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Jewish Peoplehood the Theme of the Jewish Federation P2Gether Partnership Educator Delegation

By Amy Krakovitz

Thirty-two teachers from around the Southeast US came together to attend the 2012 P2Gether Educator's Delegation to Israel with our partners in the Hadera-Eiron region. Partnership 2Gether is an initiative of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte and the Jewish Agency for Israel that creates people to people connections between Israelis and Jews in the Diaspora. From Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville, Jacksonville, Richmond, and of course, Charlotte, they arrived as individuals, and left as a cohesive group, ready to continue the relationship with the Partnership and the students and families that they connected with.

The emphasis of every activity was Jewish Peoplehood, how we are connected across the globe. From the Atlit Detention Camp, to the Aliyah Museum, to the Tunisian Synagogue, to Yad Vashem, our bonds of Judaism were stressed and clarified.

But it wasn't just the museums and sites of Israel that connected us. We each spent two days teaching in various schools across the area, from preschools to elementary schools to high schools. We dined with our teachers and got to know the students. "The school that I attended was absolutely filled with love, learning, compassion, excitement, and respect for

both the children as well as the teachers," says Melanie Marks, who teaches preschool at the Weinstein JCC and third grade Judaics at Temple Beth El in Richmond. "I formed a special bond with one particular teacher, Ronit, and her children, and I already miss them."

The teachers were met with a great deal of warmth from the participating schools on the first day. Some were greeted with special signs put up for them, other schools put together special performances with song and dance. Getting to know the students was fun and interesting as well.

The informal atmosphere in the Israeli schools was surprising. Teachers are called by their first names. Wanda Vande Linde of the Jewish Preschool on Sardis noticed a "busy" atmosphere at the preschool she visited. "The school was small and reminded me of a little beehive buzzing," she says. "It was an exciting place full of activity. It also made me appreciate my classroom so much more ... [it] is twice as large with less than half of the number of children."

The older students are also given a great deal of responsibility. The 9th graders at Bet Eliezer

created a lesson plan for the 7th graders about gratitude. They performed a skit from a story in *Pirke Avot*, then gave out replicas of a



Hannah Piracha of Richmond participates in the Friday afternoon Kabbalat Shabbat with Charlotte's Nancy Good, a teacher at Hebrew High.

newspaper front page banner and had the 7th grades create their own stories and headlines about what they were thankful for.

Leigh Watson, a Special Education teacher in the Dalton, GA school system, who lives in Chattanooga, saw some distinctions in the way Israel deals with Special Education students, as our Israeli counterparts did not mainstream challenged students.

We were also greatly impacted by our weekends with local families in the region. Somehow it seemed for the most part, that Maya

Shoham and Yael Ben Tzion, the staff members of the local partnership, matched up each teacher with his or her "beshert." Having missed my morning runs for almost a week, I was thrilled to be spending the weekend with a runner, Eti Hosman, who took me into the agricultural fields behind her moshav to run with her running group. Eight-and-a-half miles later, I knew I had found a "sister." Throughout the weekend, we discovered so many other things that we had in common.

Other teachers expressed exactly the same sentiments about their weekend hosts. Susan Soto, a 3rd grade Hebrew teacher from Temple Beth El here

in Charlotte, was as thrilled with her host family, saying her hosts, the Hermonis, were like family.

Our trip culminated in Jerusalem where Avraham Infeld detailed for us the "Five Legged Table" of being Jewish: Family, Memory, Mt. Sinai, Israel (the Land and the State), and Hebrew. His compelling speech ignited us to bring Jewish Peoplehood to our classes. Jennifer Sawyer, a 2nd grade Sunday school teacher at Charlotte's Temple Beth El, was thrilled with his presentation.

There is so much more that we did, so much more that connected us to Israel, the land and the people, and to each other. But I will let Liat Walker, a 3rd and 5th grade Jewish studies teacher at the Marvin J. Gottlieb Day School in Jacksonville, FL, conclude for us: "Although I am a native of Israel, I never traveled and explored the country as we did on this trip. It is like I was seeing Israel for the first time through the eyes of a Jewish educator and through the eyes of my students. ... The teachers and students ... were so excited to share themselves with us and learn about Jews in America. I was so impressed with how much the Israeli teachers were committed to this partnership. ... I can't wait to continue our partnership in the future." ☆



The local partnership with the Charlotte delegation: Maya Shoham, Betsy Olinger, Nancy Good, Amy Krakovitz, Wanda Vande Linde, Susan Soto, Jennifer Sawyer, and Yael Ben Tzion.

Sign Up Today for PJ Library

You might have received a mailing recently that contained a free book, telling you about the launching of PJ Library in the greater Charlotte area.

The PJ Library, ("PJ" for pajamas), sends out high quality Jewish children's books every month to participating families ... for free. PJ Library currently operates in over 180 Jewish communities across North America, reaching the families of more than 100,000 children a month, ages six months through eight years. The program is a powerful tool for families to engage in the joys of Jewish life and traditions.

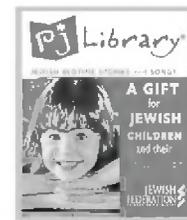
The PJ Library is the brainchild of Harold Grinspoon, a highly innovative philanthropist from Western Massachusetts. Grinspoon knew that reading stories and listening to music are among the most powerful childhood learning experiences and found his inspira-

tion in the literacy program of country singer Dolly Parton.

"More than seven years ago I brought Dolly's Imagination Library books to inner-city children in Springfield [MA]," Grinspoon explained. "Then it occurred to me - sending books to families' homes is an ideal project to adapt to the Jewish community."

All the books were chosen for their potential to inspire parent-child moments and memories. They span the emotions, from the humorous *No Matzah for Me!* to the poignant *The Always Prayer Shawl*, winner of multiple book awards.

One book chosen for the eight-year-olds, *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, can be used to spark discussions about differing



faiths and cultures in a way that children can understand. The book is jointly authored by Blu Greenberg, a leading American Jewish thought-leader, and Reverend Linda Tarry, an African American Minister at the famous Riverside Church in New York.

PJ Library is made possible here in Charlotte with funding from the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte and a generous local donor couple.

The time to sign up is now. Any family in the greater Charlotte area, raising Jewish children from six months through eight years old is eligible. To sign up or for more information visit www.pjlibrary.org. ☆

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