

NEW
PROFILE

Movement for the Demilitarization of Israeli Society

Narrative Report 2016

A Report on New Profile's Activities in 2016

Dear supporters of New Profile,

New Profile would like to update you, our valued friends and supporters, on our work, and the accomplishments and challenges we faced in 2016. In 2016, we saw some of the ugliest instincts and political forces gain prominence around the world, aided by people's fear and the rhetoric of security. In Israel, many of these trends have been afoot for decades. Times like these, in our view, show the importance of constant, ongoing work to challenge the underlying forces that enable such a social and political environment. It is to this aim that we continue to dedicate our efforts. This report is a chance to learn about the continuing efforts of New Profile to decrease militarism in Israeli society.

Militarism as an ideology glorifies the military and participation in it, and dominates civil society and the lives of people. Israeli militarism is also embedded and built on the continued marginalization and oppression of certain groups of people based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender. While Israel may promote mandatory military service for all as the "great equalizer", in reality, the military reinforces existing discrimination and marginalization.

Based on our feminist, anti-militarist analysis, one of the most significant ways to demilitarize Israel is by assisting Israelis in their difficulties when they encounter militarism, the military and its bureaucracy. In the past couple of years, we in New Profile have chosen to expand our discourse and work on resistance to militarism to include the connection between race, gender, color and socio-economic discrimination and oppression, and militarism. We believe in the importance of supporting all refusers to perform military service, not just public political or conscientious

refusers, who often come from privileged backgrounds and have a support network among activists which other refusers often lack.

New Profile is taking part in the critical discussion about the way the refusal movement be made open to non-privileged populations in Israel, who often suffer the most from military service. We see this as an important step to social change, which needs to include all levels of society – especially the silenced, underprivileged ones. New Profile has seen that the refusal of an individual can help the refusal process of others; for example, in 2016 many people got in contact with our Counseling Network asking for information about the various ways to get an exemption, after hearing about New Profile from Tair Kaminer, a conscientious objector who was jailed for 155 days. The knowledge New Profile acquires about the refusal process has been collected and amalgamated from the experiences of hundreds of non-declared refusers, public refusers, and conscientious objectors. This information is used to advise and support the different types of refusers to perform military service.

As a movement, New Profile is organized in a non-hierarchical feminist manner. Therefore, there is no director, and all important decisions are discussed and decided upon by consensus at our monthly general assemblies. Also, staff and key positions have a two-year limit to restrict possible power accumulation by individuals within the movement. As you will see in this report, new people were given the opportunity to be coordinators of New Profile's various programs when previous coordinators finished their two years in this role. This organizational structure is a part of what the New Profile movement is: feminist, anti-militaristic, non-hierarchical, as well as dynamic and constantly growing.

In this report, we would like first to provide a brief background on developments that have directly affected our work in 2016, and then share with you the work of our projects. This year, we have also included the stories of some of the many people New Profile has worked with, as examples of the kinds of difficulties and situations Israelis experience when dealing with the military and its role in Israeli society. We hope these stories show you the human side of New Profile's work and its impact.

Relevant Political Developments and Military Policies

Israeli lawmakers and the Israeli military are interested in maintaining the status quo on military service, and they increasingly adopt new policies in an apparent attempt to limit the effectiveness of organizations critical of the military. New Profile has always tried to be aware of such changes and on how they may affect our work. In 2016 New Profile noticed three different areas where policy changes and institutional practices made our work more difficult.

Ministry of Education

During the past year, Naftali Bennett, Israel's Minister of Education, expressed his very negative opinion about the educational work of organizations critical of Israel's policies towards Palestinians, such as Breaking the Silence (an NGO that collects testimonies of soldiers and ex-soldiers about Israeli atrocities against Palestinians). Teachers who invited Breaking the Silence to their schools were summoned for a hearing in the Ministry. In December 2016, Bennett decided to put an end to Breaking the Silence's access to Israeli education system: explicitly to that end he amended internal ministry regulations, which now forbid representatives of an organization "whose activity challenges the very legitimacy of national institutions" from entering classrooms. These days, a law to a similar effect is being put forward to be legislated in the parliament. This has made teachers and principals fearful of hosting or talking with any organization critical of the government or the military, including New Profile. This is not the first time the Ministry of Education has tried to block critical organizations from entering schools and speaking with students: In 2009 New Profile was subject to such an informal, but highly publicized, directive by the then-Education Minister, Gideon Saar.

Mental Health and the Military

Medical exemption (also known as "Profile 21"), which includes exemption on psychiatric grounds, is among the most common reasons the army exempts or discharges individuals from military service. It is very important to note that this common route to avoid military service arises

in the context of psychological difficulties, mental health crises and intense pressure that individuals are already experiencing when they seek exemption.

The negative effect military service has on a soldier's mental health is not unknown to the military and to many Israelis. For example, the high rate and prevalence of suicide during military service is a long term trend in Israel. In addition, while some soldiers commit suicide, there are many more who experience mental health crises, or contemplate or attempt suicide while performing mandatory military service. Despite the prevalence of suicide, suicide attempts, and mental health crises during military service, exemption on mental health grounds is a difficult and long process, in which the individual is required to manifest symptoms that fit into the army's narrow definitions.

Social Media and the Military

To make the exemption process even more difficult, the army began using social media as a tool to investigate individuals seeking military exemption, checking Facebook profiles and Whatsapp statuses of people who wish to get an exemption on mental health or religion grounds. The use of social media to verify someone's mental health or religiosity can make exemption difficult, as often the military has a set idea of what mental health crises or a religious practice should look like. This trend is decreasing even more the odds of getting an exemption, expanding the ability of the IDF to control and monitor a person's personal life and the civil society. Our Counseling Network is collecting information on the military's use of social media to cast doubt on people's conditions and stories, and is starting to inform people accordingly.

New Profile's Projects in 2016

In 2016 New Profile continued to work on our three main programs: 1) our longest running program - the Counseling Network to assist Israelis in receiving exemption from military service, 2) connecting to marginalized youth through their teachers and social workers in the Reaching Out Project, and 3) challenging Israel's militarized education system with our Education Project. These programs extend our outreach and help those who have no one else to support them in their struggle against the hold of the military in their lives.

The Counseling Network

New Profile's Counseling Network can be best defined as an information network, assisting people seeking exemption from military service. The Network has been the longest running program of New Profile and is at the core of what we do. Our volunteers work hard to listen and advise those who reach out to the Network. Some of the best volunteers in the Network are those who once got help from New Profile with their own exemption. In many cases, our volunteers are confronted with individuals who feel hopeless, in a mental health crisis and desperate. We are extremely thankful to the Network's volunteers who are there to accompany each individual seeking exemption. This year stood out in the number of extremely complicated cases the Counseling Network dealt with, due to continuous toughening of the military regulations regarding exemption. Many of the people reaching out to the Network had mental health crises, physical difficulties and intense family situations. Our Counseling Network volunteers and coordinators have noticed a trend by the military to make mental health exemption process even more difficult and complex, requesting more documentation and certifications.

The Network's coordinators Sharon Diskin, Masha Averbuch, and Shir Berebi who replaced Masha in October 2016, continued to recruit and train volunteers to join the Network, as well as keep the volunteers up-to-date on the changing practices of the IDF regarding military exemptions. We are grateful for the work Nasreen Massarwi, our Legal-Aid coordinator, has done during her time in this role. Replacing her is Gila Barzilay, a human rights lawyer who also works on issues such as refugees and asylum seekers, immigration law, and torture and human trafficking.

Our Network receives calls for help from both Israelis required to enter the military and those who are already serving, are reservists or have deserted. Many of the people the Network directly counsels and who are already in the military, are experiencing difficult family situations, financial troubles or lack a support structure. The people who contact the Network have often already tried numerous ways to get out of the army, and have found that the military is immune to their stories of how bad their situation is and why they *need* to leave the army. Many from this group have spent time in a military prison while trying to get out of the military, before they contacted our Counseling Network.

Overall, the Counseling Network functions very well and assists a large number of people in need. However, since the process of exemption from the military becomes increasingly more complicated and demanding, our counselors need to put much more time and work into accompanying each applicant. Therefore, extra effort has been invested in to expand the number of volunteers in the Counseling Network. More volunteers to share the high number of cases would allow the coordinators to manage the Network more effectively, to inform people in need of the program's existence, and to keep recruiting and training new volunteers. In training sessions, the coordinators focus on providing volunteers with different strategies to help counsel people from a wide range of backgrounds and situations.

The way we can best describe the work of the Counseling Network is through the stories of the people we help and our volunteers. Hereinafter we would like to share some such stories with you (names have been changed).

In fall 2015, **Adi** received her induction orders from the Israeli military. During the following two months she sent 14 emails to the unit charged with pre-conscripts, asking to meet with a military psychiatrist before her enlistment date. In the spring of 2016, Adi met with a civilian psychiatrist to discuss her mental health. On Adi's conscription date, she was jailed for refusing to enlist. She spent six days in jail, two of which in solitary confinement. After her release, she was sent to the hospital and the doctor who saw her recommended she speak to a mental health officer. The following day Adi was jailed again for refusing to enlist. Adi's sister called our Counseling Network for help. Our Legal Aid coordinator met with Adi two times in prison to learn about her situation and counseled her on her options. Shortly afterwards, Adi was exempted from military service.

Amnon was conscripted in the beginning of 2016 to serve at a military base, returning home each day after his service. Shortly after beginning his service, Amnon's parents were arrested and he was left alone to care for his sister who was completing high school. Amnon took a job working in a restaurant to pay for his parents' legal fees and for the family's mortgage, so he and his sister would not become homeless. He would begin his day at 8am serving at the military base, finishing at 2pm and then going to work at the restaurant until 2am, leaving him with three hours to sleep each night.

Amnon requested his military service to be shortened in light of his home situation, and for the next six months, the military continued to request more and more documentation proving his situation. Amnon also met with a civil psychiatrist and then a military one, with no results. With no other option, Amnon deserted. After contacting the Counseling Network, our Legal Aid coordinator submitted an emergency request to the military, asking that Amnon's service be shortened due to the financial and mental difficulties he was experiencing. The request was approved and Amnon was exempted.

A few years ago Noga asked for help from the Counseling Network to get exempted from military service. This year, **Noga** contacted New Profile again, this time asking if she could join the Network. She told us the story behind her renewed contact with New Profile: Noga was traveling on a train when she saw a female soldier in uniform sobbing. Hoping to help, Noga asked her if everything was okay. The young woman opened up to Noga, telling her that things were very difficult in the army and she didn't know how to get out; everything she tried to do to get exempted only lead to punishment. Noga offered her phone number, telling the soldier to call her so she could help. Later, the young soldier and Noga met and tried to come up with a strategy to get her released from military service, but Noga felt like she didn't know what advice to give or how to properly help. She remembered New Profile had helped her with her exemption, and wanted to help others in the same situation she had been in not long ago. She reached out to New Profile in order to get trained in the Counseling Network. After her training with our coordinator, Noga helped the young soldier get an exemption.

The Reaching Out Project

The goals of the Reaching Out Project are to inform young Israelis and those working with at-risk youth of alternatives to military service, to raise their awareness to military service as a risk factor, and to connect them to our Counseling Network and Education Project. The Reaching Out Project contacts schools and other organizations that work with at-risk youth and meets with their staff. The Project began with the objective to help those who are most vulnerable in the military system. Often such groups or individuals do not frame their refusal to serve as a moral or political decision, but nevertheless, their refusal is still a critique of the militarism of Israeli society which continues to marginalize and harm them. The Project has sought creative responses and opportunities to help at-risk youth in danger of conscription and provide support and training to those who work with such populations.

The Project has also attempted to counter the discourse touting the benefits of military service by providing social workers with information about the risk factors associated with military service; often teachers and social workers believe that the military can provide opportunities for at-risk and vulnerable youth and so encourage enlistment. However, young Israelis in the military are at risk of psychological and emotional distress, sexual harassment, imprisonment and suicide, to name a few. Also, individuals from marginalized groups often are given little or no skills or training in the military that could advance them socio-economically after they are discharged; the jobs they are typically assigned while in the army keep them in a low socio-economic status during military service and beyond.

In September 2016 Yuval Yekutieli finished her term as the Reaching Out coordinator. During her work in 2016 she continued to maintain and develop existing connections with teachers and social workers helping at-risk youth. Often the teachers and social workers would ask Yuval for information and advice for the specific cases they came across in their work. Jude Enshin replaced Yuval, and has developed the project in interesting directions:

Jude contacted various organizations and professionals working with at-risk youth all across Israel. One such organization is trying to create alternatives to Israeli youth that hang around downtown areas at night. While this organization is part of the mainstream Israeli society, the professionals working with the youth there recognize and understand that vulnerable youth might be damaged

by military service. In 2016, New Profile and this organization have come together to talk and address the problems facing these youth in relation to military service. Jude also met social workers who help youth from boarding schools to become independent after graduation. These youth often come from broken or poor families, and/or have a criminal record. Jude has provided information for the social workers on how to help youth who decide not to join the army. For many people working with at-risk youth, this is the first time they've encountered the idea of providing options for those who are not going to be drafted. However, many such places and organizations are apprehensive when it comes to defying the social norm of military service and its "benefits".

In 2016, the Reaching Out Project also published a well-received booklet, "Know Your Rights: Options and Procedures for Obtaining an Exemption from Military Service", providing information for individuals about ways to avoid or discontinue military service. The booklet, written in Hebrew, is available online as well as in print, and will be published also in Arabic and in Russian.

The Education Project

The goal of New Profile's Education Project is to counteract the militarism present in the Israeli education system. Israel's education system is highly militarized and is geared toward promoting enlistment after high school. The Education Project facilitates workshops and groups for both students and teachers to discuss the military, military service and militarized education. In 2016, coordinators Gilad Ben David, Elisheva Gavra, and replacing Elisheva, Oshrat Elmaliah, organized and facilitated workshops both in schools and in other venues for youth. Meanwhile, Jana Schmidt and Michal Carmona-Weimann facilitated a teachers' group for educators interested in discussing anti-militaristic teaching and education.

Workshops

The Education Project runs workshops for high-school aged youth to discuss the military's role in their lives and conscription. By law, all citizens and residents of Israel are obliged to serve in the military. Most Israeli high school students are expected to join the army after graduation, and the

last few years of high school are especially geared to facilitating entry into the military. As discussed above, marginalized Jewish-Israeli youth are promised economic and social advancement through military service, however, many youth from marginalized schools experience problems once they enter the army. Such problems might lead to extreme mental distress, and often also to incarceration in military prison. Meanwhile, the promised rewards of enlistment often fail to materialize, as these young people gain few skills or connections that can transfer into economic opportunities later in life.

New Profile facilitated workshops in two schools for marginalized youth in 2016. In the first school, we gave four workshops, with 7–12 students attending in each, and 35 students participating overall. The students attending the workshops came from diverse backgrounds which influenced their perceptions and attitudes towards military service: Jewish-Israeli students talked about feeling they didn't belong in Israeli society because of their experiences with marginalization and discrimination. Meanwhile, students who are refugees from countries such as Eritrea, voiced feelings of rejection, as the IDF doesn't want them, and Palestinian students grappled with their identity and the violence perpetrated towards Palestinians by the IDF. In the second school, New Profile organized two meetings with a classroom of 30 students. While in the first school the workshops were for youth most likely not to enlist, the workshops at this school were done with a regular class.

The workshops were designed to provide information and facilitate discussion about chosen topics related to the military, such as: what mandatory conscription meant to the students, the various forms of discrimination and harassment within the army, expressions of militarism the students saw in Israeli society, and the importance of civil society. The facilitators used different resources such as movies and poems to help create discussion. The Education coordinators also gave the students resources in case they decided to refuse, and introduced the students to the work of New Profile and the Counseling Network. The Education team was encouraged by the overlap between their own activities and the Counseling Network, with 12 students from one school using our Counseling Network in order to receive a military exemption.

In 2016 the Education Project also conducted workshops for youth through organizations such as: Sadaka-Reut (a Jewish-Arab youth movement), Igy (a LGBT+ youth organization) and Mahapach-Taghir (a feminist, Jewish-Arab organisation). In addition, during Passover 2016 the Education

Project participated in a seminar day for undergraduate students hosted by an Israeli multicultural organization. All the participants attending the seminar had served in the army, which opened the conversation up to their personal experiences serving. One woman spoke about her experience of contemplating suicide throughout her service, and another about the sexual harassment she experienced in the army. Many concluded that their military service was a traumatic experience. New Profile received positive feedback from the organizer of the event, saying that she found our workshop very informative. Also coming out of this event was a new volunteer for New Profile's Counselling Network: a seminar participant asked to volunteer to help people who wanted to receive an exemption from the military.

As the 2016/2017 school year began, the Education Project tried to reach to new schools, but did not receive much response, probably due to the Ministry of Education's firm stance against organizations critical of the government being in classrooms. The project's coordinators noticed that every time the Ministry's crackdown on critical organizations talking to students is publicized, schools stop reaching out to New Profile. Sometimes the educators clearly state that they are afraid to host a New Profile workshop because of the possible repercussions from the Ministry. These days we think on new ways to reach youth, also in non-formal educational venues.

Although not a typical situation encountered in New Profile's work, one story we would like to share from our education workshops involves a refugee student from Eritrea, **Mara**. Mara attended all four workshops we conducted in her school, and in a conversation with the facilitators, she expressed her cynicism about the way the military works. She thought serving in the army was the only way to prove her "Israeli-ness", and was deeply frustrated, feeling the army and Israeli society does not want her. Our workshops were the only place for Mara to think in a more critical way about conscription and the military's role in Israeli society and citizenship. This story shows the importance of having a space to allow individuals to critique the sanctity of the Israeli military and the discourses around military service and citizenship/belonging in Israel.

Teachers Group

Our teachers group was created in the beginning of 2016 to provide a space for teachers to meet and discuss anti-militarist education in a militarized school system. The Israeli education system is charged with creating the proper sentiments and practices in young Israelis which encourage military service, support for the IDF, and the military's role in Israeli society. Many teachers are afraid to talk about politics or be political, especially in regard to the role the military has in Israeli education. The teachers in our group, who teach all grade levels, find it challenging to navigate the militarized curriculum and provide alternative ways of teaching in such a system.

New Profile initiated the group so teachers can meet to discuss relevant topics, challenges and teaching practices. To guide the group's discussions, facilitators Jana and Michal provided articles and resources on various topics, with each meeting designed around a specific topic. The group has discussed topics such as militarism in education, feminism in education, political education, marginalized populations, and the politicization of Israeli memorial days (Holocaust Remembrance Day and Fallen Soldiers Memorial Day). For example, the group discussed how the memorial days and the Israeli Independence Day (all happening in the same two weeks) are actively politicized in schools; the schools visibly change weeks before, with Israeli flags and patriotic signs hanging all over school buildings. Those days are the most militarist and political within the school year, and there is hardly any critical discussion among teachers about these issues. The teachers are directed to educate their pupils based on this very structured and one-dimensional narrative: Jews were persecuted, then established a state with an army that will defend them from being killed again. There is no critical discussion about militarism, the occupation and what the IDF did and does to Palestinians.

Since the 2016/2017 school year began, the group is meeting monthly. The facilitators are now planning also to conduct a seminar for the group, where they will assemble teaching materials with a feminist and anti-militarist orientation. Furthermore, the facilitators are planning to contact teaching schools, in order to teach future teachers about critical education.

As we continue our work in 2017, New Profile remains committed to opposing militarism in Israel by working with those who choose not to be part of the military system. The people we have the privilege of working with experience many challenges: not only do those seeking exemption and alternatives to military service have to deal with the frustrating bureaucracy of the military, but many also experience sexism, racism, financial and family difficulties, limited economic opportunities, and discrimination and marginalization within the military system and in Israeli society.

The growing hostility towards human rights movements and critical NGOs by Israeli society and the government is always a threat to our work. Unwanted public attention might interfere with our work, as well as different laws that the state holds against NGOs of our kind. Being a small movement, and with much of our workforce being volunteers, having to respond to those attacks would consume a lot of our energy. We struggle on how to walk the fine line of not risking our work and not risking ourselves, not allowing them to paralyze us or undermine our important work.

As a movement for the demilitarization of Israeli society we envision a society whose citizens participate in civil society and do not need their participation in the military to legitimize their citizenship. New Profile believes the current forms of marginalization and discrimination experienced by many different groups in Israeli society, stem to a large extent from militarism, and military service only reinforces such inequalities. This is why New Profile has chosen to work “beyond the choir”, with marginalized and vulnerable people who are seeking exemption from military service. New Profile equips Israeli youth, Israelis already in the military, teachers and social workers with the information, support, and guidance in their efforts to remove the military’s hold on their lives and the lives of others. The vision of a civilian society with equal citizenship for everyone, to be achieved through feminist and anti-militarist principles, has guided the work of New Profile in 2016 and will continue to inform the work of New Profile in the years to come.