

The Niot Project

Helping Israeli Teens with
Learning Differences
Succeed in School



The Niot Project was launched in 2012 by the Society for Advancement of Education, Jerusalem (SAE) at the request of the Watzman family and operates with the generous support of Niot's many friends and the following partners:



Ministry of Education

The Reggi Marder
Foundation

The Maor
Foundation





The Niot Project

The Niot Project is a comprehensive, educational model dedicated to enabling students (ages 13-18), parents, and school staff to work together effectively to improve the scholastic performance and emotional resilience of teens with learning differences. Currently operating in Israeli high schools and residential care campuses affiliated with the Society for Advancement of Education in Jerusalem (SAE), the Niot Project makes maximal use of government sponsored services and offers additional support services through philanthropy.

The Niot Project honors the life and learning accomplishments of Niot Watzman, z"l

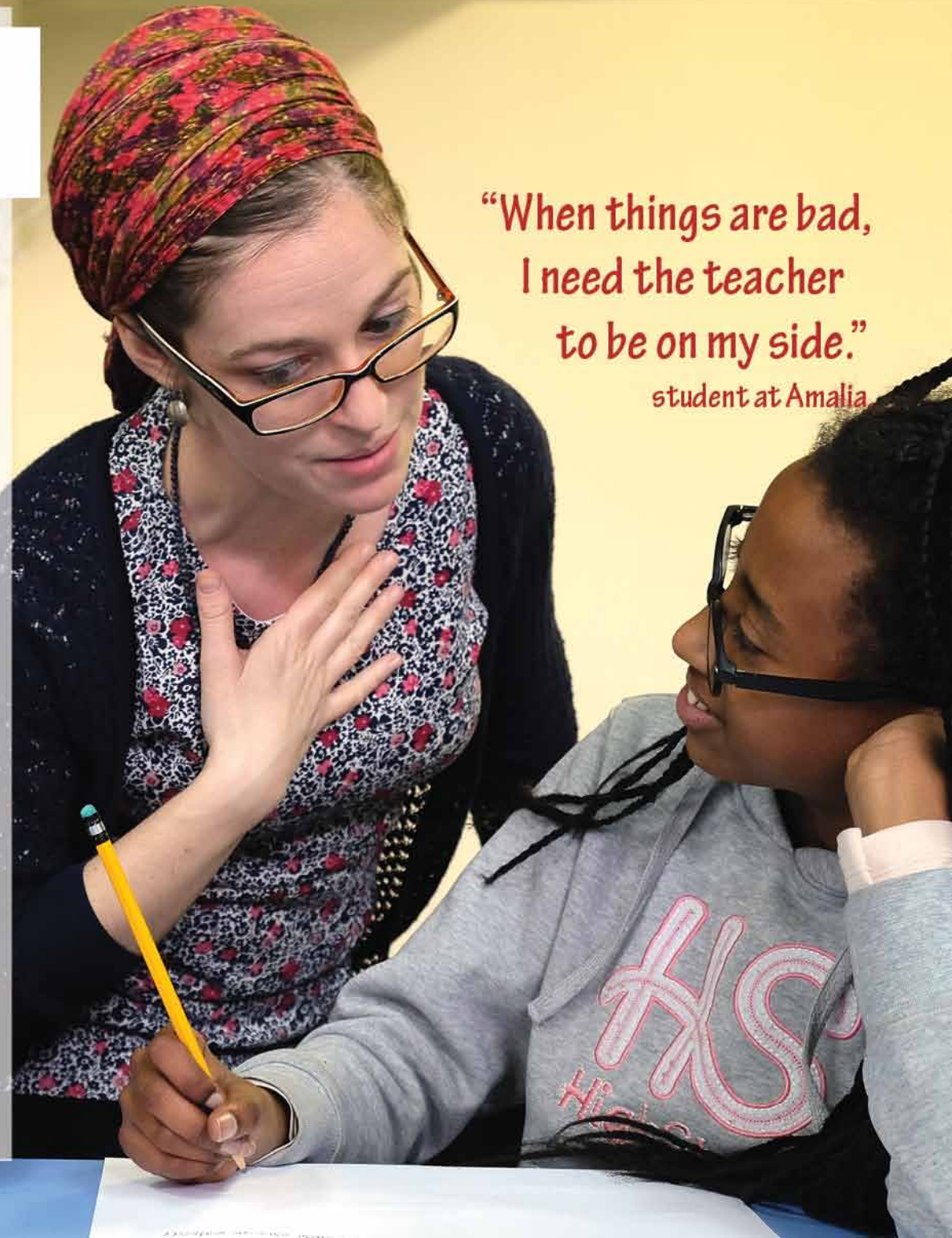
For teens with learning differences, getting the right help is difficult and discouraging.

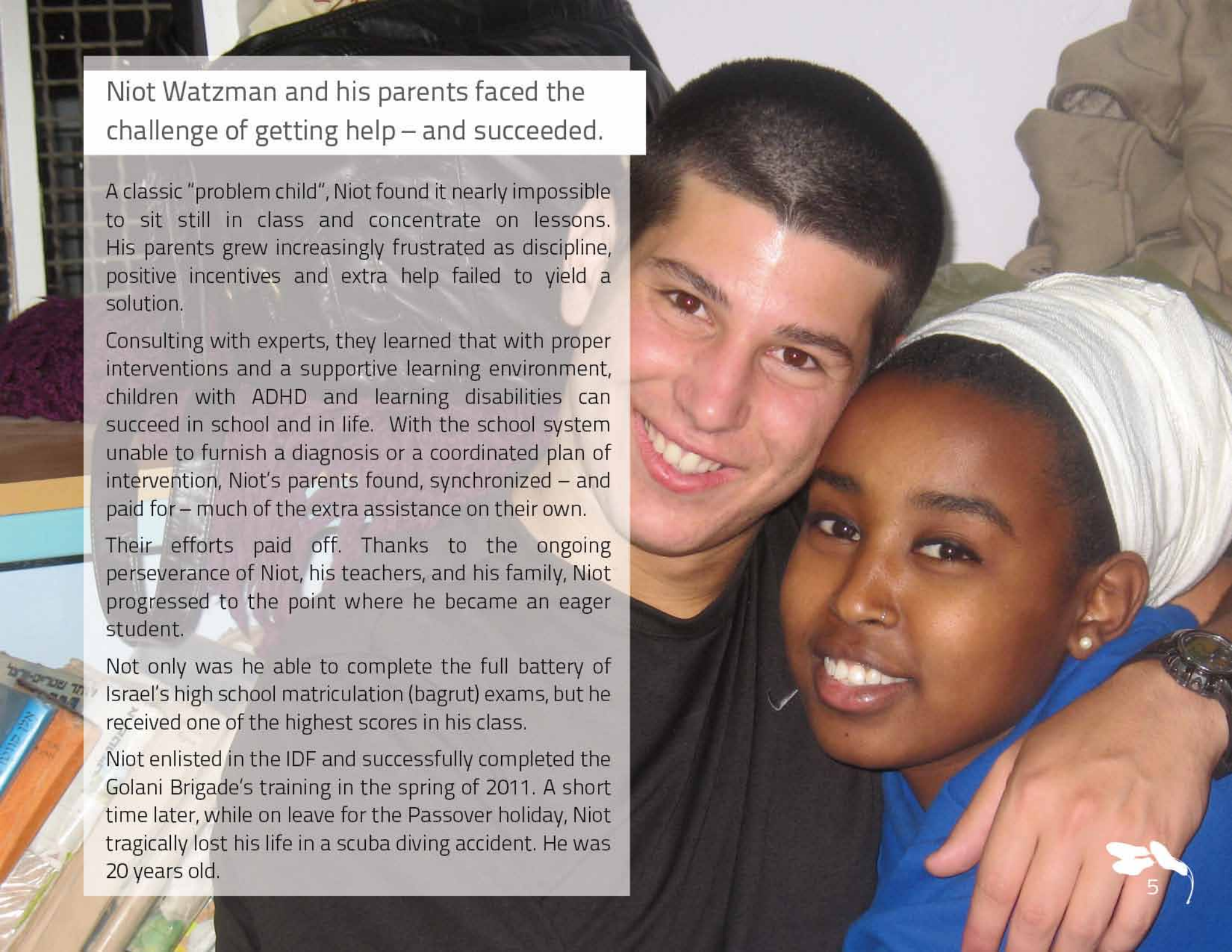
Israel's educational system can be very unfriendly to teens with learning differences – and their parents. It is difficult to track down the information, interventions and support services that are critical to helping students get ahead. Israel's Ministry of Education does not subsidize diagnostic testing for junior high school and high school students, counseling for their parents, or professional guidance for their teachers. As a result, parents of these teens must seek out and fund these services privately. This is extremely difficult, or even impossible, for parents with limited time, awareness, patience and financial resources.

Furthermore, most schools do not have a coordinated approach to synchronizing the valuable resources that are provided by the government specifically for students with learning differences. The families of these teenagers must thus seek out, request, and organize these resources on their own – which often means that professional support services are used partially or ineffectively.

**“When things are bad,
I need the teacher
to be on my side.”**

student at Amalia





Niot Watzman and his parents faced the challenge of getting help – and succeeded.

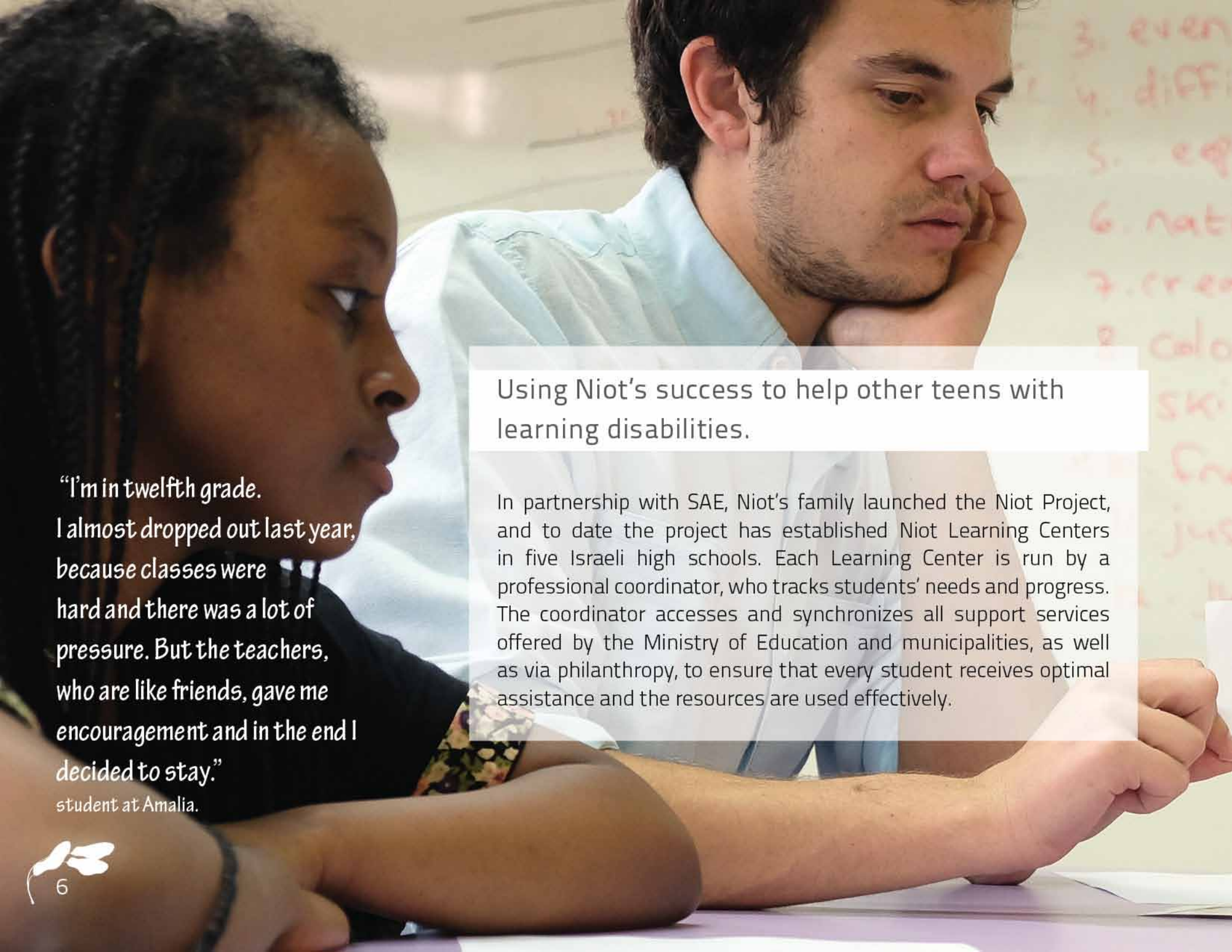
A classic “problem child”, Niot found it nearly impossible to sit still in class and concentrate on lessons. His parents grew increasingly frustrated as discipline, positive incentives and extra help failed to yield a solution.

Consulting with experts, they learned that with proper interventions and a supportive learning environment, children with ADHD and learning disabilities can succeed in school and in life. With the school system unable to furnish a diagnosis or a coordinated plan of intervention, Niot’s parents found, synchronized – and paid for – much of the extra assistance on their own.

Their efforts paid off. Thanks to the ongoing perseverance of Niot, his teachers, and his family, Niot progressed to the point where he became an eager student.

Not only was he able to complete the full battery of Israel’s high school matriculation (bagrut) exams, but he received one of the highest scores in his class.

Niot enlisted in the IDF and successfully completed the Golani Brigade’s training in the spring of 2011. A short time later, while on leave for the Passover holiday, Niot tragically lost his life in a scuba diving accident. He was 20 years old.



“I’m in twelfth grade. I almost dropped out last year, because classes were hard and there was a lot of pressure. But the teachers, who are like friends, gave me encouragement and in the end I decided to stay.”

student at Amalia.

Using Niot’s success to help other teens with learning disabilities.

In partnership with SAE, Niot’s family launched the Niot Project, and to date the project has established Niot Learning Centers in five Israeli high schools. Each Learning Center is run by a professional coordinator, who tracks students’ needs and progress. The coordinator accesses and synchronizes all support services offered by the Ministry of Education and municipalities, as well as via philanthropy, to ensure that every student receives optimal assistance and the resources are used effectively.

The Niot Project Aims to:

- Improve the overall scholastic performance and emotional resilience of students with learning difficulties and disabilities;
- Reduce the stress and financial strain on families by subsidizing diagnostic testing, providing all necessary interventions, while keeping parents involved and informed;
- Use professional interventions to increase the rates at which teenagers with learning differences receive high-level high school diplomas, which are key to enabling them to perform meaningful service in the IDF, attend university, and pursue fulfilling careers;
- Enable comprehensive assistance by providing teachers with skills and knowledge that will enable them to better understand students with learning differences, and create an environment - in the classrooms and in the school as a whole - in which learning-challenged students can thrive alongside their peers;
- Fine-tune an effective educational model that can be adopted by other junior high and high schools in Israel.



How the Niot Project Works

Niot's personal experience now benefits students with similar stories:

1. Niot Learning Centers and Coordinators

The Niot Project has placed learning differences coordinators at five schools. These professionals lead comprehensive work in Niot Learning Centers, which serve as the hub from which all support and training services are offered to teachers and students.

At each school, the coordinator organizes all information relating to available resources, and works to ensure the optimal use of all resources and responses that are available from the Ministry of Education and through philanthropy.

2. Diagnosis of Learning Disorders

The Niot Project subsidizes learning evaluations. These are carried out by carefully chosen registered diagnosticians. Niot Learning Coordinators then use this diagnostic information in order to fashion a tailored intervention plan for each student. In schools where special-needs students have already been diagnosed, this allocation is used to provide learning strategies training for small groups of students.



A photograph of a Learning Coordinator, a woman with long dark hair wearing a black top, pointing with a black marker at a smartphone held by a student. The student, a young woman with dark hair wearing a grey hoodie, is looking down at the phone. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Role of the Niot Learning Coordinators

- Map the needs of each student, through evaluation and classroom observation;
- Synchronize and assign a broad range of group and individual tutoring hours carried out by teachers, university students and other providers;
- Ensure that tutoring hours are effective by closely monitoring student progress and, when necessary, modifying interventions before unsuccessful situations cause students to lose motivation;
- Serve as a liaison and advocate for each student in relation to classroom teachers and other authority figures;
- Track subjects learned by students, their attendance, lateness and homework - to ensure accurate flow of information between teachers and students;
- Mentor teachers and serves as a "go-to" person for students;
- Participate in all pedagogic meetings and decision-making related to students with learning issues.

"It's enough for me that a girl comes up to me with a sparkle in her eyes and says, 'I knew what to do on the test!'"

Learning Coordinator at Dror



The Niot Project at a Glance - 2015

Niot Project Component	Dror High School	Amalia HS & Residence	Boyar HS & Residence	Reut School	Ein Carmit Residence	Steinberg Residence	ORT Netanya	Kfar Adumim	Hachmey Lev	Total
Niot learning center to be established	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	5
Total students at school	220	300	900	250	130	160	110	44	50	2,164
Teacher-student ratio	1:25	1:25	1:35	1:25	1:20-35	1:35	1:35	1:31	1:25	Av. 1:30
Percentage of students with learning differences	50%	60%	30%	40%	80%	60%	60%	30%	15%	Av. 47%
Total students assisted at Niot center	101	111	115	75	88	0	0	0	0	490
Weekly hours provided by coordinator	8	7	8	6	10	7	10	-	-	Av. 8 hr
Students receiving additional tutoring	100	110	190	75	130	160	110	20	10	905
Didactic evaluations provided	8	9	8	4	10	8	0	0	7	54
Staff members trained	9	23	38	25	13	0	0	0	0	108
Hidden Sparks Year 1	2014	2014	2015	2015	2015	-	-	2016	2016	7
Matriculation rate	85%	80%	90%	80%	83%	85%	85%	-	-	Av. 84%

Measurable Success and Pragmatic Goals

The Niot Project was evaluated by Yuval Piurko, a social psychologist from the Zofnat Institute for Organizational Consulting, Development and Research. Preliminary findings from Yuval's report included:

- More than half of participating students improved their attendance and grades in core subjects. The greatest improvement was seen in mathematics.
- Learning coordinators have accessed resources that were previously unexploited.
- Coordination with teachers is critical to the success of all interventions.

Further, the evaluation determined that:

- The learning coordinators currently do their jobs on a part-time basis, in combination with other teaching and administrative responsibilities. The demands of the Niot Project require full-time positions.
- The availability of well-equipped and structured learning spaces is vital to maximizing the impact of all interventions.

The Niot Project has adopted these recommendations.



Yuval Piurko - Niot Project Evaluator

The Future: Niot Learning Centers in Each School

In order to ensure optimum assistance and opportunities for every teenager in participating schools, the Niot Project aims to establish a dedicated Learning Center in five SAE schools, each with a full-time coordinator and additional tutoring hours to be utilized at the coordinator's discretion.

Each Learning Center will be a dedicated physical space, specially designed to make the most out of every service available for students with learning difficulties. According to specifically defined needs in each school, the Niot Project will provide the following services:

- Diagnosis of Learning Disorders – Subsidized diagnostic testing that qualifies students for therapeutic and emotional support services.
- Remedial Teaching – Helping students develop effective learning methods and skills for managing test anxiety.
- Tutoring Hours – Extra hours above tutoring hours provided by the school.
- Personal Coaching – Ten-session course in effectively setting and meeting personal goals.
- Self-Advocacy Training – Group meetings for improving self-esteem, confidence and ability to self-advocate.
- Art and Drama Therapy – For students with acute emotional needs.
- Staff Training – Workshops for staff in SAE residential care facilities.



“Hidden Sparks” –

Training teachers to be more effective

Hidden Sparks is a school-based teacher training and coaching initiative project that builds a cadre of professional teachers that are equipped with the tools and teaching strategies to better understand and teach children with social, emotional, and learning differences.

The model was founded in the United States of America in 2005, with the goal of increasing the capacity of Jewish day schools to address the varied needs of children with learning difficulties, particularly children whose struggles might otherwise elude identification.

Hidden Sparks has partnered with the Society for Advancement of Education and the Niot Project in order to successfully implement the model in Israel.

Objectives

- Implement the Hidden Sparks educational model in three Israeli schools in 2014-15 (Dror, Amalia and Maanit High Schools), and in eight high schools by 2016-17.
- Evaluate the implementation in order to refine and optimize the model so that it can be replicated.

Program Roles

External Coaches: There is one external coach per school and the coach works with six teachers. The external coach will provide coaching one full day each week (or its equivalent) for 38 weeks.

Internal Coaches: Internal Coaches are members of the school faculty who are trained to be a resident Hidden Sparks coach. Each works with one teacher in the school.

Hidden Sparks Activities

1. **Summer Training:** Each year, Hidden Sparks will provide the central training workshop in the summer before the school year opens. It will be attended by members of the school administration and teaching staff and by professionals who will function as either internal or external coaches. Approximately 10 teachers per school will receive coaching each year and depending on the size of the school, in three to five years all the teachers in the school will be able to use the Hidden Sparks method. This summer workshop will be attended by approximately 30 professionals each summer.
2. **Year-Round Classroom Coaching:** Each coach observes the teacher in the classroom once a week and then meets with the teacher to provide feedback. Additionally, coaches provide a one-hour teacher training session once a month using materials that have been adapted for Israeli schools by Claire Wurtzel and Roxana Neiman.
3. **New Internal Coaches:** At the end of the year, teachers who were observed to be effective in implementing the Hidden Sparks technique will have the option to be trained and will serve as internal coaches for their school.
4. **Evaluation:** The Hidden Sparks-SAE partnership will retain services from the Zofnat Institute for Organizational Consulting, Development and Research in order to evaluate the impact of this pilot in the schools. Zofnat was founded in 1985 by Dr. Yisrael Katz.



Niot Project Leadership

Eden Israeli, SAE Learning Differences Coordinator, has over 15 years of experience in treating learning disabilities. She holds a BA in Psychology and an MA in Special Education from the Hebrew University, and certified at Bar Ilan University to conduct didactic evaluations and Applied Behavior Analysis.

Haim Watzman, Head of Niot Project Steering Committee, was born in Cleveland, grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, and graduated from Duke University. After his college studies, he went to Israel to volunteer in a disadvantaged community for a year - a year that turned into a lifetime. In addition to working as a translator of Hebrew books into English, Haim is the author of two books of his own, *Company C: An American's Life as a Citizen-Soldier in Israel* and *A Crack in the Earth: A Journey Up Israel's Rift Valley*. He also writes the monthly "Necessary Stories" for The Jerusalem Report.

Haim is married to Ilana. Their eldest daughter, Mizmor, is an animator; eldest son Asor is a student and officer in the IDF and is married to Adi, also a student. Niot died in April 2011 during his service in the Golani Brigade; youngest daughter Misgav is now serving in the Caracal infantry battalion.

Haim's website is: www.southjerusalem.com.



Eden Israeli- SAE Learning Differences Coordinator



Help youth with learning differences to achieve excellent grades at school

To make a tax deductible donation from the USA please use this tear-off sheet to earmark your gift to the Niot Project and send it by mail, together with a check made out to **'PEF Israel Endowment Funds, Inc.'** to the following address:

PEF Israel Endowment Funds, Inc.

630 Third Avenue, 15th floor

New York, NY 10017

USA

Tax Deductible Donation to the Niot Project

Dear PEF-Israeli Endowment Funds, Inc.

Please find enclosed my contribution of \$_____ to registered Israeli non-profit organization **The Society for Advancement of Education-Jerusalem (SAE)** with registration number 58-002811-6.

I would like to designate my gift to the 'Niot Project: Helping youth with learning differences achieve excellence'.

Please mail my US tax receipt to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

For personal assistance, please contact Daniel Hasson at danielh@kidum-edu.org.il



Supporting the Niot Project from Israel

Tax deductible donations in shekels may be made by writing a check to the Society for the Advancement of Education, Jerusalem (SAE) and mailing it, with a cover note to:

The Society for the Advancement of Education,
Jerusalem

PO Box 16252

Jerusalem 91162

Alternatively, tax deductible donations can be made with a secure credit card transaction via PayPal at the following web address:

<http://www.kidum-edu.org.il/en/donate1>

About the Society for the Advancement of Education – Jerusalem (SAE)

Mission

SAE is a non-profit organization which uses education to empower youth from disadvantaged communities in Israel to attain distinction in their social, scholastic and leadership endeavors.

Need

As Israeli society polarizes in response to local and global economic trends, SAE's mission has become more pertinent than ever before. The number of children growing up in poverty and broken homes is rising. Many have high academic aptitudes and display no significant behavioral problems – and thus hold the key to lifting themselves out of the cycle of poverty. According to independent research conducted by the Henrietta Szold Institute, over 80% of SAE youth come from families that survive on a monthly income of \$1,300 or less. These children need access to top quality schools and a supportive environment, so that they can attain their full potential in all realms of life.

Activities

Over the past 50 years, SAE has established 10 high schools and residential education campuses in Jerusalem, Kfar Saba and Netanya, reaching over 2,300 youth from Israel's geographic and economic periphery and urban centers.

SAE's Naale Elite Academy, which enables Jewish teens from 42 countries to complete their high school matriculation in Israel, has just celebrated 20 years since its founding, and boasts 13,000 graduates to date.

SAE's Steering Center for Ethiopian Immigrants is the largest national project of its kind, providing daily educational and social support for over 10,000 Ethiopian-Israeli children under the age of 18.



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Contact information

Haim Watzman

Niot Project Steering Committee

Email: hwatzman@gmail.com

Mobile: +972-544-612-939

Daniel Hasson

Resource Development

Email: danielh@kidum-edu.org.il

Mobile: +972-522-637-548

www.kidum-edu.org.il/en/special-projects/niot

