents who started out the year categorized as ambivalent in their support were most likely to become more supportive as the year progressed, and as they went through a process alongside their child (see sub-section 2c below). However, there was one case in which parents who were supportive of their daughter being in Israel became less supportive as the year went on. Naomi indicated that her parents' position reflected their "understanding that their children are all different from one another" and not a fear of her being in Israel during and insecure year. Before coming, Naomi admitted that she was herself scared and therefore scared her parents. However, in the end they all decided, "it was the right thing to do, Jewishly". Yet after coming home for Pesach, they decided not to let her return to complete the program because "they did not feel I had the courage to come back". Though they pulled her from the program, Naomi's parents were allowing their younger daughter to go to Israel the following school year "because she is not afraid" (NG).

*Minimal parental support*

Finally, some students arrived in Israel with minimal support from their parents. That is, at least one parent in the couple did not want them in Israel for the year, and in some cases a parent (in most cases, the mother) was even vehemently against the idea based on fear of the security situation. Similar to students whose parents showed ambivalent levels of support, these students nevertheless made it to Israel as a result of heated arguments and serious deal making with parents. These students came with clear restrictions, such as not being allowed to leave the program's base other than on organized school trips (see section I). Leah reported that while she was in Israel her parents called her in tears and begged her to come home. "They had asked me to go home…but I said no. They broke down and I said 'you only get your information from CNN'" (LG). Furthermore, none of these students report receiving support from their parents in negotiating personal boundaries of safety, though this appears to have stemmed from fear and a lack of knowledge of the area and not from a distrust of the child or their decision-making abilities. "My parents could not put restrictions on me because they did not know Jerusalem". (LG) Furthermore, minimally supportive parents were more likely than other parents to consider or threaten pulling their child off the program and out of Israel, and in many cases, these participants ultimately did not complete their program.

*Parental visits to Israel as useful in increasing levels of support*

Increased levels of parental support were catalyzed through visits to Israel during the school year. As YC director Keith Berman noted, "Each time… parents come here, it is a different world for them, a different perspective. Twenty families were here…during bad things [that happened] during Pesach. They were visiting throughout the country. It makes a huge difference when they are here (KB)". As a result of experiencing the present situation in Israel with their child, parents were able to construct a more realistic sense of their child's surroundings. Some overcame initial fears as they began to view the situation as dissimilar to the images portrayed on television, and subsequently loosened restrictions on their child. Several students spoke about the effect of their parents' visit.

> What really changed things, I noticed…that the people that have problems dealing with their parents on the security level are those parents that had not been to Israel before or didn't come to Israel this year. My whole family came during the winter *chofesh* [vacation] to visit. They spent a lot of time in Jerusalem. The first day I went to Kikar Tzion with my dad and showed him a bank I was at and the spot where [a suicide bomber] blew up. Just going through that experience and him seeing the effect that tourism has, like in Tiberias, where there are signs, 'Big discounts for brave tourists.' My parents went home with a new sense of mission. They understood better why I was here and why it was so important to be here. (AR)

> …Also they came to visit and this was *really* helpful for them. They saw how beautiful it is and they had a great time. That's a real push…. When they came to visit, they felt a lot more comfortable. [It was] the end of April. It was still hectic then, tanks were going into settlement towns. They saw that while they were in Israel, from Eilat, as they were having a great time. It helped. They were able to go back to their friends. People had been asking them if all three of them were coming back. They said no… The trip really helped them. They are much more supportive about it. They are not against it. They had so much pressure. (DR)

Naomi spoke about her father's trip to visit her in November 2001. "He saw that the situation was not as bad as they had thought" (NG). After his visit, she started going out more (before his visit her parents had restricted her to stay on campus), including to malls and to the Old City. (She admitted that she actually went to the Old City before receiving permission from her parents, though she did not tell them. She claimed that felt comfortable going there and did not feel they needed to know.)

Tova Rheine reported on one extreme case in which a family (of a Midreshet Lindenbaum student) was injured in a *piguah* (terrorist attack) in downtown Jerusalem while in Israel visiting their daughter and sister. Tova noted that the father of this family became a spokesman in America for Israel and the situation.

Although in most cases parental visits were helpful, there were times when these visits did not make a concrete difference, especially in cases where only one parent visited (usually the father), who was the less worrying parent. Though these visits were helpful in providing students with a home front advocate, they did not solve the issue for the parent at home who was still anxious and fearful.

*b. Institutional support for students*

Institutional support for students came in various forms. While some methods of support were in place before the students arrived in Israel (as they were standard practices for these institutions and programs), other forms developed in response to the unique circumstances of the year and in response to students' needs that developed throughout the year. As mentioned earlier, students generally appreciated the guidelines and restrictions set by their institution (see section II). Nevertheless, interviews revealed that students sought more informational and emotional support from their programs at particular times, especially at the beginning of the program and after large terrorist attacks when students felt unsure of what to do.

The programs addressed the students' informational needs by recognizing their students' limited Hebrew skills (and thus their inability to follow local news sources) by providing them directly with news updates and alternative news sources. At ML, the staff posted general information, such as the times of English news broadcasts, and subscribed to the Jerusalem Post for participants. Both programs also began to hold general announcements in which staff debriefed the students on what was going on in the country, especially after attacks.

In response to the students' needs for additional emotional support, both institutions indicated that they tried to make their staff available to the students who wanted to talk or discuss issues. Teachers and madrichim were available to talk with the students and often told them their personal approaches to safety in the current situation. Staff in both programs also invited students to their homes. In terms of parental pressures, Keith Berman mentioned that his staff helped students by offering to speak to parents directly.

Both institutions also had a psychologist or social worker available, at the school's expense, for anyone choosing to meet with him/her. Tova Rheine acknowledged that as a result of feedback on the end-of-the-year surveys, ML intends to bring a counselor into the school in upcoming years on a more regular basis instead of leaving it up to the students to call and make an appointment to see her. On the one occasion where several students were near a bombing, the school brought the counselor in to meet with students, but otherwise, the students were on their own to make

appointments. Although the counselor was available, most students did not choose to talk with her because they did not feel they had a "real" reason to call her.

*Student evaluation of the institutional support*

Overall, students reported high levels of satisfaction regarding institutional support. They were especially expressive in their appreciation of support from particular staff members, whether they were madrichim or administrators. Students expressed various ways in which they felt supported by their institution. For Ari and Daniella of Year Course, they felt supported from people who were also going through a difficult security situation was helpful.

> At that time [of increased tensions], I started talking more to the staff about the situation. They were helpful. Of course they couldn't change anything and they were going through the same things. Nothing they could say to make me feel better. But it was good to have someone to listen to. They were pretty helpful. (DR).

> [With the] madrichim [you] could have actual dialogue about what it is to be here. When you hear a madricha say 'I'm scared too.' I am dealing with this too and it is hard to be here.' It makes you feel it is ok to go through this, to express fears, to not go out, to feel these things. (AR)

For Aliza, feeling supported by Midreshet Lindenbaum was "not just in terms of them helping us out anytime we had a problem, but just that I was so satisfied here" (AV). While for Mindy, buying in to the ML's philosophy of independent decision-making provided the means for her feeling supported.

Although students were generally satisfied with institutional support there were specific areas in which students were less satisfied. Some students felt that their program was not explicit enough about talking about the situation. Dana of Year Course felt "There was not enough counseling. It was stressful to be in Jerusalem [because we] were not use to it" (DK).

Finally, in regards to support for those who received pressure from home (especially among those who left their programs early), levels of satisfaction differed among students from each of the two institutions. Although they recognized support in other areas, Year Course participants who left early felt that they were not adequately

supported in their decision to leave. They felt that the director and staff tried to convince them to stay without recognizing the struggle they were undergoing with their families and without respecting their decision to leave. One student even felt that the director stigmatized those who left.

> YJ didn't talk about what was going on here. They didn't talk about the pressures from families. [It was] not as simple as, 'tell them you are fine'. YJ didn't act as if it was an option to go home. They pretended like the pressure wasn't there… [YJ] could be more open-minded and give the option to leave. That is being responsible, but they were scared to give the option to leave. But it was wrong that they didn't do it. A lot of people were scared… They should have dealt with the situation as something out of the norm, stressful. (DK)

> YJ did not want me to leave, my counselors especially. They did help out and they understood my decision [but] the staff did try and get me to change my mind, and my parents too. It got to be annoying. (LG)

Although she questioned the message coming from the institution, Daniella, who stayed for the full YC program indicated the message was helpful in pushing her to stay because she was not receiving this message from home.

> [YJ] definitely frowned upon our leaving. Maybe [this is] not a pressure that is their right to put on us. Maybe they should have been more open to the idea of saying 'leave if you need to'. But I guess for me it was good to hear 'stay here' since I didn't get it from my parents. I was glad for the message of 'stay, you'll be ok'. (DR)

In contrast, Midreshet Lindenbaum students felt that they were fully supported as they decided whether or not to return after Pesach. (Clearly these two situations differ as in one case, the students are in Israel while in the other they are in North America). Over Pesach, while many students were in North America visiting their families, ML sent an e-mail indicating that they supported any decision made by the students' families (whether to keep their daughters home altogether, delay their return or send them back on time), but also indicating that they could provide a safe environment for those who returned. Students who were in North America at the time reported that they appreciated this letter. Naomi, who did not return felt that ML "handled it very nicely. They were not negative." (NG).

*c. Support from family in Israel*

All students who spoke about their relatives in Israel reported high levels of support from these relatives. They felt their relatives supported their being here and in some cases acted as advocates for them with their parents. “I had constant contact with my aunt. She tried to calm my mother down [when] she was also worrying (LG)” Leah also reported that her aunt was supportive in her decision to leave, as she herself understood the pressure from home. “I have an aunt in Karmiel who understood why I left. My grandparents constantly ask my aunt to leave for a while, but she refuses”.

Students also felt their relatives supported them by helping them negotiate boundaries of safety.

> I trust them in terms of security of where they would like to go, even if it is contrary to the restrictions. If they are going, I wouldn’t say anything…That was helpful. It’s been good and helpful. They are from kibbutz so they are also in a bit of a bubble. They think it is wild to be here, to be me (DR).

> I was at her house when there was the bombing in the Park hotel [on seder night of Pesach] and she would not let us go out. (LG)

*d. Support from friends*

Students report different types and levels of support from their cohort in Israel. While some students felt that their major support came from parents and the institution, others indicated that support from friends who helped them feel comfortable and ultimately acclimate to Israel and the security situation.

> That week in [Beit] Riklis, the dialogue was feeling comfortable and going through those weeks in Jerusalem- one week there were 5 bombs, those weeks, being able to say ‘I’m scared’ and ‘I’m thinking of going home’, and ‘This whole situation makes me uncomfortable’. In terms of personal growth, that was important thing to get over the ideological hogwash and to be able to express human emotion and not be tied down to ideology…It is good to be here for support…To deal with it with them made it, not pressure, but the opposite, released pressure to deal with this pressure with people who understood what I was going through. (AR)

Even as students reported peer support for their fears and dilemmas stemming from the security situation, they also acknowledged a peer pressure among their cohort to stay in Israel based on their ideological convictions.

> There was never an outward pressure, but there was always a 'if you're really committed, you'll be back.' That was definitely always the sentiment. Like, 'are you Zionist or not?' (MR).

> There is an attitude of 'of course I am staying, I am not thinking about going. Who am I to leave year course. If I am a Zionist, I am staying'. (AR)

Leah and Dana, YC participants who left the program before its completion admitted to feeling disappointed that their friends did not support them in their decision to leave.

> Some of my friends were mad at me for not staying. They were more hurt than angry. Others were crying and others got scared. If the situation was so bad and parents were making people come home, they were scared they would be next. (LG)

> They made me feel like a quitter and they were mad. A lot of them understood as they were also getting pressure from their parents. Those who called me a 'quitter' were not good friends. (DK)

In contrast, Naomi from ML felt she was supported in her decision to not return after Pesach. "Everyone had a different situation…I felt I received respect from my friends. They knew I wanted it and they understood where my parents were coming from. No one was negative" (NG).

It is interesting to note that the same students who felt a lack of support by their institution in their decision to leave the program also felt a lack of support in this decision by their friends on the program. It is thus reasonable to assume that the institutional pressure to stay was translated into a peer pressure to stay. Similarly, the institutional message to support students and their families in any decision they made regarding return after the Pesach holiday likely translated into a respectful approach to peer decisions on this issue.

*2. Support for parents of the participants*

Parents whose children were scheduled to be in Israel during the 2001-2 school year faced a situation that few parents of eighteen-year-old students face. These parents were put in a position in which they had to decide whether or not to let their child go to a foreign country (albeit Israel) in the midst of an extremely insecure period. Once they made this decision, they had to deal with various family members and friends who did not support their decision and also their own doubts about their decision. Furthermore, many continued to question their initial decision as the situation heated up and worsened throughout the year. For many of these parents, support was crucial if they were going to allow their child to remain in Israel throughout the year. Parents sought support from the institutions hosting their child, their families and friends, and ironically, from their child in Israel. It appears that some parents did not receive ample support from these sources and therefore brought their child home early.

*a. Administrative support: staying in touch with parents*

In both programs, support from institutions came in the form of information as administrators instilled new methods for keeping their participants' families informed. Both programs sent e-mails to the families immediately after a *piguah* and once they knew all their students were unharmed. In addition, both programs sent out occasional e-mails that were unrelated to the security situation to give the families a more general sense of what their child was experiencing during the year.

In addition to e-mails, Year Course instilled a "town meeting" during the August before the participants arrived. Parents in the New York area attended, while those further away were on conference calls. At this meeting, administrators explained to the parents their policies and the precautions they would take in the coming year, and parents were given the chance to ask questions. Also in August, Midreshet Lindenbaum called a meeting in Toronto in response to a rumor that led them to believe those parents were considering keeping their children home. In addition, parents whose children were in the same program subscribed to list-serves in order to discuss particular issues, such as ending the program early.

Along with informational support, programs provided some level of emotional support to the parents of their students. Both directors expressed a marked increase in

the amount of time they spent on the phone or writing e-mails to individual parents. Tova Rheine noted the change in her job description from working with teachers and students to working with parents and students, and less so with teachers. Both directors also acknowledged that there were certain parents who were more demanding and who required much more time and energy to reassure them of their child's safety and the precautions they were taking as an institution.

*b. Support from other sources*

Interviews with students who experienced difficult negotiations with their parents around coming and staying in Israel also revealed the place of community in their parents' decision-making process. In reflecting on the role of community in providing support for parents, the director of Midreshet Lindenbaum stated the following:

> It is much easier for them not being the only one in their community who is letting their kid come back. If their neighbor is letting their kid come back, why can't you? But it happens the opposite too. If their neighbor is not letting their kid go back, why are you? Am I not a good parent? Am I not a loving parent? What's the matter with me? Am I going to sacrifice my child by letting them come back? It plays on the guilt in both ways. It's easier to make a decision as a community. (TR)

Students also mentioned the role of other parents in their parents' process. Interestingly, those who highlighted the role played by other parents represented examples in which their parents felt unsupported. Mindy pointed out that all the other parents of young women from her high school pulled their daughters out of their Israel programs in the two weeks prior to coming. "There was very little support that [my parents] found from their peers sending kids to Israel" (MR). Naomi noted that while she was home over Pesach break, her parents and their friends decided as a community that they did not want to send their children back to Israel. They postponed their return for a week because it was a "dangerous situation," and eventually (in her case) barred her from returning to end the program in Israel (NG).

Extended family members also played a significant role in parents' decision-making. The students who spoke about extended families tended to highlight negative or non-supportive experiences. These students reported that family members put pressure and

placed guilt on their parents. Grandparents were mentioned most often when speaking about the role of family members in their parents' processes.

> As soon as I came here, it was totally not what I expected. My parents were, to get them to be able to let me go was like one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life. It is only matched by trying to come back after Pesach. My entire family, my grandmothers, my cousins, were calling. My family was basically telling my parents they were stupid for letting me go to Israel. My parents didn't know what to do. It was a hard thing that you can understand for a lot of reasons. (AR)

> Everyone was giving my mother grief while I was in Israel. She was feeling guilty and sad as from being harassed. People asked, "Why are letting her go?" "You are a bad parent. (DK)

*c. Reciprocal support: parents and their child in process*

In describing the ways in which their parents supported them, students revealed that they also served as a means of support for their parents. As the year progressed and students showed stronger levels of comfort with their surroundings and even stronger convictions for being in Israel, their parents gained confidence in their decision to allow their child to be in Israel. Some parents expressed this comfort by loosening initial restrictions on their child, others became more actively involved in Israel campaigns and support rallies. Despite growing levels of comfort and conviction, there were various times throughout the year that parents lost confidence and questioned their decision to let their child remain in Israel, especially as terrorist activity increased and they felt unsupported by their surrounding communities. Though support from the institution was helpful, hearing directly that their child was safe and felt secure was more important. Though the conversations were often difficult for parents and students, the communication appears to have served as a means of support for both sides.

In reflecting on conversations with their parents, several students described a process they felt their parents went through while they were in Israel for the year. Interestingly, they described a process similar to one they were also experiencing in Israel. Ari described the "maturation process" that both he and his parents went through while he was in Israel.

> [After a difficult period in the security situation], I talked to my parents about ending the program early for me or trying to work something out. To come home or, and they were just supportive. Last night I spoke to a group of *shlichim* [Israeli emissaries] that are going over. Someone asked 'how it was like to be on year course?' and I asked 'how is it like to be an Israeli for the last year?' That I can make that transition, my parents went through a similar one, being in the states while I am here, they appreciate what is happening on a different level. They have kind of matured having their son in Israel for the year. They deal with it on a very different level than someone who is just going on a trip and coming home. Yes, I am coming home but they are dealing with it on a reality that they know I am here, want to stay, but yes they are worried. They pay attention to news more, write letters to editor, go to rallies. It is wonderful to see that our effect in Israel, a lot of peoples' parents have that thing that they are now so much more involved and conscious about what goes on here. (AR)

Mindy described her family's process as one in which they came to understand their internal strength. She mentioned several instances in which she herself was scared by the security situation, but continued to slowly increase her boundaries of safety, as she felt more comfortable. As she eased into wider boundaries, she reported back to her parents and eased them into these new boundaries with her. In this case, the family process was by no means linear, and was in fact an ongoing negotiation through most of the year. Nevertheless, by the end both Mindy and her parents were able to see what they had achieved within themselves and with each other.

> It got to a point, like in January, my grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. And I said I was coming home and they said 'no, you're not'. So at that point, even through all the December disasters, by that point they found the value in my being here. I guess they weren't nervous anymore. They wouldn't let me come home and that was a sign to me showing how much they had progressed during the year, letting me come and then realizing the importance of it… And [then] I went home [for Pesach]. And from the time I got home, my parents were like 'you are not going back, there is no way'. At this point, my grandmother is sitting in the hospital and said 'you can't go back'... My parents were being swayed by that and they said 'you shouldn't go back, it is irresponsible of us. You can't go back'. At that point, my mother had been going to all these rallies and being really involved. I told her that she wasn't a real Zionist unless she let me go back to Israel. And that Israel was there for me and I needed to be there for Israel. I think she got the point. I said that I would be happy being in the building. I think she really got the message of how important it is to be there for Israel, to be in Israel. Although my father was not as gung-ho as she was, he

> supported me also, and they let me come back. ... My mother, when she re-scheduled my flight made sure that I was able to be back for Yom HaZikaron, Yom Ha'Atzmaut because she realized that it was really important. And I actually go an e-mail from my mother a couple weeks ago saying how, she was thanking me forcing her to let me go back gave her a lot of strength, strength she didn't realize she had and strength that she didn't realize anyone could really have, being in America. (MR)

It is worth pointing out that all students who described an ongoing and parallel process between them and their parents were students who remained in Israel until the completion of the program. None of the students who left the program early described this parallel process, though one student did describe reciprocal support between her and her parents.

## IV. Students Who Left Early in Relation to Those Completing Their Programs

As noted in earlier sections of this report, students who came on yearlong post-high school programs in Israel during the 2001-2 were all highly committed to being in Israel, in spite of the security situation. These were students who were ideologically committed to being in Israel for the year, and in most cases, they were individuals who fought hard to get here. And yet despite their commitment to being here, some did not complete the program in its entirety (either leaving early or not returning after the Pesach vacation). What ultimately led some students who were highly committed to being in Israel to leave Israel before the completion of their program? How do these students differ from those who stayed to the end? This section looks at the various circumstances that led some students to leave while others stayed in Israel to the end of the program.

*1. It was not my decision to make*

Overall, few students in each of the two post-high school programs left Israel before the end of their program as a result of the current security situation. Among those who did leave, these students were adamant that the decision was made by their parents, or that they made the decision based on high levels of pressure from their parents to come home. "I know it was my parents decision. I just agreed with it" (LG). In fact,

all students who left early implied or directly relayed that they wanted to stay to the end of the program. “I would have come back if my parents allowed me to… It was not my decision to make” (NG). Directors of both programs concurred that it was parental pressure that ultimately led these students to leave early.

*2. I just couldn’t fight with my parents anymore*

As mentioned, some students came to Israel with minimal parental support while others came with ambivalent or complete support. Although minimal support was a necessary condition for leaving, it was not a sufficient one. Students whose parents were minimally supportive fought hard with their parents to arrive initially, and many continued to fight and negotiate through the very end of the program. However, the directors and participants acknowledged that some students reached a point in which they felt they could no longer fight with their parents, and therefore left early. In telephone interviews, students who left early described the guilt they felt knowing that they were causing their parents’ grief and anxiety.

> If it were up to me, I would have stayed. I just felt too guilty that my mom wasn’t sleeping.” It was important for me to stay, but I couldn’t deal with my mother anymore. She was feeling bad and owed it to her to come home. (DK)

Furthermore, these students indicated that they generally had very good relationships with their parents and that generally their parents were not overly restrictive or demanding. Thus, when their parents continued to ask them to come home, these students eventually decided that it was something that had to do out of respect for their parents.

> My mother is not a parent who tells me what to do. She let me come on year course. She’s not usually restrictive. So I knew that if she was ordering her to come home, I needed to do it. (DK)

> It was more the relationship with my parents that brought me home… There was no reason to cause my parents so much worry. When my parents ask for things I normally do it, because they don't ask for a lot. (LG)

Among students who left, the less supportive parent generally did not come to visit. As suggested, these visits often decreased the fight with parents and usually provided

the parents with a means in which to understand the situation and their child's environment. These students did not benefit from this visit, a visit that in many cases provided the crucial link in allowing students to remain in Israel.

*3. I can't function*

One young woman who left early revealed that in addition to leaving because of parental pressure, she left because she was personally uncomfortable (though they still claim that would have stayed if their parents had agreed). Inasmuch as Naomi felt that being in Israel was the "right place to be", ideologically, she admitted to it being difficult for her personally. She spoke in terms of being here as a Jew versus being here as a human being. "Even though I think it was the right thing to do as a Jew, I felt that I needed to take into account what I needed as a person. I couldn't sleep and I couldn't function, as a person (NG). Naomi felt that because of the condition she was in, she could be more productive in supporting Israel from North America. "I couldn't deal with doing 'nothing'. I wanted to help, to do more"(NG). And in fact, Naomi got involved in Israel activism locally after her parents refused to let her return after the Pesach vacation.

Student who stayed in Israel agreed that one needed to stay in Israel because they enjoyed it personally and not because of ideological convictions. Daniella stated that ideology alone was not a good enough reason to remain in Israel during such a difficult year (despite undercurrent messages from the institution).

> I started with the Zionist-thing, but it got to be the point where that reason was almost bad reason- to risk your life for an ideal is probably why we are in this mess. It got to a point where I stayed because I liked it here not because I "should" be here. "Should" would be wrong. If my parents ever knew I was staying for Zionist purposes they would have made me come home. We had to stay because we liked it. I am trying to emphasize that [our teacher's message was,] 'it is your right to be here and you should stay because you are doing it for your people because if everyone picked up and left there would be no Israel'. So, I don't know if it was wrong for them to emphasize [that message]... You should stay because you like it and you are happy and you feel good not because you are forced by your belief or someone else's belief imposed on you. (DR)

*4. Am I experiencing Israel?*

Some students who left indicated they did so because, in addition to parental demands, they felt that parental and institutional restrictions were so tight that "it was not worth it to stay in Israel if I can't experience it"(LG). Some even felt that they could accomplish similar goals stateside. In contrast, students who stayed in Israel felt that they were still experiencing Israel and their program's goals, despite restrictions. Moreover, those who stayed disagreed that they could accomplish the same goals in North America.

> I never ever wanted to leave. Like I said, this place, the learning here, the teachers and everybody was just everything I was looking for... Even though there were so many terrible things going on around, I did notice it, but I never wanted to leave because I knew this experience couldn't be replicated anywhere else. And I wasn't going to be doing anything else more meaningful... You know, you might look back on things and say 'I wish it could be like that again'. (AV)

*5. I learned more this year because of the present state of the country*

Not only did those who stayed disagree about reproducing the experience in North America, but several also suggested that their experiences and development as individuals were positively molded because of the specific year that they were in Israel. Some even felt that they learned lessons that they could not have learned during calmer times, most notably, they what it means to be *committed* to Israel.

> I keep saying to myself that because we've known violence peace is going to be so much sweeter to us. We'll truly understand what it means. Nobody who didn't go through that will ever get to know what peace is or how great it is. They can be happy but they won't be as happy as we will be because we'll know something else. (DR)

> The more someone talks to me, finds out what we did, why I came, what I received being here this year, they understand that (a) it was worth it and (b) I might not have gotten half of what I did out of this year if it wasn't for being in the country the way it is. (AR)

> I don't want to say this, I don't want it to come out the wrong way, because on the one hand it was obviously so incredibly tragic and so many people were killed and I hope it stops very soon. But on the other hand, I think that maybe more so, I don't know, I have never been here for a long period of time when it was peaceful…but

> because of all the stuff going on, and I saw my teachers going to miluim and I saw what it means to have a commitment to something. I learned about myself that I stayed here through this. I would have never thought, that at the beginning of the year, I never would have thought that I could do something like that. I would have thought that I would be nervous and scared the whole time. I really learned about commitment and I don't know that I would have necessarily learned those lessons as much had I come when everyone was able to just go wherever they wanted and they weren't scared at all. I am not saying that is necessarily a good or bad thing, but I definitely think that I am much more committed to coming back here and you really realize how much each person makes a difference here and each persons presence sort of uplifts other people. I just realize what it means to really be committed to something. So I am thankful for that, that I have that newfound devotion because I definitely didn't have it before…. I don't know if I would have had that otherwise. I hope I would have also but I definitely gained that. (AV)

> My family has always supported Israel, but I think this year I have learned what a Zionist is. And my family, we have learned what commitment to Israel is…It has really showed a new side to my family. Like my sister, my family was so against me going, and now my sister, their letting my sister come to Israel for the summer. She's 16. When I was home over Pesach, she said 'I see what you are doing, I need to come Israel.' She is organizing a trip for 10 kids to come to Israel and volunteer on kibbutz. And my parents are letting her go and she is not going to be sitting in a building. (MR)

*6. Other reasons led to leaving*

In contrast to the interviews with students who left, both directors and also several students who completed the program believed that a handful of students who left did so because they were not enjoying their year generally and not because of the security situation, even though they used the security situation as justification for leaving early. That is, some of those who left were unhappy socially while others felt suffocated by the limitations on movement. In some cases, students who stayed suggested that the situation put a damper on their peers drinking and partying (whereas they felt their own year was not negatively effected because they were not individuals who 'party'). Some of those who stayed also indicated that those who left were not fully into Israel or their program.

> I think people chose to leave because if you are not fully into this place and into being here and learning here and maybe what the institution is giving us, then I think

> it is hard to deal with everything else because you cannot necessarily go out and you can't even leave this environment. So maybe some of those people decided to go home… The fact is that a lot of people who didn't come back, I can think of 5 people, that it had nothing to with the situation. It was because they didn't like being here, like in the school. (AV)

It should be noted that the above statements made by the directors and students who stayed (in regards to those who left) do negate the interviews with the students who left. In fact, both directors purposely chose students to be interviewed who they believed left as a result of parental pressures or their own fears surrounding the security situation.

## V. A Final Remark on a Developmental Stage Within A Time of Crisis

Not surprisingly, most of the post-high school students interviewed indicated that they learned a lot about themselves or gained a sense of self during their year in Israel. For some, this came in the form of understanding their ability to deal or cope with situations in which they felt fear. For others, this translated into understanding what commitment or loyalty meant for them. Furthermore, many of these students reflected on how much they felt they had changed over the course of the year.

It would appear that these lessons reflect not only on the particular year in which these students spent in Israel, but also on the students' specific developmental stage in life. That is, interviews with these students illuminated not only the experiences and struggles of students on yearlong programs during a time of crisis in Israel, but they also elucidated the continuation of normative internal processes occurring for young adults in a particular stage of development.

**Policy Recommendations** This section is based on the findings from the current report on post-high school students, and the forthcoming report on students in post-college programs. Despite the differences among the four programs and the individual students, these participants are all young Diaspora Jews, who experienced a year living in Israel during one of its more tragic times. Regardless of their motivations for coming or their decision to remain or leave

Israel early, each participant lived in a situation that included fear, confusion and terror. And regardless of their age, each participant was forced to cope with his/her own vulnerability and feelings of powerlessness while living in a life-threatening reality. Being in Israel during 2001-2 was a personal choice for each of these individuals. They could have chosen to be somewhere else, and yet despite the security situation, they chose to be in Israel.

*1. The decision to go to Israel*

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing participants on yearlong programs in Israel is making the decision to participate in the programs. It is clear from the interviews conducted that in the months before departing for Israel, participants found themselves in a quandary as they tried to make the decision. The prelude to participation was emotionally draining, even for those individuals who anticipated going on these programs for years prior to their participation (most notably the students on post-high school programs). Choosing to spend a year in Israel during the 2001-2 school year was unlike choosing to spend the year in Israel before the start of the second Intifada. The usual deliberations were augmented by more urgent concerns, namely, the question of personal safety due to the indiscriminate nature of the terrorist attacks in Israel over the past two years. Most interviewees described prolonged discussions and arguments with their parents and relatives, where they continually justified their decision and even absurdly promised to guarantee their own safety. In many cases, the participants were unsure of their decision and were filled with apprehension.

Yet despite enormous pressures, both externally and internally, these students eventually made the decision to spend the year in Israel. After the initial settling-in period, participants found it much easier to be in Israel. They began developing coping mechanisms, allowing them to live in the country in a similar manner to Israelis. Furthermore, they were able to enjoy and gain from being in Israel once they experienced Israel close-up and the images from the mass media were not those that dominated their minds.

Understanding the decision-making process to go to Israel is crucial for institutions that bring students to Israel during times of crisis. Though the final decision of

whether to Israel is out of their control, program administrators need to be keenly aware of this process when planning policy for future years. First, knowing that many students and their families are feeling ambivalent about the decision to go to Israel, the programs must show unwavering commitment and support for the year in Israel. This message needs to come from both Israeli and US organizers of the respective programs because once one of the parties shows ambivalence in sending Diaspora students to Israel, as it becomes almost impossible to recruit future participants. Second, understanding the decision-making process allows these institutions to support potential participants and their families as they go through the process. We suggest that the institutions maintain strong contact in the months and weeks leading up to their program, especially when these months are dominated by insecurity within the country. Parents and participants need to know that they are not the only ones thinking about their safety as they begin to embark on a year in Israel.

*2. Support from families*

While *Otzma* and HUC participants are adults and therefore able to make independent decisions regarding their time in Israel, parental pressures still played a role in their ability to carry out their decisions, and an even more significant role in helping participants deal with the situation emotionally. This latter role of emotional support was similar to the experience of Year Course and Midreshet Lindenbaum students in relation to their parents. Our research found that in cases where parents were unsupportive of their children's decision to be in Israel, students felt a constant distress during the year as they placated their concerned families, while simultaneously trying to cope emotionally with the stressors of being in Israel under such trying circumstances. As one student observed "It wore me out." For some students, feeling worn out was the breaking point for leaving their program and Israel.

For many individuals who choose to be in Israel during these times, it is not surprising that they feel they have to constantly justify their decisions, placate their parents and fight to stay. One of the difficulties that exist is that there is marked discrepancy between what parents see on the TV screens and what their children experience on a day-to-day basis. The sensationalism of the media is traumatizing for the parents. Many of them have no concept as to where the violence is in relation to their children,

and people do manage, despite the enormous difficulties and constraints, to continue living a meaningful and productive life.

Parental visits during the year were extremely useful in breaking down the media portrayal of the situation in Israel. Parent-group visits during the year may help programs deal with this issue. Even if only a few parents are able to travel to Israel during the year, they should be invited to speak to the rest of the parents, and report on what they saw and experienced. Furthermore, conference calls with parents, talks given by informed speakers, a weekly newsletter compiled by the participants relating the weeks events, are some ideas which may help break the distance between "there" and "here," between the perceptions from far away and the daily reality. This is likely to prove helpful in distilling parents' fears, and subsequently, this may translate into support of the parents for their children, and helping students find strength and confidence in their being in Israel during a difficult time.

*3. Learning to live with terror*

Similar to most Israelis, students learned to re-negotiate and adapt their lives to the escalating violence and terror threats throughout the year. They were able to cope as long as the terror attacks were removed from their "comfort zones". Yet when the terror struck at places which were part of their daily lives and reality, many of them had difficulty with the proximity of terror to their daily lives. Terror became too close for their comfort, and it was at this point that some of them decided to leave. For others, the increased violence strengthened their resolve to stay as their feelings of connectedness and identification with Israel and its citizens increased. Through our research we found strong ideological commitment to Israel and a sense of connectedness to the people and the land helped individuals live through this difficult time.

Programs cannot guarantee the safety of their participants. Yet programs can help the participants feel more secure in Israel. Primarily, participants need to feel that they are not alone, that they have a support structure, and a community who will help them deal with the threatening reality. Participants also need to know what is going on in the country. They need to be provided with information upon which they are able to make informed decisions. Furthermore, the participants need to feel guided. Despite

any uncertainty about the future, students still need to feel a sense of being taken care of or of being guided by their institutions.

*4. Rules and the Role of the Institution*

There was a notable difference between the way the different institutions (especially the post-high school programs) chose to guide their students as far of rules and regulations were concerned. Young Judaea put forward firm boundaries as to where the students were allowed and not allowed to go. These rules were subject to constant change throughout the year. Midreshet Lindenbaum left it to the students and their parents to decide. Midreshet Lindenbaum made no stipulations whatsoever. Whilst many of the girls in this program valued this approach, appreciating its educational value, some found it difficult to live with, as some girls were free to do whatever they wanted, whilst others were unable to leave the building in accordance with their parents' wishes. Beyond creating divisions within the group, this policy indirectly encouraged some girls not to be completely honest with their parents and the administration, often telling their parents only after they had visited a certain area, or not telling them at all. On the other hand, some of the interviewees from Young Judaea were critical of the way their administration approached the situation, finding the rules and regulations too confining. These individuals suggested that the inflexibility also created a situation of dishonesty, whereby individuals who felt so confined would transgress the rules.

The researchers recognize that breaking the rules and making independent decisions counter to adult approval is an endemic part of the experience for these young adults, yet we believe that these acts are potentially more dangerous because of the current security situation in Israel. Furthermore, we recognize that the issue of creating boundaries for participants, especially on post-high school programs is a difficult endeavor which involves educational, ideological and even political considerations. Yet we also believe that it is important for all students to feel guided, supported and treated equally during their year in Israel. Based on these considerations, these researchers suggest that the institutions find ways to *guide* their students in ways that are neither too restrictive nor too open or loose. It should be noted that this recommendation is not contradictory to programs that put few boundaries on their students in the form of rules and restrictions. Rather, it emphasizes the need for a

sense of community and a place for discussion within this community. It is about information sharing and encouragement and not about the actual rules an institution chooses to initiate.

*5. Benefits from being in Israel during a time of crisis*

By being in Israel during a time of crisis, many participants felt even more connected to Israel, Israelis, and in some cases, to Judaism and Jewish learning. For many of them, being in Israel during a difficult year felt like right thing to do, and inasmuch as their year was more constrained and restricted, many felt that they had come to see a part of Israel they never would have seen otherwise. Furthermore, some felt that there year was more meaningful because of what they were seeing and experiencing. Some students commented on feeling a sense of pride in being in Israel during this difficult time, while others mentioned learning the meaning of commitment by being here during such a time.

Participants also felt they shared a part in the fate of Israel and developed more intimate and real relationships with Israelis as a result of the surrounding situation. Through our research, it became obvious that the more involved participants became with Israeli society, the more they felt a sense of belongingness and the less they felt a sense of isolation. Witnessing the daily fears and deliberations made by Israelis, many participants felt that their own fears were validated and their anxieties were normalized. They learned from Israelis that it was “okay” to be scared, and they learned different coping mechanisms from them. Furthermore, students’ pride in coming to Israel during a time of crisis was enhanced through direct contact with Israelis.

These participants were also presented with unique (and sometimes sobering) opportunities to interact with Israelis and Israeli society than in past years. One director noted how his students became the “media darlings” of Israeli and foreign press as they were constantly interviewed and invited to the homes of the mayor, the President and other Israeli officials. Through various experiences, students learned that for many Israelis, their presence was a source of inspiration and support. As one director noted, “Everywhere they go, it is kol hakavod that you are here”. Another director relayed an experience of her students as they attended a funeral of a neighbor

who was killed in Jenin (on Yom HaShoah 2002, during an incursion by the IDF). The grandmother of the soldier came up to the students, and after finding out who they were, she requested that each of them call their parents and thank them for letting her come to Israel as it gave her a sense of strength to know that her grandson had died for a greater purpose, for Am Yisrael.

The experience of vulnerability is not unique to the participants on yearlong programs, but is one that is experienced by all Israelis during these difficult times. In many instances, the experience of vulnerability also leads to an openness amongst Israelis as they often reach out in support to each other during such times. This mutual support and help is a source of inspiration to many, including the participants on programs who are able to witness such acts. We believe that these moments have enormous educational value as they teach people about giving and sharing. We therefore recommend that participants become more involved during their year away in volunteer projects which attempt to help those personally and directly affected by the terror. Furthermore, we encourage programs to arrange visits to hospitals and institutions where terror victims are recuperating and rebuilding their physical and emotional strength, especially children. (We do not suggest visiting those who are in critical or serious condition, but those who have recovered significantly, yet are still undergoing treatment.) Helping participants feel useful and helpful is vital during a time when most of us feel impotent and vulnerable.

## Concluding Remarks

### A core population for future Jewish leadership

As the Intifada in Israel continues, Jewish leaders have begun to ask: What will be the consequence on a future generation of Jewish leaders in North America who have not taken part in Israel Experience programs? Israel Experience numbers have plummeted after a dramatic rise in numbers in the late 1990's. The question speaks to the concern of the next round of Jewish leaders who will not count Israel as part of their collective Jewish educational experiences. How will, or more so, how *can* such leaders keep Israel as a priority on the table of Jewish community concerns when they themselves have not experienced the richness of the experience? How can they prioritize Israel and the plight of Israelis when they have not gained a sense of belongingness in the Jewish homeland through first-hand interactions with the people and the place?

Participants on yearlong programs in Israel during time of crisis can be described generally as "Jewishly involved." Their involvement comes in various forms, from being active in Jewish or Zionist youth groups, to Israel or social action involvement, to religious or spiritual activity. It is recommended that attention be paid to these particular individuals as they represent a *core population* among the younger Jewish populations in North America. That is, they not only display strong (behaviorally) Jewish identities through their Jewish involvement in North America, but they also show *commitment to Israel* as part of these identities through their participation in yearlong programs in Israel during times of crisis. Our research indicates that even among those students who came to Israel as part of a program requirement, their affinity for and loyalty to Israel and Israelis grew as a result of their being here during a difficult time.

These researchers believe that individuals who continue to come to Israel on quality educational programs potentially make sound Jewish lay and professional leaders for the future. We call these individuals a *core population for Jewish leadership* because we believe them to be uniquely qualified to keep Israel on the agenda in the future when other Jewish leaders will no longer have the tools to understand the importance of Israel, tools that can only be developed through quality time spent in Israel. Thus, although their numbers may be small, we believe it is worth investing various resources to maintain contact with these individuals while they are in Israel, and when they return to North America after their year in Israel.

**Further research**

In thinking about future research in this area, these researchers suggest further interviews with individuals who would ordinarily have participated in these programs but who did not participate due to fear or parental/familial constraints. Such interviews would provide useful comparisons to the sample population of this study. They would also be helpful for institutions in understanding the make-up of the families that allowed their children to come to Israel in relation to those who did not. Interviews with the parents of students who participated in these programs would also be helpful in clarifying the parental perspective that we were only able to assess second-hand, via their children's responses. Furthermore, such interviews might also

prove useful for institutions in establishing supportive policies for the families of their students.