

Derech Eretz



**Strengthening
Our Future:**

Fostering Collective Responsibility and Leadership

2024-25
Annual Report



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Rising Above: the Power of Perseverance



Assaf Amir
CEO

Dear Partners and Friends,

On September 1, 2024, we launched the 13th year of the Derech Eretz program, welcoming 269 new participants to our six Youth Leadership (Mechina) programs and young adult educators program, spread across the Negev, including new campuses in Kibbutz Mashabe Sade and Ashkelon. Throughout the year, our youth engaged in transformative learning, leadership development, outdoor training, and community service, deepening their pluralistic Jewish identities and understanding of Israeli society.

This year, amidst Israel's most challenging conflict, we have been guided by the Hebrew phrase "אף על פי" - "In spite of". Despite adversity, our participants and alumni have continued to drive positive change, launching new volunteer initiatives and strengthening their communities.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your steadfast commitment and belief in our mission. Your partnership is a treasure, and we will continue to cherish it deeply as we work side by side to empower the next generation and strengthen our society. It is through your trust and engagement that we are able to achieve everything you are about to read.



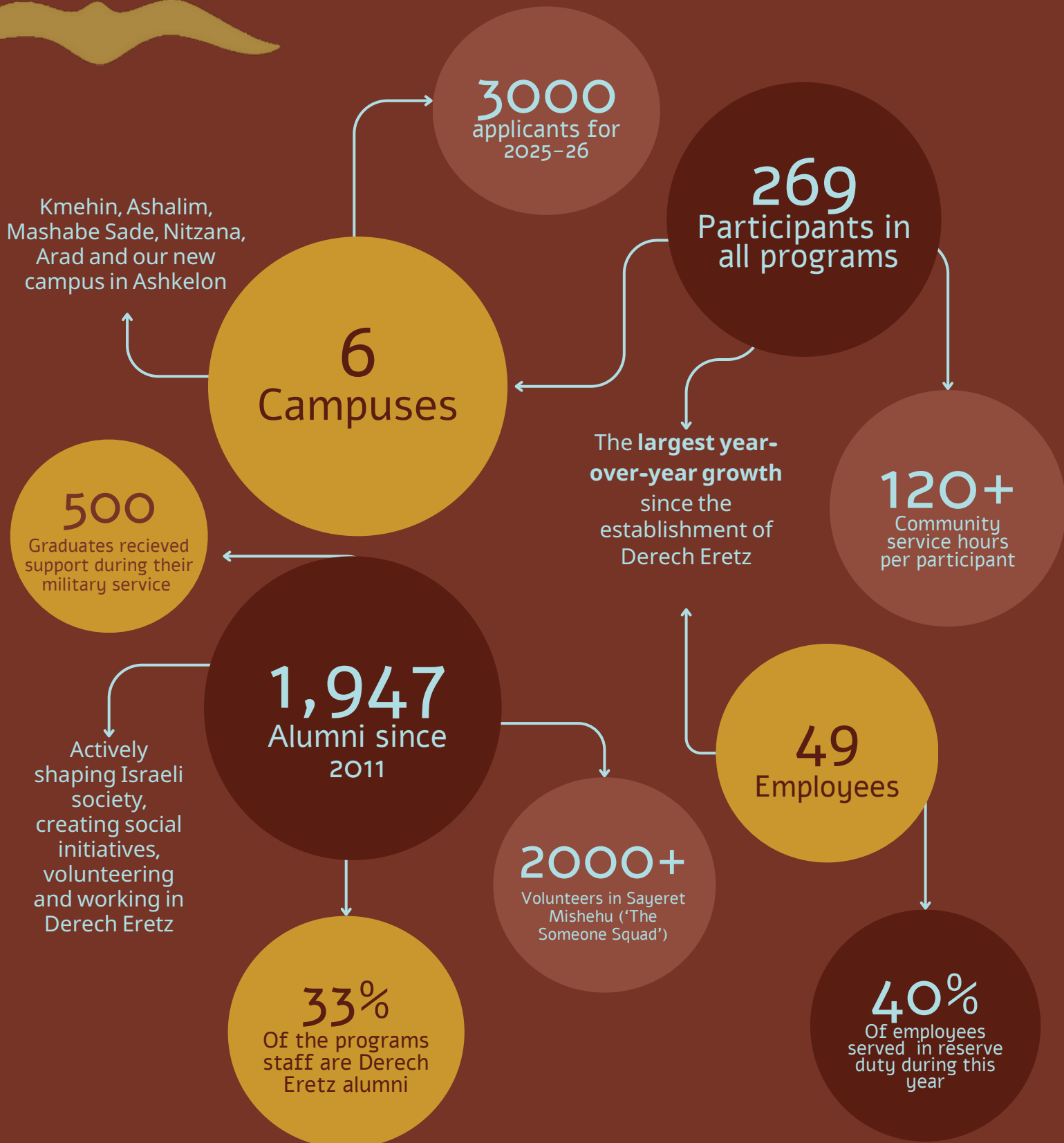
Together, we are not only shaping the future of Israeli youth but also building resilience in the very fabric of our communities. During these challenging times, your unwavering support has been a beacon of hope, reminding us of the profound impact we are making together. You have shown us what true Jewish peoplehood means—standing together, united in purpose, no matter the obstacles we face.

As we gather for Passover, a time of hope and freedom, we pray for the safe return of the hostages. May this year inspire strength and unity in all of us, and may we continue to grow and thrive together as part of the Derech Eretz family.

Warm regards,

Assaf and the Derech Eretz Team

By the Numbers: 2024 Impact Overview





Building Resilience For Israeli Society

Our mission is to **foster a cohesive, resilient society based on mutual responsibility, belonging, and respect for all people.**

By investing in the youth of today, we are building a stronger, more unified Israel for tomorrow.

Changing the Life Trajectory of Israeli Youth

Since 2011, Derech Eretz has been empowering Israel's youth and young adults through **transformative social-educational leadership programs**. With a focus on those from underprivileged backgrounds, our programs bridge social gaps, level the playing field, and develop a new generation of engaged citizens.

We reach young people at **3 critical stages of their lives**—before military service, during their service, and as they transition back to civilian life — equipping them to become leaders who champion **equality, tolerance, responsibility, and a deep love for Israel.**

Polarized Society: Israel's Greatest Challenge

Israel is facing an unprecedented internal crisis, with growing rifts between religious and secular, Jews and Arabs, and the center and periphery, tearing at the very fabric of society. Since 2009, political polarization has surged by nearly 180%, creating a volatile atmosphere where animosity between different groups is no longer just ideological—it's personal.

Recent surveys show that over 60% of Israelis believe internal division poses the greatest threat to the country's future, surpassing even traditional external threats like terrorism.

As a result, Israel's resilience is undermined, and a divided society struggles to effectively address military, economic, and social challenges.

All of our programs achieve our mission by:

- Deepening participants' connection to Jewish heritage, pluralism, and Israeli identity, while fostering mutual respect among Jews and Israelis of **all backgrounds, ethnicities, and denominations.**
- Exposing participants to the full spectrum of Israeli society, helping to **break down barriers** between communities and **build bridges of understanding.**
- Delivering comprehensive leadership training that strengthens social responsibility and equips participants with the tools to navigate challenges—**both individually and as a collective.**
- Instilling a deep love for, and sense of belonging to, **Eretz Yisrael** and the **Jewish people.**

Our Programs

Our 3 - stage programming supports individuals through pivotal life transitions: from high school graduation, through military service, to early civilian adulthood. At each stage, we help shape identity, foster purpose, and empower meaningful action.

* Youth Leadership Programs (Pre-Military Preparatory / Mechina)

Derech Eretz was the first organization to establish youth leadership programs for Israeli youth from the **socio-economic periphery**, offering them access to meaningful preparatory programs for military service and adulthood. It paved the way for 36 additional half-year programs, four of which are operated by Derech Eretz, alongside two year-long programs.

This is our main program, which has incredible demand—about **10 times** the number of available spots. The program combines leadership training, classroom studies, outdoor training, and community service to help participants **develop resilience and social responsibility**.



* Term of Service Support Program

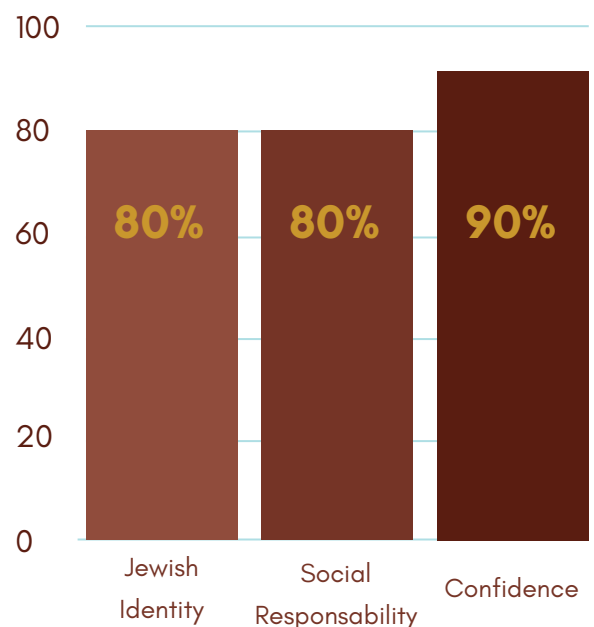
Provided for all program graduates while they serve the country. This includes workshops at crucial points in their IDF development, personal 1 on 1 mentoring, and annual alumni gatherings.

* Alumni Community and Young Adults Programs

The alumni community is a place where shared values and responsibility serve as a platform for social initiatives, supported by our guidance and resources. We also offer a young adult educators program (Derech Hanegev), which connects young adults interested in education with educational opportunities in the Negev region.

Measuring the Change

The first indications of impact can be seen after graduation, as participants are more connected to their identity, feel greater confidence in themselves, and show higher responsibility toward Israeli society.



The graph shows the percentage of participants who indicated an increase in the following attributes post-program, based on questionnaires given before, during, and after our programs.

Derech Eretz Long-Term Impact Report

In November 2024, we conducted a survey among our alumni network, receiving 415 responses from nearly 2,000 alumni. The responses were diverse in terms of gender, age, geographic location, and occupation.



Resilience & Long-Term Impact

- Alumni who graduated 2-6 years ago report a high impact (4/5) on their ability to cope with the challenges of the ongoing war.
- 56% report that they still carry practical tools and skills from the program, years later, such as resilience, responsibility, leadership, tolerance, and more.

A Diverse Community of Leaders

- About half of our 18-25 year old alumni were raised in mid-low socio-economic environments, many identify as part of a disadvantaged group.
- About 90% of alumni stay in touch with their peers, even 8 years after finishing the program.

Civic Engagement & Volunteering

46% of alumni aged 21+ volunteer (occasionally or regularly), compared to 22% in the general Israeli population (CBS, 2023). This includes significant social engagement such as youth village work, education, and community leadership.

Military Leadership & Motivation

Despite coming predominantly from mid-to-low socio-economic backgrounds, our alumni outperform national averages in military leadership.

- 44% hold or aspire to command roles.
- Over 40% serve in combat roles.
- More than 70% of post-service alumni have primarily served in reserve duty over the past 2 years.

44% of alumni
currently serving in the IDF
hold or aspire to command
positions — compared to the
national average of 2-4% for
youth from mid-to-low
socioeconomic backgrounds.

90% of alumni
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46% of alumni
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Expanding Our Reach: New Campuses, New Opportunities

In 2024, we successfully launched two new Mechina campuses in Ashkelon and Kibbutz Mashabe Sade, bringing our total to **six**. These new locations allow us to engage more young people in **leadership training, community service, and Jewish identity exploration**.

In Ashkelon, a city facing economic and security challenges, our participants integrated with the local community by **mentoring youth, assisting in schools, and supporting seniors**. Meanwhile, Kibbutz Mashabe Sade welcomed our program and its participants, fostering strong connections between our students and local families—including evacuees displaced since October 7th.



Leadership in Action: Mechina Programs

Six-Month Mechina Programs (Kmehin, Nitzana, Ashalim, Mashabe Sade)

With 189 participants across 4 separate campuses chosen from over 1,500 applicants this year, our six-month Mechina programs continue to attract motivated young adults seeking personal growth without delaying national service. Participants engage in workshops, educational programs, and community service, developing leadership skills through hands-on experiences such as leading hikes, lectures, and cultural activities.

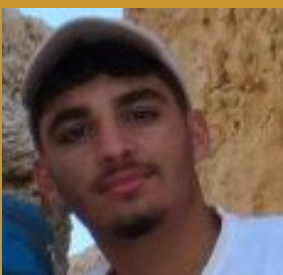
At the program's conclusion, participants reflect on their transformative journey, sharing insights with peers and communities. Many continue their involvement through our Alumni and Community programs, further strengthening their impact on Israeli society.

Year-Long Mechina Programs (Arad & Ashkelon)

Now in their sixth year, the 65 participants in Derech Eretz's year-long Mechina programs continue to grow, with the exciting addition of new branches in Ashkelon and Arad. Our urban-based approach fosters deep integration with local communities through joint Shabbat meals, Kabbalat Shabbat ceremonies, and partnerships with municipalities and NGOs.

The Ashkelon Mechina, launched this year, operates in a city facing ongoing economic and social challenges. Participants engage in volunteer programs supporting senior citizens, at-risk youth, and local schools, driving meaningful change. By combining education, civic engagement, and service, they develop leadership skills that prepare them to become active citizens.

Ron Zaken, Mashabe Sade Alumni 2024-25:



// I learned to listen to a wide range of opinions and to hear **people who have different views from mine and respect them.** (...) I gained the ability to **respect people who think differently than I do,** and the ability to adapt where I am less comfortable; I realized how important it is for me to **contribute in a meaningful way to my country** //



Watch Nitzana graduation ceremony highlights





Bringing Young Adult Educators to the Negev: 'Derech HaNegev' Program

The Negev region makes up about 60% of Israel's land area, yet only around 10% of the population resides there. Ramat HaNegev Regional Council—the largest in the country—is home to just 8,200 residents. This presents ongoing challenges in terms of demographic growth, attracting young people, and staffing key educational, mentoring, and early childhood support roles within the region's informal education frameworks.

In response, in 2019, Derech Eretz, in partnership with the Ramat HaNegev Regional Council, launched the 'Derech HaNegev' program—a unique initiative in Israel that connects young adults interested in education with meaningful guidance and educational opportunities in the region. The program includes regular group meetings, seminars, and training sessions, and more than anything, it provides a space for belonging and personal development.

In September 2024, the program began its sixth year, welcoming a group of 15 participants—both returning and new. These young leaders serve as anchors for children and teens across the region's communities, acting as role models and providing critical support to the entire community—including families who were evacuated from their homes due to the war. *Yishar Koach!*



Alumni: A Growing Force for Change

Our 1,947 alumni continue to be deeply engaged in strengthening Israeli society. This year, we focused on:

- **Supporting alumni in the IDF and reserve duty:** Over 70% of alumni served in reserve duty in the past year, with 56% serving in combat roles.
- **Expanding mentorship and career guidance:** Offering post-Mechina pathways in higher education, civil society, and leadership.
- **Launching new social initiatives:** Including Sayeret Mishehu (The Someone Squad), a nationwide volunteer organization.

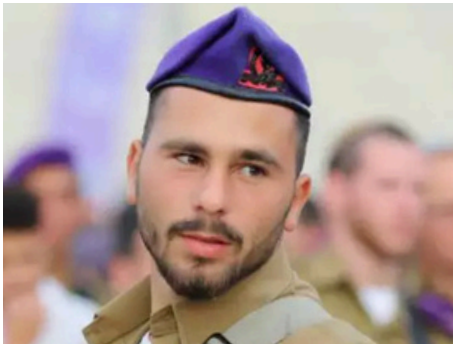


Ilay Elbaz - Kmehin Alumni, 2020-21, Current Counselor at Arad Year Long Program:

// To me, Derech Eretz is the most authentic preparatory program in the country; **I opened up to the real Israeli society** thanks to the Mechina. I have friends from home and friends from the army, but with **the friends from Derech Eretz I have a unique, deeper connection, we can understand each other without words.** //



'The Someone Squad': Honoring Our Fallen, Serving Our Nation



Founded by Derech Eretz alumni in memory of their friends Roi Daoui (top photo) and Eitar Ohiyaon Abuksis (bottom photo), two 'Derech Eretz' alumni who fell in service, Sayeret Mishehu (The Someone Squad) embodies the values of commitment, leadership, and action. Thousands of volunteers have come together to support others, turning it into a nationwide project that brings citizens from all walks of life together to "be that someone" for others.

- **2000 + volunteers mobilized across Israel.**
- **Assisted Western Negev farmers and communities recovering from war-related damages.**
- **Provided ongoing community support: tutoring children, assisting the elderly, working with schools, and rebuilding local infrastructure all across Israel.**
- **Visiting local hospital patients bring comfort, joy, and support**

We are tremendously proud of Derech Eretz alumni—Nitzan, Roey, Celine, Danit, Amit, Naama, Shai and our Alumni Staff—for bringing The Someone Squad to life! Keep up the incredible work. This initiative is a testament to our alumni's enduring dedication to Tikkun Olam—repairing the world through action.

Follow them or get involved on their instagram page:



Our Staff: The Backbone of Derech Eretz



Welcome!

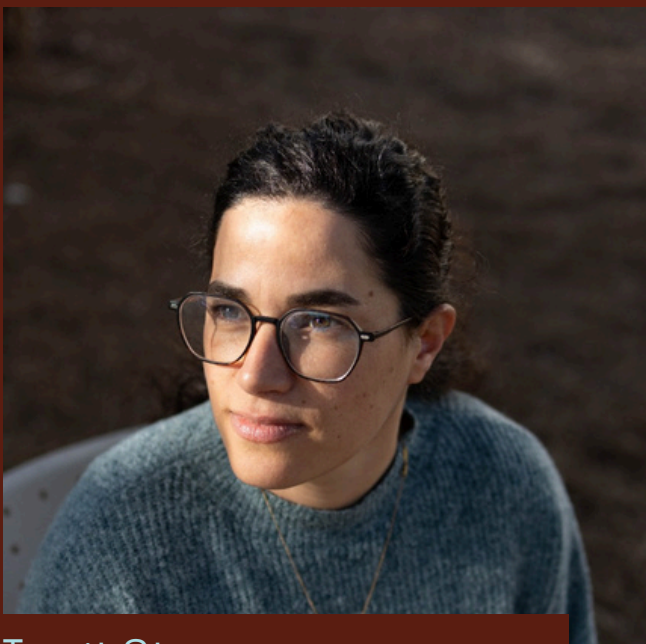
The New Resource Development Team: we wish to welcome our newest team members: Hadas and Jared. **Hadas is a marketing and branding professional**, with a decade's worth of experience in shaping perceptions and creating engaging stories. **Jared is a member of Kibbutz Revivim and has worked as a Jewish Community Professional in Israel and abroad for the past 15 years**, both as the Co founder of The Lone Soldier Center in Memory of Michael Levin, as Partnership Director at Ramat Ha'Negev Council and Assistant Director of UConn Hillel. We can now set our goals higher than ever, taking the Derech Eretz to the **next level**.

Jared White

Director of International
Relations & Partnerships

Hadas Golan Sadeh

Director of Resource
Development & Marketing



Tsurit Stern

Director of Education

A Warm Goodbye

We also want to express our gratitude to Tsurit, who has been with us from the very beginning and will be finishing her role with us this May. **Tsurit has single-handedly built the educational philosophy of Derech Eretz**, continuously learning and improving what we do each year. Her work has had a massive impact, not only on Derech Eretz but also on every participant and Mechina staff member who has worked with us. We are **grateful** for the wonderful 14 years together and wish her all the best in her next challenge. **B'hatzlacha!**



- * About 40% of our staff have served in reserve duty over the past year, including in combat command roles.
- * 33% of our educational staff are alumni, creating a full-circle impact.
- * Monthly professional development sessions are conducted, covering Jewish identity, democracy, gender studies, resilience, and leadership.

We Lead By Example



Read about our Leadership

["Acharai: The Model of Israeli Leadership", The Times of Israel,](#)
[By David Farahi](#)

// Seeing how people from all ends of the spectrum come together as one group strengthens my belief that, **despite all the differences and challenges, we can live together, listen to each other, and build a unified, diverse, and shared society.**

The truth is, this impact is not always made in the large classes or in extreme moments; **the magic is measured and revealed in the simple moments** – in hallway conversations, in advice given to a participant when they come to my office and through leading by example. //



Shulamit Kamisa

Deputy Director of the Kmehin Youth Leadership Academy 2024-25
Alumni 'Avnei Derech' 2023-24

Looking Ahead: A Peek on What's to Come in 2026



Establishing the 'Derech Eretz' Home in Ashkelon

After an exciting and inspiring start in Ashkelon, we are now setting our sights on establishing a permanent home to further grow our programs and expand our reach. This is expected to be our most ambitious project yet, as we create, almost from scratch, the first Derech Eretz establishment. The new home will serve as the foundation for what we hope will be a long-lasting partnership with the local municipality and community. Through this, we aim to deepen our impact in the city by increasing the number of participants, volunteer hours, community activities, and transformative workshops and seminars. More information on this will be coming soon.

The Next Dream: Innovative Preparatory Program for High School Youth

With the founding of 'Derech Eretz', we set out on a mission: to reach youth from the socio-economic periphery of Israel at key crossroads of identity formation, and to engage as many communities and segments of Israeli society as possible.

Following our success in the pre-military field, and as part of our broader vision, we are excited to launch new programs for **high school students**: an innovative pilot initiative that brings the quality and unique approach of 'Derech Eretz' into the education system and into high schools. More on this to come.



Revitalizing the Nitzana & Kmehin Campuses

We're thrilled to announce an exciting new chapter for our two campuses—Nitzana and Kmehin—in the heart of Ramat HaNegev! Starting in Spring 2025, both campuses will undergo significant renovations to enhance the experience for our participants and expand our activities. These upgrades will modernize our spaces and embody the pioneering spirit that defines us. We're always moving forward, creating environments that inspire, cultivate leadership, and drive change.

Get Involved: Be Part of the Change



* **Donate Today** - Every contribution fuels our mission

In the USA - Our fiscal sponsors are 501 (c) (3) non profit organizations. Donations are tax-deductible and they will issue you a receipt. We will work with a variety of NGO including local Jewish federations, JNF USA and more that can direct funds to Derech Eretz.

In the UK and Australia - Gifts to Derech Eretz are tax deductible for taxpayers through JNF, a non- government organization. Please contact us at development@derechetz.org.il and we will put you in touch with a JNF representative who will be able to assist you.

PayPal,
Credit
Card

Visit us here at [JGive](https://www.give.org) and funds will directly allocated to Derech Eretz. Please make sure you check the Derech Eretz Charity number: 580540458

Check

US-Tax deductible contributions may be sent and made payable to:

P.E.F Israel Endowment Funds, Inc.
630 Third Ave, St 1501
New York, NY 10017

Contributions sent to PEF must recommend that funds be used for Derech Eretz, amutah number 58-0540458 (Failure to include this recommendation may result in funds being misdirected or returned, so please do remember to add the recommendations.)



* **Guided Tours in the Gaza Envelope and Negev area**

Planning a visit to Israel? we would be honored to offer a meaningful guided tour tailored to your schedule, **focusing on the Negev and/or Gaza Envelope area—a region defined by resilience, hope, and the unwavering spirit of its people.**

During the tour, we will **meet with our participants** and their work within the communities, highlighting the direct, life-changing impact they are making, while also sharing insights about the local region. Please email us at development@derechetz.org.il, and we will create a personalized visit for you.

Contact Us



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**Thank you for standing with us
in strengthening the future of
Israel and of us all.**

Keep in touch:



Cherished Partners



Thank you to ALL our generous partners - We couldn't be doing any of this without you!