

A SCOUT TROOP IN A JUVENILE PRISON

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A routine feature at the Ofek Juvenile Maximum Security Prison is its scout troop. Sentenced offenders and detainees both take part and the troop is a regular unit of Tzofim – the Israel Scouts movement.

Ofek houses 240 male inmates, up to 18 years of age, all placed there by a juvenile court, roughly two-thirds convicted youth and one-third detainees, and equally divided between Jews and non-Jews. Twenty-eight percent of the convicted juveniles have been sentenced for violent crimes, 24% for illegal residence in Israel, 23% for

property offenses, 10% for a sex offense, 6% for drugs, and the remaining 9% for a range of other criminal acts. The recidivism rate is 38%. Eighty-five percent of the inmates participate in schooling programs, 10% are gainfully employed and only the remaining 5%, representing a very high level of dangerousness, are kept in their cells. The prison, which is divided into four wings of varying levels of openness, incorporates education and therapy spaces designed to meet the special needs of its young inmates.



The scout troop — the brain-child of Tel Aviv University's Dr. Miriam Golan — has been active since 2004. Dr. Golan's idea was that activities enjoyed by 'normal' kids on the outside should be brought within the walls for imprisoned kids also to taste and experience. The Scout Movement, worldwide and apolitical, possesses a universe of content which communicates universal social and human values through challenging activities that generate strong experiences and allow youngsters to express their temperament, and which also encourage teamwork and goal-achievement.

Once a week the youths put on their scout uniforms and gather in a designated place, where they engage in scouting activities, hold discussions on a range of topics, and also undertake a variety of group tasks of benefit to their community, both to the



wings in which they live and to the prison community as a whole. Extremely important is the fact that from time to time scouts from 'the outside' come to Ofek for joint activities with the scouts inside. The resultant dynamic interaction and common language give the inmates



a strong sense of togetherness with the 'outsiders'. More rarely, the inmate scouts go outside the walls for activities, such as summer camp.

All told, this imprisoned scout troop improves the atmosphere of the whole facility, brings elements of 'normality' into the prison routine and provides the scout inmates a degree of corrective emotional experience, which prepares them for release by supporting their self-confidence and the belief that they have it in them to achieve positive goals.

