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ISRAELI ENTREPRENEURS FIXING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

With the publication of Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics most recent reports, Israeli media reported extensively about the gaps between the peripheral communities and the privileged municipalities in Israel. Public discourse has focused on the gaps in the field of education as the primary area of concern. Not only are a significant percentage of youth being locked into an unfair cycle of poverty, but the nation's prospering economy, which so heavily relies on human talent, is being compromised.

The Darca schools network was established in 2010 aiming to strengthen schools in underserved communities and level the playing field. A quick glimpse at the organization's website shows very strong and respectable leadership; prominent philanthropic partners Youth Renewal Fund, Azrieli Foundation, Adelis Foundation, the Rashi Foundation and KIAH-Alliance are involved and Darca's senior management team bring with them decades of excellence in the field.

Darca breathed new competition into what was a stagnant education industry. It is the sole school network operating exclusively in Israel's geosocial periphery, providing their schools' leadership with valuable resources and working hand-in-hand with them, allowing them to dream and do what they do best. Their students benefit from unique cutting-edge pedagogical innovation empowering them with the tools they need to succeed in the 21st century. This has all been made possible with the managerial mentoring as well as the strategic and financial support received from several significant partners.

As Mr. Jimmy Pinto, chairman of Darca's board and founder of the Israeli subsidiary of the Edmond de Rothschild banking group, points out:

"It has been truly encouraging along the years to see major philanthropic foundations and individuals recognize the unique success Darca is driving in underserved communities, and then enthusiastically committing significant visionary guidance and financial resources to this cause."

These strong partnerships are what make Darca's final ingredient of success possible. Darca, in contrast to all of its competitors, as a declared policy, does not take any of the state financing it receives for overhead. On the contrary, 100% of state financing is designated for the schools and philanthropic funds supplement each school's budget with an additional 15%.



Today, Darca has grown to manage forty educational institutions across all of Israel, including in cities such as Yerucham, Dimona, Kiryat Malachi, Gedera, Lod, Yarka, Julis and Kiryat Shmona. Over 21,000 students are benefitting from Darca's enriched education preparing them to succeed at every step of their journey after high school, whether in the IDF, university or in their professional careers.

The network has plenty of numerical data to back-up its success. According to statistics published by the Ministry of Education (MoE), Darca has established itself as Israel's leading school network for three years running. This ranking reflects Darca's network-wide university matriculation eligibility rate of 89%, significantly higher than the national average of 58%. It also reflects that over one-third of Darca's schools received top-rank recognition by the MoE, and among many other impressive headlines, that the network achieved the lowest high school dropout rates.

These results have not only attracted the close attention of Israeli media and philanthropic foundations. Prominent Israeli entrepreneurs and businesspersons have been partnering with Darca in recent years as private benefactors, aligning themselves with Darca's cause. In light of this strong support, Darca established the exclusive **Chairmen Circle**, partnering charitable Israeli leaders with a Darca school. **Yariv Gilat**, an Israeli investor and financial technology entrepreneur, committed significant resources to Darca as Chairman of the Menachem Begin High School in Gedera. **Dov Moran**, best-known for inventing the USB memory stick and today a successful Hi-Tech investor, was moved by Darca's story and for several years has been Chairman of the Nachala Ulpana High School in Elad. **Robert Antokol**, co-founder of the Israel-based company Playtika Ltd. which was sold for \$4.4 billion in 2016, supported the Gymansia Darca High School in Kiryat Malachi both charitably and by partnering the school's students with hi-tech startup companies for valuable hands-on exposure.

"Chairmen are adding a whole new layer of meaning, serving as a source of inspiration to students and school administrators alike," says Darca's CEO Dr. Gil Pereg, "their commitment to the schools, and their efforts to visit them, share insights and motivate the students, has been deeply valuable. We have all been inspired by the rapidly growing commitment and sense of responsibility Israel's prominent entrepreneurs have shown towards this cause. I want to take this opportunity to express our gratitude, and invite like-minded successful Israeli business leaders to join this exceptional group." ■