



NEWSLETTER
Fall-Winter 2009



Immigrant Teens: Facts on the Ground

A \$27,000 government research study of Night Owls reported these trends among normative, Russian-immigrant teens:

- 40% reported 3 or more days of truancy in the previous month (vs. 20% national average)
- 41% said they were thinking about dropping out of school
- 44% smoke (vs. 20.4% of the general public)
- 65.8% drank strong alcohol in the past month
- 58% frequently resorted to fights for interpersonal conflict resolution (vs. 16% national average)



Night Owls Exceeds All Expectations

The results are in and they pack a whammy: A \$27,000 government-sponsored research study states unequivocally that Night Owls is a proven, effective model that prevents thousands of normative, Russian-immigrant teens from sliding into at-risk and delinquent behaviors.

"This project is excellent," says Dr. Lyuba Sereda, PhD, research director for the six-month study. "It has helped so many teens, and it is meeting a very specific need that no other organization is addressing."

Dr. Sereda presented her 110-page findings before an Israeli Knesset (parliament) committee hearing in November. After hearing Dr. Sereda's testimony, the Knesset committee lauded Night Owls for meeting its objectives.

Slide To Delinquency

Night Owls was launched in 2006 in response to the growing phenomenon of thousands of immigrant teens, beginning in middle school years, "hanging out" in the streets and parks of many Israeli cities well into the night. Without adult supervision or presence, they are exposed to negative street influences and pressure to drop out of school, drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism, violence and general antisocial behavior.

Municipal liaisons to Night Owls consistently report that these teens come from homes where sufficient structure and adult supervision are often missing. The research confirmed that the target population is still "normative" (still in school and living at home), but that it displays significant potential, and even tendency, to spiral downwards.

The statistics tell the story. Of the youth who responded to the study's questionnaires and personal interviews, 40% skipped school three or more times in the past month – twice the national norm – and 41% reported that they were thinking about dropping out of school altogether. Fifty-eight percent reported a high incident of fighting, using violence for interpersonal conflict resolution – three-and-a-half times the national norm. Rates of smoking and hard drinking also greatly exceeded the norms for this age group and for immigrants as a whole.

"I really connected to my Night Owls counselor. He understands me, and I understand him. I trust him. Now I hang out in the street much less."

– Yefim, age 17



(continued on page 3)

New Stress-Busting Workshops

Stress management is the newest workshop being offered under the banner of JOI's Institute of Personal Development (IPD), with a 5-week course led by David Menaker, PhD.

The workshop offers insights, techniques and practice in cognitive reframing, breathing imagery and relaxation techniques. Participants learn to flip stress-inducing thoughts and events into positive and energizing challenge-stimulants.

An innovative aspect of the course is its use of medical testing and biofeedback to establish each person's base level and track improvement in reducing stress. Using sophisticated medical equipment and software to monitor heart, pulse, breathing, sweat production and molecular electrical activity, Dr. Menaker is able to further concretize the lessons, demonstrate the benefits and engage the participants.

JOI invested in training, supervision and purchase of equipment, and expects the minimal workshop fees to cover ongoing expenses. JOI is proud to offer this powerful new approach to better the quality of life for many people in need.

Introducing Dr. Menaker

Dr. David Menaker studied medicine in Russia and received his master's degree in biotechnology from Hebrew University and his PhD in medical science from Hadassah University Medical Center at Ein Kerem. While researching his doctoral thesis on the nervous system, he was fascinated by the connection between thought and physiological processes, which brought him to study cognitive-behavioral psychology and biofeedback.

New Computer Center in Netanya

The **Allan S. Bisk Computer Center** in Netanya has been established as a memorial to JOI's founding Board member by his wife, **Regina Bisk**. Equipped with 18 state-of-the-art computers and accessories, this center will provide educational opportunity for hundreds of underprivileged youth for years to come.



Overall, the recession has stifled the growth of JOI's extensive network of computer, science, library, English and other educational centers. JOI now operates 355 school computers throughout Israel. There is a dire need to establish another new computer center in a Petach Tikva high school. An \$18,000 sponsorship will upgrade the education of thousands of students over the projected lifetime of the equipment.

Adding JOI To The Wedding



There's no joy like a wedding. But for some struggling, young immigrant couples, the prospect of making a celebration and setting up house without family support is a daunting one. JOI steps in with extra financial aid to make dozens of weddings much happier.

Like the wedding we celebrated with Vika and Eliezer, immigrants from Moscow and Ukraine. Eliezer lost his father at a young age, and Vika was orphaned from both her parents. Her mother died of diabetes, a disease that Vika also suffers from. Together they hope to build a new life in Israel, where Eliezer is studying accounting. JOI's assistance came with the blessings of all our supporters for a hearty "Mazel tov!" to the new couple.

CONGRATULATIONS to Board and Staff Members

To **Stephen and Yitti Bisk** and Board member **Regina Bisk** on the marriage of their son and grandson, Moshe Ahron, to Malkie Kosman

To founding Board member, legal counsel and host of JOI's NY office, **Yisroel Schulman** on his marriage to Rivka Rothschild

To **Maurice and Heather Dayan** on the bar mitzvah of their son, Dennis



Bar mitzvah of Dennis Dayan at The Wall, Jerusalem

Announcing Our New Events Committee

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Knesset Committee Applauds Night Owls

At an Israeli Knesset (parliament) committee hearing on November 16, a thumbs-up was clearly given to Night Owls for its response to the immigrant youth crisis, while a finger of blame was pointed at government ministries that haven't prioritized intervention and prevention activities.

The Knesset Committee on Immigration and Absorption heard the research findings of Dr. Lyuba Sereda, director of the government-sponsored study of Night Owls, in a hearing room packed with high-ranking representatives from the government, municipalities, police and youth-advocacy organizations.

Dr. Sereda noted that Night Owls' target population of 13- to 18-year-olds is not fully defined as "at-risk," yet it meets 7 of 10 criteria for delinquency and is therefore likely to decline to delinquency. Yet the government doesn't support preventative measures, and responds only after the child falls into delinquency.

Dr. Sereda also presented evidence of the effectiveness of Night Owls' model of employing significant adults to connect and offer constructive activity to these youth.

Roman Peres, Deputy Mayor of Yokneam, testified that Night Owls saved 30 to 40 youth from slipping into at-risk behavior after only six months of operation. Slava Belenky, Night Owls' project director in Migdal HaEmek, attested to how Night Owls is saving 150 youth there.

The evidence prompted committee members to unanimously agree to the critical need for sending trained youth-counselors to work on the streets, at night, throughout Israel. In its decision, the committee called upon the government and relevant ministries to take responsibility for the fate of immigrant youth sliding to delinquency and to provide

“My counselor is like a friend. It's easy to speak to him about all kinds of things. Sometimes you hear the advice he gives to others and you take it to heart too. It helps you live on a higher level.”

– Elena, age 15

“Before I connected with the project, I was a heavy smoker. The counselor brought me articles about smoking and got me involved in activities. Recently I began to be interested, and I even stopped smoking because of it.”

– Olga, age 17

Night Owls Exceeds All Expectations *(continued from front page)*

Preventative Success

The study demonstrates that Night Owls is uniquely effective in halting and even preventing these phenomena among the target population. Ninety-six percent of the teens said that Night Owls effected a positive change in their lives. The majority of youth now skips school less often, is less drawn to violence, has developed better relationships with their parents, and feels more connected to their city, all due to Night Owls' intervention. Furthermore, Night Owls counselors report a 74% decline in new police records among the youth.

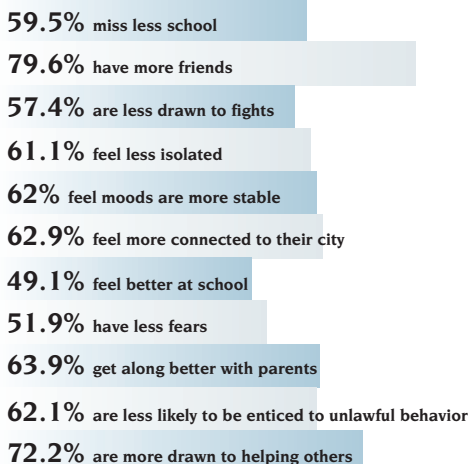
Each counselor acts as a role model and mentor for hundreds of immigrant teens. Counselors spend the nighttime hours talking to the teens on their own turf, relating to their needs, and coordinating recreational activities. Night Owls' current team of 25 counselors in 14 cities maintains a strong relationship with over 2500 youth.

The study demonstrated that the more contact between the counselor and the youth, the more positive change resulted. "The responses showed a willingness on the part of youth to turn to the counselors regarding issues relating to free time and relationships," reports Dr. Sereda. "To a great degree, the youth see the counselors as a partner and an authority figure in their lives."

The presence of a Night Owls activity center in each city was particularly helpful for younger teens, according to the research, as it keeps them off the street and prevents problems before they occur. But the interactions on the street are the most essential. "The counselors are successful at being there where and when the teens need them," Dr. Sereda observes. "They are successful in encouraging and creating change in the feelings and actions of each youth."

Teens Agree: Night Owls Helps Them Cope

Youth responses regarding the effect of Night Owls:



52.7% reported a positive change in at least 10 areas
83.3% reported a positive change in at least 5 areas



“When I went to school, all I heard was 'Eww, Russians!' I think that in Israel, they don't like Russians. We Russians have to protect each other.”

– Boris, age 16

Unlimited Potential

The study recommends additional supervision and financial stability to fully realize Night Owls' potential. Funding is urgently needed to strengthen and extend the project to many more cities.

The ones who have the most at stake in Night Owls' success are the teens themselves. Without Night Owls, fully 56.8% of participants admitted that they would regress to a worse situation, continuing the slide into delinquency. "This is a very high response and a very significant number," Dr. Sereda observes. "The project has proven itself to be effective and full of potential."



IN APPRECIATION

JOI gratefully acknowledges the following contributors whose generous donations have reached us by November 15, 2009. We are most grateful to all our donors and we take this opportunity to thank them.

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Your gift can sponsor one or more of the following programs:

Night Owls

- \$1,000 will support nighttime youth street counselors for a month
- \$12,000 will support nighttime youth street counselors for a year

JOI Educational Centers

- \$125 will provide educational enrichment for a child for a month
- \$350 will purchase a shelf of library books
- \$1,000 will purchase a computer with software
- \$2,500 will purchase a bookcase of library books
- \$15,000 will create a computer or science center

Personal and Career Training

- \$500 will sponsor a course at JOI's Institute for Personal Development (IPD)
- \$1,200 will subsidize a professional career-training course

Counseling Services

- \$250 will subsidize 10 sessions of marital counseling
- \$500 will subsidize a marriage or parenting enhancement workshop

Senior and Emergency Support

- \$75 will keep a person or couple afloat in a time of crisis
- \$180 will feed an elderly couple for a month
- \$750 will fund six months of an activity group at a seniors' club
- \$1,000 will extend Project LifeLine, critical grants to the most needy, to a city for one month
- \$12,000 will bring Project LifeLine to a city for a year

JOI Camps

- \$100 will sponsor a child for a 3-week day camp
- \$1,000 will sponsor an entire bunk

Jewish Continuity

- \$120 a month will sponsor a weekly Jewish lecture series
- \$1,000 will sponsor the production and airing of one Russian-language Jewish educational program on national TV

