



Alona Poupesheva

“My decision to come to Israel on the Na’aleh program when I was 15 was completely spontaneous. I didn’t think about the consequences. But I have been given so many incredible opportunities in this country and I have so many aspirations for my life here.”

Growing up in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in southern Siberia, Alona Poupesheva, 25, was completely assimilated. It was only a chance reading of a Jewish Agency ad announcing the Na'aleh program for teenagers to go to Israel on their own that set Alona's life on a completely different course.

"I was in ninth grade and at a point where I wanted to break away from the norm. When I saw the ad, I decided to apply, even though I knew nothing about Israel," laughs Alona. "I didn't think I would actually be accepted."

But when Alona was accepted she shouted for joy. And when she was asked where she would like to go to high school, she said Haifa, the only city she remembered from the map she saw on the Jewish Agency office wall. She was placed at one of the best youth villages in the North, and spent three wonderful years there. "I didn't know a soul when I arrived," says Alona, "but I found a warm home, made lifelong friends and even had a family that adopted me. It was unbelievable." In the summers she went back to Russia and worked as an interpreter for the Israeli counselors at Jewish Agency summer camps.

During her army service, Alona was one of the first women to serve in the Special Forces canine unit. She and her dog stopped a truck filled with explosives headed for central Israel, and Alona



הדפס בבית הדין של הסוכנות היהודית

received a medal of honor. "My only concern was to protect my dog from touching and triggering the explosives," says Alona.

As a lone soldier she participated in the Jewish Agency's course for discharged soldiers. It was here that she learned skills for finding a job, interviewing and writing a resume. She also met up with a lot of her old friends from Na'aleh, many of whom served in elite combat units.

Today, with the support of a Jewish Agency scholarship, Alona is studying for her degree in political science and international relations at the Hebrew University. She works as a security guard at the Jewish Agency to make ends meet.

"I plan to go on to get my law degree, and who knows, maybe one day I'll be the Foreign Minister," says Alona. "Israel has been very good for me, and I feel that here, with hard work and initiative, the sky's the limit."