

## Boston-Haifa Early Childhood Connection 2012-2013

### Personal and Professional Connection



Boston-Haifa group, is welcomed at 'Gan Shelanu' Newton

## Background

The Boston Haifa Early Childhood Connection concluded an inspiring year of professional and personal connection; a year of meaningful collaboration full of conversations and programs that deepen and strengthen Jewish identity and a high level of professionalism in all participants.

The Boston Haifa Early Childhood Connection initiative includes several goals. The first component is a professional and personal exchange in which educators from Boston partner with educators from Haifa ('Shagrirot'). The 'Shagrirot', are involved in ongoing professional development programs and personal communication utilizing video-conferences, Facebook, email, exchanges of packages and in-person seminars. The group includes Jewish, Christian and Muslim early childhood educators.

The second component is to create an active local network of early-childhood educators (in both cities) comprised of leaders within their respective school communities who have a demonstrated track record of helping to forge a strong sense of Jewish identity in their young students, their families and communities. These educators are engaged in the personal learning and integration of studying about Israel and Judaism into their programs.

As part of professional development, 2012-2013 included learning about Israel with Dr. Shai Shafir, head of Science Education from Oranim, Academic College. In addition, the 'Shagrirot' participated in video-conferences, and exchanged packages put together by schools in Boston and in Haifa. The Boston Haifa Early Childhood Connection Facebook group continues to support exchange of curriculum and allows the 'Shagrirot' to keep in touch with one another. 'Shagrirot' from both cities post photos each week and even more during the holidays.

In December Rachel Raz, Director of the Early Childhood Institute and Iris Schor, Boston-Haifa coordinator, utilized their personal visit to Israel and visited the preschools in Haifa and delivered packages put together by the Boston schools. This face-to-face exchange was very meaningful. The staff and children welcomed them warmly, wanted to know all about their friends in Boston and enjoyed the packages very much. All of the Haifa 'Shagrirot' indicated that they feel close to their partners in Boston. The Haifa preschools sent back beautiful packages to their Bostonian friends and the packages were accepted at the local preschools with a lot of excitement. The long term connection that has been forged over the past few years has created a real bond and

the visit to Boston in March was very special to the 'Shagrirot' both personally and professionally. The beautiful words below reflect the impact of this program on one of the participants.

*Dear Rachel,*

*I want to thank you for all the energy and passion you put into creating such a meaningful week of varied interactions between the Boston and Haifa Early childhood Educators.*

*The visit of Rina and Osnat had a profound effect on our school. I was so excited about their visit and for weeks had been telling the children and teachers about the pending visit. Parents and teachers eagerly welcomed them to our school and the children seemed amazed to meet real live people from Israel!*

*In a community where there is relatively little exposure to Israel, talking about Israel to young children is almost like talking to them about Mars. Osnat and Rina changed that by relating to our children with incredible warmth and interest and very enthusiastically shared photographs of their school children, taught us new songs, shared in our Kabbalat Shabbat, read us a story from Hebrew book and danced with us.*

*I believe that this visit created a spark that will hopefully strengthen the ties of our Boston Haifa connection and ultimately, the Jewish identity of our school and community.*

*On a personal note, Rina and Osnat brought the same warmth and sparkle into our home for shabbat. They were deeply respectful of our observances and bonded with our whole family. Not only did they enhance our shabbat experience, they rekindled our motivation to study Hebrew!*

*Rachel, I admire you for the attention you paid to every detail of this trip and for the caring way in which you made sure that everybody derived some deep, personal meaning from this experience.*

*All the best,*

*Chantal*

Chantal Lawrence, Director of the Wayland JCC Early learning center also 'Shagrira', Boston

## **2013 Seminar - Boston Massachusetts**

In our last seminar, which took place on March 2013, eighteen local preschools and eleven educators from Haifa participated (five teachers and six professionals). In addition to the local 'Shagrirot' many educators from local preschools, families, children, clergy and other from the community joined the programs and events that took place during the seminar week. Lila Kagedan and Iris Schor coordinated the program this year with Rachel Raz, Director of Boston Haifa Early Childhood Connection at Hebrew College.

The goals of our program were achieved through a wide variety of activities, visits and Jewish experiences that the 'Shagrirot' did throughout the week. These activities included professional experiences, that formed and strengthened the personal connection between both sides and emphasized the Jewish identity.

Three core activities helped reach our goals:

### **A professional day at 'Gan Shelanu' in Newton**

The goals of this professional day that took place at 'Gan Shelanu' in Newton were to share educational philosophies, to strengthen the personal connection between the teachers from Israel and the local teachers and to emphasize our mutual identity.

The Shagrirot were welcomed at 'Gan Shelanu' by Arnie Zar Kessler, the head of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Newton and by Ellen Agulnick, the director of Gan Shelanu. 'Gan Shelanu' staff as well as thirty five additional early childhood educators from twelve local preschools participated in this educational and spiritual event. Arnie Zar Kessler lead the group on a tour of the upper school campus and spoke about the Jewish day schools in our area and their missions. The 'Shagrirot' were extremely impressed by the school, its educational philosophy and its resources.

The 'Shagrirot' from Israel ran three workshops for the entire group, which included: a cooking workshop about smells and tastes; an art workshop about the spring; and an activity workshop using occupational and speech therapy techniques. This morning was a wonderful opportunity for professional development as well as creating relationships between the educators from both countries and between local educators from different preschools in the area.





Welcome words by 'Gan Shelanu' Director Ellen Agulnick



Ellen Agulnick, Arnie Zar-Kessler, Rachel Raz and Shifra Antebi at 'Gan shelanu'



Art workshop by Osnat Hada (Haifa) at 'Gan Shelanu'



Israeli, healthy, Cooking Workshop at 'Gan Shelanu'

## **'Shma party' at Temple Emunah in Lexington**

The goals of this program were to expose the educators to a celebration of the local Jewish community, to share professional programs prepared by the Israelis with the local community and to strengthen the personal connection of the educators amongst themselves.

The group participated in a family program called "Sh'ma party". One hundred and eighty children and their caregivers participated in this fun evening. The children, all dressed in their PJ's listened to Mali and Vardit read the book "Silly Billy" in both Hebrew and English. The Shagrirot from Israel sang the song 'Tfilayla' in Hebrew about our prayers before we say "good night" and handed each child a hand made "worry doll" that they can put by their bed and it would take away all the worries at night. The kids ended by "helping" Rabbi Lerner get ready for bed and the room was filled of giggles and laughs from the Rabbi's silliness. The 'Shagrirot' were deeply impressed by the involvement of the temple's Rabbi in the education of the children of his community.

Following the 'Shma party' the Shagrirot gathered together for a dessert party hosted by Temple Emunah's preschool. Shelly Rosman, the school director led a beautiful evening where each participant introduced herself and shared her professional experience and feelings about her work with children. This evening was a very meaningful experience for the educators from both countries and their personal connection grew stronger. Vicky Benedek, Director of the Jewish Preschool of Lexington joined with her staff.



**Temple Emunah 'Shma' Party, Families and Haifa Shagrirot celebrating together**





Temple Emunah 'Shma Party' presentation by Haifaiyot

*"I was very impressed and enjoyed very much the Pajama party at Temple Emunah. This event gave me a warm feeling of home and I could truly feel the special connection of the Jewish community amongst itself and especially to Judaism and to Israel."*

Alla Jilavian, Haifa, Shagrira

*"I was full of pride to watch the Jewish community preserve its identity. I was very impressed by Temple Emunah and the way the preschool teaches the children about the torah and the Jewish traditions and that every Friday they welcome the Shabbat with the Rabi".*

Nune Zazian, Haifa, Shagrira

## Professional evening and learning seminar at the Hebrew College

The goals of this evening were to share professional ideas and to strengthen the personal relationship between the participants. In addition, the educators participated in a 'limud' connecting them to their Jewish heritage and strengthening their Jewish identity.

The 'Shagrirot' and many educators from the Boston Jewish community joined together at Hebrew College for an evening of professional development and learning seminar. The group was warmly welcomed by Michael Shire, Dean of the school of Jewish Education and by Rabbi Daniel Lehmann, president of the Hebrew College. Prof. Rachel Adelman gave a 'shiur' and spoke about the righteous women in the Exodus. She raised

interesting questions about the midwives, Miriam, Yocheved, and Pharaoh's daughter (Batya) and many were involved in deep discussion.



Hebrew College Seminar – Learning with Rachel Adelman

Shifra Antebi, Director of the early childhood education in the city of Haifa spoke about the professional and personal connection that has developed throughout the years between the educators from Haifa and their fellow educators in Boston.

*“This is an opportunity to exchange educational ideas from both sides of the world and to experience culture and traditions in different forms of Judaism”.*

Shifra Antebi, Director of early Childhood Education, Haifa

Three of the Israeli Shagrirot presented their unique initiatives in Haifa: Annie Bugin spoke about “The Jump Start Program”, which is a unique program only in Haifa, sponsored by the municipality for children ages 3-4. This program includes weekly visits of a communicational therapist and occupational therapist in each school to work with the kids, parents and staff. In addition a psychologist comes once every 2 weeks to work with the staff and the parents. The professional staff get to know each child very well and are able to establish individual goals and purposes for each child and for the whole class. This program has been a great success and is able to intervene and solve existing problems at a very young age.

Ghada Zahara, Director of the program “One”, Haifa Municipality. The program

designed for the Arab sector in Haifa for ages 0-6 and involves health, education and welfare. This program started 6 years ago and is funded by the Jewish federation of San Francisco, the Israeli government and the Haifa municipality. The goal of this initiative is to enrich and develop the children of this community to create a better society and lower discrimination. The program includes supervised play-groups, educational support for parents and tools to engage successfully within the family and the community.

Michal Dana, spoke about her initiative “The empowerment of Parents”. This program is offered in low-income neighborhoods and brings professional staff to strengthen and educate staff, parents and children in these communities. The professional staff includes a psychologist, a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist and speech therapist. The children receive educational support and the staff and parents receive guidance and modeling. In addition there are group activities, which connect the community members and strengthen the neighborhood.

The three presentations inspired the Boston community and introduced many new ideas. It was also an evening of encouragement between educators where collaboration was stressed and sharing was the spirit.

## **Professional Exchange**

In addition to the activities above, the group participated in other activities that enriched their professional knowledge.

## **An historical visit in Concord**

The goal of this visit was to learn the historical comparison of a nation (Israel versus United States of America), to learn new educational philosophies and to emphasize the important place of books in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The group visited the North Bridge, for a tour of the replica of the Historical Bridge from the battle of the American Independence War. Rachel made a comparison between the birth of a nation in the USA to the establishment of Israel. From the bridge, the group headed to the Orchard House to visit Louisa May Alcott’s house [www.louisamayalcott.org](http://www.louisamayalcott.org). The guided tour of the Orchard House had an emphasis on Bronson Alcott’s educational philosophy and transcendentalism and included a wonderful tour of the house itself. The group enjoyed this visit very much and was



especially interested to learn about Alcott's educational ideas and how his progressive way of thinking is implemented in many schools today. The group ended the morning at the children's section of the public library of Concord where the local teachers introduced their fellow visitors to famous children's stories in English.

Sharon Cores from the Jewish Preschool of Lexington and Tina Goldin from Temple Beth-Shalom Preschool in Needham who are both 'shagrirot' from Boston, as well as Hebrew College faculty Marion Gribetz joined this morning and toured with the group from Haifa.



The North Bridge, Concord MA



**The Orchard House, The house of Louisa May Alcott**

### **The Discovery Museums in Acton –**

[www.discoverymuseums.org](http://www.discoverymuseums.org)

The goal of this visit was to explore STEM (science, technology, engineering and math curriculum). Lucas Skorczeski, director of education, and Neil Gordon, CEO of the Museum welcomed the group after the museum's regular hours. After an introduction the 'Shagrirot' explored the wonderful activities both in the Children's Discovery Museum and the Science Discovery Museum. The 'Shagrirot' learned about many creative ideas and were excited to implement them at their preschools both here in Boston and in Israel.

Sol Feldman, a Boston Haifa volunteer and three shagrirot, Sharon Dadon from Temple Shalom in Newton, Sharon cores, Jewish Preschool of Lexington, and Tina Golden Temple Beth Shalom, Needham, escorted the group as they toured the museums.



**Figure 1 - The Discovery Museums**

### **Perkins School of the Blind –**

[www.perkins.org](http://www.perkins.org).

The goal of this visit was to discuss inclusive education. The 'Shagrirot' were lead by a tour guide who is blind himself and received an enriching tour of the grounds, facility, philosophy and program. The tour was active and included guiding one another blind folded, running around a track blind folded and getting a better understanding of the needs met at the school. The tour led to a discussion about how to address every child's needs.

Marlene Schultz, Hebrew College faculty joined the group on this inspiring and informative visit.





**Perkins School of Blind**

**WGBH –**

[www.wgbh.org](http://www.wgbh.org)

The goal of this visit was to learn about technology and education. The ‘Shagrirot’ toured the building and learned about the television and radio channels. They received an important introduction to technology and education and discussed the different ways that they can be integrated. The tour included several technology rooms, libraries, sets and storerooms. The ‘shagrirot were very impressed to learn about the current technologies in media and compare them to the technologies that existed in the past. The tour emphasized the importance of preparing the children for modern technology that exists in our days in every field.



**Figure 2 - WGBH**

### **Children's museum, Boston**

The goal of this visit was to discuss the role of play in education and in the learning environment. The 'Shagrirot' visited the Children's Museum of Boston where they were able to benefit from new educational ideas, be inspired by the surroundings and innovations and collect curricular ideas to take home with them.

Carol Charnow, CEO of the museum welcomed the group.

Linsday Harvey, Director, Yal-Day-New Day care and Marceline Marsan, educator from Yal-day New Day care joined the group.

### **JCC Early learning Center, Newton**

The goal of this visit was to expose the group to new educational philosophies and specifically to the Reggio Emilia educational approach. The 'Shagrirot' visited the JCC preschool and were welcomed by its director, Ronit-Ben Shir. Ronit spoke about the Reggio Emilia educational approach and lead the 'Shagrirot' on a tour of the preschool to view how this philosophy is applied in the classrooms. Ronit also described the parents' involvement in the educational process including weekly newsletters and monthly meetings discussing educational topics in early childhood. The 'Shagrirot' were extremely impressed by the tour and learned many ideas that they were excited to bring back to their preschools in Israel.



**Figure 3 - JCC Newton**

## **Temple Israel, Brookline**

The goal of this activity was to discuss early intervention approach in early childhood education. Two Shagrirrot from Haifa Annie Boogin and Michal Dana visited Temple Israel in Brookline and ran a workshop. They were welcomed by Helen Cohen the preschool director, thirty educators from the area and the preschool staff. The 'Shagrirrot' lead a workshop on early intervention, children with special needs and integrating occupational therapy into blended classrooms. The session was very well received by the educators and staff and was expertly instructed by Annie and Michal. Their combination of lecture, story telling, physical examples of teaching methods and creative instruction was engaging and fascinating. Following the workshop Helen gave the 'Shagrirrot' a tour of the preschool classrooms and they were very impressed by the different play stations and the organization of the facility and its accommodation to fit the children's needs.

## **Personal connection**

In addition to the activities mentioned above and in order to enhance the personal connection between the sides, the 'Shagrirrot from Israel participated in the following programs.

## **Home hospitality**

During the weekend, the 'Shagrirrot' were hosted by their local partners and other



volunteers from the Jewish Community. The hosts took their guests to their local synagogues for Shabbat service and showed them around Boston. This experience allowed both sides to connect on a personal level and form a special friendship.

*"The respectful home hospitality introduced me to a different stream in the Judaism and to the strong Jewish connection that has been kept in the community like a precious stone.*

*The highlight of my experience was when we went with Chantelle to her synagogue. Being in the synagogue in a foreign country and hearing the Hebrew language and the familiar prayers was more meaningful than hearing the same prayers in Israel".*

Osnat Hadar, Haifa, Shagrira

### **Visit to local preschools**

On Friday morning, the Israelis spent the morning at their partner's preschools. Many of them held 'kabbalat shabbat' with the families. The Israeli 'Shagrirot' prepared and shared programs with the children, teachers and families.

### **Farwell dinner**

On Saturday evening, ending a full week of adventures the 'Shagrirot' had a farwell dinner hosted by Iris Schor. It was a warm and wonderful gathering of new and old friends in a friendly atmosphere of food and fun where individuals could comfortably assess the week, share strengths and shortcomings, comment on the agenda and speak about furthering out relationships. The group was truly formed at this point and sad to say good-bye but very optimistic about staying in touch and sharing resources.

*"These connections have strengthened my personal connection to Israel and its people, my people."*

Lynne Glass Rubinger, Boston, Shagrira

## Jewish identity

On top of the activities mentioned above the group participated in a few events that connected them to their Jewish roots and emphasized their Jewish identity.

### CJP, Boston

The group visited the CJP and had the honor of meeting its president Barry Shrage. They also met Judi Jarvis, who shared with them what the Jewish community is doing to engage families of young children, mostly unaffiliated, to connect with their Judaism. Some of the programs she introduced were Shabbat of the month (each family receives an art project kit related to Shabbat once a month), a Passover Box (instructions for families celebrating Passover for the first time) and Baby Basket (CJP sends new moms a basket with Jewish books and a blanket for the newborn).



**Visit to CJP, With Barry Shrage**

## Dinner at congregation 'Kerem Shalom', Concord, MA

The group of 'shagirots' was greeted by Ronit Ben -Shir, the director of the JCC early childhood center on Newton and was exposed to the religious school concept and Jewish education in the diaspora. This visit raised a deep conversation about "how to keep your Jewish identity outside of Israel?"

*"During our visit in Boston, I was deeply touched by the way both the children and the teachers practice their Jewish traditions. I was also touched during Friday night services and the temple seeing the community pray and sing in Hebrew".*

Mali Saadon, Haifa, Shagrira

\* The Hebrew College, Early Childhood Institute (ECI), founded in 1987, is dedicated to expanding and deepening the Judaic and pedagogic knowledge and skills of early childhood Jewish educators in the Boston area and beyond and promoting excellence of the Jewish early childhood programs. The ECI through its academic and professional development programs integrates the study of Judaism with early childhood education, presenting developmentally appropriate methods for teaching young children about Jewish values, traditions and culture. The ECI is very well known and recognized for his excellence nation wide. Since founded, the ECI has trained hundred of educators and influenced thousands of children and their families in many communities.

Since 2009, the ECI with financial support from CJP has expanded its services to the early childhood learning center community beyond the academic arena and serves in the capacity of liaison to CJP's Commission on Jewish Life and Engagement, Boston Haifa Connection and Initiative for Day School Excellence. The ECI directs and runs the Boston Haifa Early Childhood Connection including its Ambassadors ('Shagirots') initiative.

The Ambassadors Initiative ('Shagirots') is a three-year leadership program. This program is designed to enhance leadership and strengthen Jewish identity by creating long-lasting personal connections between Boston early-childhood educators, their schools and communities and Haifa early-childhood educators their schools and communities. This program includes two components

The first cohort, formed in 2010, currently includes twenty-four preschool teachers from Haifa and from schools in Boston, representing all denominations as well as non-affiliated programs.