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ZIVIA (Vice Principal) **SHARONA** (Science Teacher)

Hodayot, Israel

Hodayot is a Youth Village located in northern Israel, about 20 minutes outside of Tiveria. World ORT Kadima Mada owns and operates the school. The student body shares two main characteristics: they were referred here as a result of not being able to function within the traditional educational system in Israel; almost all of our students come from families that face a vast number of challenges, including single parent households, families where the parents are no longer living or no longer involved in their child's life, and families who are not able to support their children financially.

Our students arrive while dealing with significant educational gaps, emotional gaps, and many of them are illiterate. Some of our students have extensive life experience, but they have not received a formal education. They have dropped out of school before coming here, or some of them never attended school at all. Others have bounced around from school to school.

Hodayot has a strong reputation for providing students with the boost they need. For many of our students, this is the first time in their lives that they have experienced a normative, healthy school environment. We often say that Hodayot is the last stop for these children—the final opportunity to receive a normative education in a healthy environment.

How do we create the change that these students need? We recognize that every child needs a substantial adult in their lives. Every child needs an adult that believes in them—and that is exactly what we do.

The number of children in the classroom is proportionately much smaller than the national average. Our class sizes range from nine students to 15 per

class, which is highly unusual for Israeli high schools (the national average is more than 30 per class). We limit class size in order to provide critical individualized attention and personalized lesson plans for our students.

In Israel, the typical length of a high school class is 45 minutes, and students see many teachers throughout the day. Here, our students study for 90-minute sessions and stay with the same teacher for much of the day. We are able to convey an emotional investment in our students through the strong bonds we create with our students.

Our school is a microcosm of Israeli society. We have a diverse student body, which includes a lot of olim (new immigrants) arriving from the former Soviet Union who are not Jewish. Here we have students who are Muslim, students who are Christian and students who are Jewish. At Hodayot, all religions are respected and we celebrate holidays from all cultures. Throughout it all, we work to preserve an Israeli identity.

We have 230 students at Hodayot. Each of them is an individual, and we tailor our educational services for each of them. Thanks to generous ORT supporters, we have the Yudelson Sulam Empowerment Center, which provides much needed art therapy, the Panovka Family Auditorium and a new culinary classroom environment designed to provide a new career path for students who are struggling academically. We invest in our students, and as a result, they flourish.