



הקרן לירושלים
THE JERUSALEM FOUNDATION
مؤسسة صندوق القدس

The Gishur Program:

Fostering Religious Tolerance among Jerusalem Teens



2007-8 Interim Report

February 2008

Introduction

The Jewish population of Jerusalem is likely the most diverse of any Jewish population in the world. Jews from every continent have settled here, bringing with them rich and varied languages, customs and religious practices. Daily contrasts and juxtapositions give the city a vibrancy that simply cannot be experienced anywhere else.

Yet Jerusalem's diverse ethnic and religious Jewish communities exist separately from one another, with limited, if any, awareness of each others' beliefs and lifestyles and without any meaningful interaction. The identity of Jewish children is limited early on by the narrow labels of "secular" and "religious." Children grow up with limited, if any, exposure to children outside their homogenous school and neighborhood environments.



This insularity has been the cause of social tension and violence in Jerusalem in recent years. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 demonstrated all too vividly that the rifts in Israeli society are sizable and dangerous. Since then, Ultra-Orthodox Jerusalem men have continued to exhibit violent behavior against Jews who drive on the Sabbath, women who participate in all-women's prayer groups at the Western Wall, and Conservative and Reform Jews who participate in egalitarian prayer groups at Robinson's Arch, just south of the Western Wall. Friction between Jewish communities has become an accepted feature of life in the city.



The Gishur ("Bridging the Gap") program was created in the wake of the Rabin assassination to help create a new social reality. The program seeks to repair the rifts between religious and secular, right-wing and left-wing Jerusalemites by bringing together groups that otherwise would have limited or no interaction to gain insight into how the other half lives, to initiate dialogue, and to embark on joint projects. The program focuses on

the teen years, when young men and women's social and political consciousness begins to emerge. Jerusalem's teens often are ignorant of what they share with their peers, incorrect in their assumptions about one other, and prejudiced in ways that dramatically affect their behavior and socio-political outlook. The Gishur program seeks to intervene at this formative stage in the lives of young people to combat insularity, ease social tensions and reduce violence.

Enclosed is an interim report on activities in 2007-8, since funds were received from the Ricky and Andrew J. Shechtel Philanthropic Fund were received in June 2007. This includes:

- ✓ activities that took place during the summer of 2007
- ✓ an interim report of the first half of 2007-8 school year activities.

A more detailed report of winter / spring 2008 activities will be sent in the spring of 2008. A final report of all 2007-8 programs, as well as a detailed proposal for the 2008-9 school year, will be forthcoming before the beginning of the 2008-9 school year.

Gishur 2007 – 8 and Beyond

Gishur is a project that is constantly evolving and developing. From a focus on individual commemorative days to a focus on Dialogue through the Arts, the Jerusalem Foundation is always looking for new ways to engage Jerusalem's diversity of youth in constructive – and meaningful – dialogue and action. In the spring of 2007, the Jerusalem Foundation invited the Jerusalem Intercultural Center (JICC) to consult on and coordinate the Gishur project citywide. The JICC is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1999 to build an infrastructure for dialogue among Jerusalem's many cultural groups, and has extensive experience and expertise in operating and developing intercultural projects.

For the continuation of the project in 2008-9 and beyond, the JICC began to develop a new, three-year agenda which would unify all programs under the Gishur umbrella. The new program agenda includes three components:

- ◆ bringing together teens from diverse religious backgrounds, including secular, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and lapsed religious teens
- ◆ facilitating dialogue on identity and social issues
- ◆ **carrying out practical, collaborative projects to bring about positive social change**

This new focus will aim to open up the world of the “other” to Jewish teens from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, while enabling them to turn thought into action--to channel their cooperative energy into projects to further the public good. **The programs implemented with funds from the Ricky and Andrew J. Shechtel Philanthropic Fund during the 2007-8 school year reflect this shift in focus.**

Dialogue through the Arts

Beginning in the summer of 2007, the following Dialogue through the Arts activities took place:

1. Theater Workshop – Youth Touch the Holocaust

The project began at the International Cultural Center for Youth (ICCY), but unfortunately ran into difficulties getting off the ground. In the end the project did not take place, and funds earmarked for the program will be used for other dialogue projects, subject to the approval of the Ricky and Andrew J. Shechtel Philanthropic Fund.

2. Filmmaking Workshops. Instead of holding one central filmmaking workshop, the Jerusalem Foundation felt it could reach more youth by holding filmmaking workshops at both centers of activity, the Lev Ha'ir Community Center and ICCY:

- a. A **Filmmaking Workshop at the Lev Ha'ir Community Center** led by a film expert from the Helena Kagan Community Center for Youth & Communications. The workshop is targeting some 12 alienated youth who are secular, religious and formerly religious teens. In the workshop they are exploring identity issues through the art and craft of filmmaking with practical photography, editing, staging, lighting, scriptwriting, acting and producing skills to create films that examine important issues of personal identity, belonging and society. Participants met twice/week (once/week individually and once/week as a group) throughout the school year to develop their ideas, critique one another and discuss common themes. Participants also operated a cinema program at the community center and produced several short films based on spontaneous interactions, interviews and filming on the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall in downtown Jerusalem. Through these experiences, participants learned about the importance of location, the viewer's perspective and developing a critical eye—skills that helped them in opening themselves up to one another.



- b. A three-week **Filmmaking Workshop at ICCY** during the summer of 2007, also led by Helena Kagan Community Center for Youth and Communications, was an abbreviated version of the workshop operated at the Lev Ha'ir Community Center. The Workshop brought together a diverse group of 15 teens to develop and produce a film about identity issues.

An **Investigative Journalism Workshop** began in the fall of 2007 as an outgrowth of the **summer filmmaking workshop**. This workshop is drawing on

the same core group of teens from secular schools, a boys' religious school, a girls' religious school and a mixed, secular-religious school to move the Gishur focus from personal identity discourse to social action. A film expert and an assistant from the Helena Kagan Community Center for Youth & Communications are teaching technical filmmaking, research and interview skills to help the participants develop an expertise and produce a film on an issue of social relevance. The project will continue throughout the 2007-2008 school year and will culminate in a public film screening on Jerusalem Day in June 2008.

3. Poetry Workshop at Lev Ha'ir Community Center

As in previous years, the **Poetry Workshop** attracted 17 teens seeking to express themselves and understand one another through the written word. Professional writers guided the teens



once/week throughout the school year in reading, analyzing and discussing traditional, religious and modern Jewish texts, offered writing exercises, led group critiques and more. The teens produced a booklet of their essays, stories and poetry and presented them at the annual International Poetry Festival at Mishkenot Sha'ananim in March 2007.

Dialogue Programs at the International Cultural Center for Youth (ICCY)

The International Cultural Center for Youth is a community center serving the German Colony, Rechavia, Old Katamon and surrounding southern Jerusalem neighborhoods. The center has many years of experience operating joint programs for various population groups, including Jews and Arabs and disabled and able-bodied children. The Gishur program includes the following projects in 2007-8:

1. Days on the Seam between Israeli-ism and Judaism

As in previous years ICCY is continuing to hold large events surrounding 5 special days in the Jewish / Israeli calendar. Thus far events have included:

- ✓ **Tisha B'Av**
- ✓ **The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin**
- ✓ **Hanukah**

All events were well-planned and widely advertised, and between 50 – 100 people attended each event. *However, because this is a veteran project of ICCY, the community center has included the program's costs in its overall annual budget. Therefore, funds from the 2007-8 donation were freed up for other innovative programs.*

2. Garden of Hope

The first step in launching a Garden of Hope was to hold week-long seminars for religious and secular youth during the summer of 2007. This 15-member group, teens from diverse public high schools and youth movements, including a TALI (secular with religious enrichment) school, a religious girls' school and an arts school, a religious, Bnei Akiva youth group and a secular hiking group, became the core of the **Ecological Leadership Program** who strive to promote environmental practices in Jerusalem's central-southern neighborhoods. As a result of the seminar, the group launched a charming community garden, a compost area, and more.

The **Garden of Hope - Ecological Leadership** group continued their summer experience into the 2007-8 school year. The teens continued to meet regularly with a program counselor at the nearby Natural History Museum. Together, they developed a multi-faceted project that included promoting composting, increasing demand (and reducing the cost) for organic produce and encouraging use of environmentally friendly materials, such as paper instead of plastic bags. Participants presented their ideas and plans during Chanukah 2007 at a public presentation at Kehillat Ramban, an Orthodox synagogue with 3,000 members in the Rechavia neighborhood. Following the presentation, and with the support of the synagogue's rabbi, the group has begun to implement its ideas, including installing a compost bin.

Dialogue Programs at the Lev Ha'ir Community Center

The Lev Ha'ir (Heart of the City) Community Center serves residents of Nachla'ot, Machane Yehuda and other central Jerusalem neighborhoods. The center serves many poor residents, including teens who otherwise would have no structured activities. The Gishur program included the following projects at the center in the 2006-7 school year:

1. Bridging the Gaps through Sport

The Lev Ha'ir Community Center regularly offers a wide range of sporting activities for all its constituents, who include religious and secular youth from a wide variety of backgrounds. In 2007-8 these activities continued. *However, given the new focus of activities, it was decided that funds from the 2007-8 donation would be better utilized to cultivate other programs, which actively deal with addressing issues that divide and unite religious and secular youth.*



2. Center for the Training of Religious and Secular "Shelach" Counselors

The **"Shelach" Program** attracted 16 secular and religious teens to develop a sense of community-mindedness through dialogue and joint projects. "Shelach" (a Hebrew acronym for "Field, Nation and Society") is a program taught in public high schools to strengthen teens' connection to the land and people of Israel through hiking, geography, history and social studies. Staff of the Gishur program recruited ninth- and tenth-grade participants from the program to further develop the program's "Society" component, traditionally its weakest. Staff are meeting with the teens once a week throughout the

school year to solidify their social bonds, to consider issues of society- and nation-building and to work on joint projects of mutual concern. Thus far, the program's 2 groups have implemented the following programs:

- a. **The Social Sukkah** – during Sukkot a large Sukkah was erected in Sacher Park, Jerusalem's largest central green space. Passersby were invited into the Sukkah to learn about Sukkot, Ushpizin, and the social action connection to the holiday. Dozens of park-goers stopped in and enjoyed the project.
- b. **Cultivating Environmental Awareness among younger children.** In the fall, participants, in cooperation with other youth and with the Jerusalem Education Authority, led environmental awareness activities at an elementary school in the neighborhood of Gilo.



**Left: Social
Sukkah**

**Below:
Environmental
Awareness**



Gishur 2007-8 Citywide Beginning a partnership with Bema'aglei Tzedek

The Jerusalem Foundation is always on the lookout for new programs that will advance the goals of Gishur in new and creative ways. Given the new, 3-pronged criteria – bringing diverse youth together, facilitating dialogue, working for social change – the Gishur staff felt that a new partnership with *Bema'aglei Tzedek* was a natural move. *Bema'aglei Tzedek* (Justice Circle) is a not-for-profit organization established in 2004 to work toward creating an Israeli society that operates in accordance with the values of justice and ethics in the Jewish tradition. **For its variety – and efficiency - of social action projects *Bema'aglei Tzedek* was awarded the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Prize in Israel for 2007 by the prestigious accounting firm, Ernst & Young.**

Because a special emphasis is now being placed on developing the social action component of Gishur, some of the funds remaining from the unimplemented programs were utilized for the following:

'Change the World' Program with Bema'aglei Tzedek



Some 16 teens from diverse backgrounds are meeting twice a month learn how to become social activists. The program has two parts: 1) **theoretical introduction and discussions** on: poverty and socioeconomic gaps; people with disabilities; the role of the government and the role of the individual in a welfare state, etc. They also learn practical skills of social activism – writing a formal letter, planning a program, making a presentation before a donor, how to legally organize and set up a demonstration, etc. 2) Practical experience in social action projects. In addition to being active in several of *Bema'agle Tzedek's* other social action

activities, program participants must adopt their own social action project and work toward improvement. Thus far, participants have chosen to **improve handicapped accessibility** in the city. Participants are selecting a street, restaurant, office building or other location that is inaccessible to the disabled and are working with the local community, city council, owners, and others to create an awareness of the issue and to find solutions. The goal is for the teens to learn by doing: rather than looking inward to understand themselves and others, this project is drawing participants outside their own experiences to create empathy for others and to feel a sense of accomplishment from taking social action.



Winter / Spring 2008

In light of the success of the first cooperative venture with Bema'aglei Tzedek, the Jerusalem Foundation seeks to utilize the funds remaining from the 2007 gift to Gishur to implement the following project, subject to the approval of the Ricky and Andrew J. Shechtel Philanthropic Fund.

Citywide 'Employment Rights' Program with Bema'aglei Tzedek

In addition to the programs begun in the first part of the 2007-8 school year, which will continue until June 2008, *Bema'aglei Tzedek* seeks to expand its "Employment Rights" social action program for religious and secular teens citywide, which is based on the Jewish values that strive for proper working conditions in a just society. Currently there is a cadre of 20 activist youth, from religious and secular high schools throughout the city, who are working to improve conditions for the employees of manpower agencies who work in their own schools. These workers are usually at the bottom of the scale – security guards, cleaners, kitchen workers – and often do not receive the minimum conditions required by law through their manpower agencies. This group, who are often leading larger groups of activists within their schools, are meeting with their schools' administrations, meeting with the manpower agencies, holding public awareness campaigns, etc. in an effort to ensure fair employment practices in the individual schools. Now, the Jerusalem Foundation, together with Bema'aglei Tzedek, seeks to augment this activism for projects citywide.

The citywide project will utilize the energies and drive of these 20 representatives of religious and secular schools to take on the issue of employment rights, such as in:

- ✓ Lobbying other schools throughout the city to make sure all manpower employees receive proper work conditions
- ✓ Lobbying institutions around the city to publish tenders for manpower agencies that ensure proper conditions for employees
- ✓ Meeting with manpower agencies throughout the city to make sure that they provide workers with proper employment rights and benefits

After studying the situation under the guidance of the group facilitator, the group will decide exactly which actions it will take to improve conditions. The program will include weekly meetings, used mainly for strategic planning, as well as independent work on the different projects. An updated interim report, including more details of this and of the ongoing programs, will be submitted in the spring.

Total Expenditures for 2007-8 Donation

2007-8 Donation		\$ 109,550
2007-8 Expenditures		
Lev Ha'ir Community Center programs	\$ 32,150	
International Cultural Center for Youth programs	41,800	
'Change the World' with Bema'aglei Tzedek	8,000	
Program Coordinator	<u>12,900</u>	
Subtotal		\$94,850
Winter / Spring 2008 Expected Expenditures		
Group facilitator (incl. planning, coordination, leading group)	\$7,500	
Social action activities	4,000	
Materials, equipment, room rental, etc.	<u>3,200</u>	
Total expected winter / spring 2008		\$14,700
Total Expenditures 2007 / 8		<u>\$109,550</u>

Conclusion

The 2007-8 Gishur program has been creative, stimulating and productive. Hundreds of Jerusalem teens are coming together to listen to and learn from one another, to read, to write, to make films and to address social issues of importance to them. The program is breaking down stereotypes, reduced mistrust and removed cynicism and doubt to enable teenagers to become active players in the world around them in order to create a new, inclusive reality through cooperation. With your help, the Jerusalem Foundation can continue to advance the critical cause of religious tolerance in Jerusalem by supporting the Gishur program.