



2018 Brock International
Prize in Education Nominee

Lee Gordon

Nominated by Yohai Gross

Why I Nominated Lee Gordon for the Brock International Prize in Education...

I am proud to nominate Mr. Lee Gordon for the Brock International Prize in Education. Lee is the founder of Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel, which is making a growing impact in Israel to bridge the divide and resolve the conflict there between its Jewish and Arab citizens.

Starting in 1998 with only one kindergarten and one first grade class, Lee and his colleagues at Hand in Hand have grown this endeavor to six integrated schools and over 1700 Jewish and Arab students. Beyond the classroom, Hand in Hand also brings over 6,000 Arab and Jewish adults together, where they engage in joint community programs and activities.

In a society that has seen decades of conflict between Jew and Arab, Lee and Hand in Hand have made, and continue to make a most important contribution for peace education and conflict resolution.

As you will see in the enclosed materials, Lee's leadership and his work with Hand in Hand are an important model for how education can lead the way to a more pluralistic and democratic society.

In addition to the enclosed written materials, please see the following links for recent videos of Hand in Hand and the organization's website:

<http://www.handinhandk12.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHEkP6cBIG8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4PK7tnYzfw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EA18apIi0g>

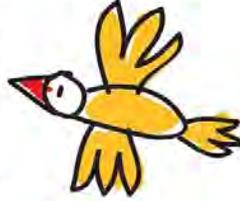
The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arab, at times seems unsolvable and that it will continue forever. While the work of Hand in Hand by itself will not bring peace to that region, it is doing something extraordinary and inspiring. I commend Lee on his vision and efforts and highly recommend him for this prize.

Sincerely,

Yohai Gross

Hand in Hand

Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel
יד ביד | המרכז לחינוך יהודי-ערבי בישראל (ע"ר)
يدأ بيد | مركز التربية العربي اليهودي في إسرائيل



July 17, 2017

To whom it may concern.

Re: Letter of Recommendation for Lee Gordon

I write this letter to express my deepest admiration and respect for Lee Gordon and to offer my strongest recommendation that he be considered for the Brock International Prize in Education.

As the founder of Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel, Lee has profoundly altered the nature of education in Israel. Israel's education system is tracked according to major population groups – a reality that secular Jews, orthodox Jews and Arabs studying in separate educational institutions. In a reality of tension and conflict, this situation propagates the separation and distrust between Jews and Arabs.

Lee's vision of creating an integrated and bilingual schools responded to a grassroots demand from parents who wanted to raise their families in an environment of inclusion and tolerance, but more so it reflected a far reaching vision of how Israel must look like. Since the first two class of 50 students was founded in 1998, the school network has expanded dramatically. Today there are six schools operating countrywide with more than 1,750 students. More than 800 Jewish and Arab students and families remain on waiting lists, and over a dozen cities have turned to Hand in Hand to request that our next school location in their neighborhood. Over the coming decade, Hand in Hand intends to continue expanding, reaching a critical mass of 12-15 schools throughout the country and more than 20,000 students and adult community members. This expansion is testament to the power of the vision that Lee articulated when he founded the first class. Though it has become a more accepted component of Israel's education system today, this idea of Jews and Arabs studying together in bilingual schools was revolutionary at the time.

Hand in Hand schools are public schools that operate in partnership with civil society and are influencing the wider education system in Israel. Senior ministry of education and municipal officials regularly visit our schools to learn from our educational model, and our Jewish-Arab bilingual educational programs are receiving official recognition as formal in-service training programs that are taught to teachers around the country. After our Jerusalem school was awarded the Jerusalem Education Award for 2017, the prize committee explained that:

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E-mail: info@handinhand.org.il

“This school acts as an example to all the residents of Jerusalem. We adults must learn from the students of this school how to live together, how to learn together and how to promote co-existence such that it seeps into the consciousness of all the city’s inhabitants.”

Hand in Hand’s schools are instilling a new generation of students and families with the values of equality and tolerance. We have now had six graduating classes who are now taking their first steps as leaders on campus and in their communities.

I applaud Lee’s vision and his continued commitment to Hand in Hand. Still today, twenty years after he founded the first Hand in Hand classroom, Lee is still a major part of this endeavor and he continues to advocate for and support the program’s growth. Lee Gordon would be a well-deserved recipient of the Brock International Prize in Education as he has made a concrete contribution to the field of education that is not only impacting the lives of thousands of Jewish and Arab families but also changing the nature of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel and redefining the possibilities in the public education system.

I will be happy to provide any further details as required.

Regards,



Shuli Dichter

Executive Director

Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab bilingual education in Israel.

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www.handinhandk12.org

NAOMI AND NEHEMIAH COHEN FOUNDATION

July 15, 2017

Re: Nomination of Lee Gordon for the 2018 Brock International Prize in Education

To The Prize Committee:

It is my great pleasure to submit this letter of recommendation in support of the nomination of Lee Gordon for the 2018 Brock International Prize in Education Prize. Mr. Gordon was the co-founder of Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel and currently serves as Executive Director of American Friends of Hand in Hand.

About Our Foundation. The Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen Foundation and its founding family have supported charitable and educational philanthropic activities in the United States and Israel for more than 50 years. Our grant making typically amounts to between \$4 and \$5 million annually and supports a variety of causes and activities. The most significant focus of our funding in Israel is devoted to organizations that work for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and coexistence between Arabs and Jews. We have supported Hand in Hand since 2001, and it now receives the largest grant we make in this field. I serve as chair of the board of directors of American Friends of Hand in Hand.

About Hand in Hand. Lee Gordon and his colleague Amin Khalaf established Hand in Hand in 1997 to provide integrated, bi-lingual schools for Israeli Arab and Jewish children. Each school enrolls approximately equal numbers of Jewish and Arab students, and classes are taught in both Arabic and Hebrew. Beginning with only 50 children in two classes, Hand in Hand now has an enrollment of more than 1500 students in six schools, running from pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Hand in Hand arose as a beacon of hope in Israeli society only because Lee and his colleague had the vision and the courage to take the first step on an impossible journey. Hand in Hand survived its infancy and grew through the darkest days of the Second Intifada (2000-2003) because Lee's dedication and commitment inspired others to share their vision. During this time of terrible violence – when many long established “coexistence” programs faltered – Hand in Hand attracted more and more support: more parents enrolled their children; more teachers and administrators accepted the challenge of working in these integrated, bi-lingual schools; and more government officials publicly expressed support for the future that Hand in Hand promised for Israel.

Today, Hand in Hand is positioned for growth and even greater impact in the future. Hand in Hand schools are accredited by the Ministry of Education, welcomed by the municipalities where they are located, and have won numerous awards both in Israel and from international organizations. Despite the tensions of 3 wars in the past 10 years, and the growing strength of radical elements in Israeli society, the Hand in Hand schools have shown the ability to continually increase enrollment of both Jewish and Arab families. They expect to increase enrollment by approximately 150 new students in the coming school year (2017-2018), and there are hundreds more families on waiting lists for places that are not available due to lack of funding.

Considering the complex realities of current Israeli society, the transformative power of this one simple idea – **integrated bi-lingual education** – cannot be overstated. Hand in Hand schools teach children to know and cherish their own cultural and religious heritage, while at the same time they learn to understand and respect the different heritage of their neighbors. By studying these lessons together, as part of a normal daily academic curriculum, in schools based on mutual respect and equality, Hand in Hand students learn the reality behind the theories of civics and shared citizenship. And because they learn together, the students and their families learn these lessons in a way that is qualitatively different than any other students in Israel.

While each of the Hand in Hand schools is special in its own way, several of them have been the subject of considerable national attention. Two examples:

- The school in Kfar Kara has received extensive coverage in the Israeli press because it is the first and only Israeli school located in an Arab village that is attended on a regular, daily basis, by both Arab and Jewish children. To see how a school in this unique situation affects Israeli society at large, I recommend the committee watch this 5 minute news report produced by Israeli TV Channel 10 at the height of the outbreak of violence in the fall of 2015;
- The Jerusalem school, which is the largest and most comprehensive of the Hand in Hand network, likewise has received exceptional national and international attention: In the aftermath of a racist arson attack on the school in late November 2014, the school was invited to send 2 students to appear with President Obama at the annual White House Hanukkah celebration. When Pope Francis visited Jerusalem in May 2015, the 8th grade class was invited to be part of the official ceremony welcoming him to the city. And, in the spring of 2016, the school's Arab co-principal was honored on International Women's Day 2016 as one of 8 outstanding women in Israel.

Although the daily operations of Hand in Hand have been managed by others since Lee returned to the US some years ago, the organization would never have been established if not for his vision, dedication and courage. In my view, these are the characteristics of excellence that are important to any organization that seeks to change the world.

Vision – Lee saw the world not only as it was and but also as it could be, and then created a pathway from one place to the other. The gulf between Arabs and Jews in Israel is a long-standing, complex problem that has been approached with many well-intentioned efforts over the past 69 years. Most of these efforts have had only modest success in changing attitudes or providing a solid foundation for the type of legal, civic and social equality that are essential for a successful modern society.

One major reason that Hand in Hand has been more successful than these other efforts is that Lee saw that Israel's separate education systems was the root cause of the continuing separation between the Jewish and Arab communities. And he believed that it was possible to change the system, not by enacting laws requiring integration, but rather by providing a living, working example that would show the educational and social benefits of integrated bilingual schools. By refusing to accept the inevitability of segregated schools, his vision opened a whole new perspective on what might be accomplished in bringing Arabs and Jews to a shared understanding of their common destiny as citizens of Israel.

Dedication. In order to make a difference in the real world, a vision requires dedication, commitment and hard work. In the earliest years of Hand in Hand, Lee Gordon did much of the on-the-ground work that was necessary to transform the vision of Hand in Hand into a concrete reality of operating schools. Even in a long letter, I could not begin to enumerate the hundreds of specific tasks that were required to actually create and operate the Hand in Hand schools in these early years.

At the very highest levels, Lee needed to recruit students, teachers and staff; to acquire space, material and supplies for the schools; to develop an appropriate curriculum and operating procedures for the schools to use; to gain the support of government officials at all levels, and to raise the necessary funding to support the entire enterprise. Considering the tensions of Israeli society, the complexities of the Israeli education system (the country's largest civilian activity), the fact that Hand in Hand is not affiliated with established institutions, religious organizations or political parties, and the fact that the vision of integrated bilingual education was such a challenge to accepted ideology, it is nearly a miracle that the Hand in Hand schools were ever able to open their doors.

And, in subsequent years, as the organization has grown into a substantial operation (with nearly 200 full- and part-time employees) and he returned to the United States, Lee has remained a key player in the overall enterprise. He has been the sole executive director of the American supporting organization that raises the largest portion of Hand in Hand's philanthropic funding. While philanthropic fundraising is rarely appreciated in the same way as teaching or other academic pursuits, it is clear that without Lee's successful efforts in this realm, Hand in Hand would not be educating 1500+ students.

Courage. In creating Hand in Hand, both Lee Gordon and his colleagues have shown the courage to face meaningful personal risks. The potential for physical violence is probably not much different for Hand in Hand than for many other institutions in Israel. And, Lee would be the first to acknowledge that it is the students, teachers and staff in Israel who are really on the front lines much more than he.

Nevertheless, I suggest that courage was an essential element of making the vision of Hand in Hand a reality. How many aspiring young academics, specializing in education, would bet their careers on an idea that was widely regarded as impossible? Lee accepted the risk that his vision would fail for any of a thousand reasons and he would be labeled as an impractical dreamer rather than a serious educational professional. He easily could have chosen a much safer path, but instead he risked his career, his livelihood, and his family's well-being, on the success of Hand in Hand. And as a result of his willingness to take this risk, Hand in Hand is providing a better education for hundreds of Israeli children, is opening new vistas of experience and understanding for hundreds of Israeli families; and is showing the public that mutual understanding, respect and equality is the way to a better future for everyone.

* * * * *

I would be pleased to answer any questions or provide any additional information that would be helpful to you in this matter. Thank you for your consideration of my views.

Sincerely,



Stuart L. Brown
Director & Treasurer



Lee Gordon

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND:

1997-Present: Co-Founder, Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel
Executive Director: American Friends of Hand in Hand

1995-1997: School for Educational Leadership, Jerusalem Israel

1988-1995: City of Jerusalem Youth Department:

- Director of Behar Community Center
- Leadership team, Department of International Youth Exchange

1984-1987: Hebrew University of Jerusalem

- Group Facilitator of weekly Jewish-Arab conflict resolution dialogue Group
- Research and teaching assistant for MA level courses, School of Social Work

1981-1983: City of Jerusalem, Social Welfare Department:

- Case worker and community organizer with at-risk youth and children

VOLUNTEER AND ACTIVIST BACKGROUND

2005-present:

- Active volunteer in J-Street organization, advocating for Israeli-Palestinian peace and two-state solution (<http://jstreet.org/>)
- Active in organizations in Portland, Oregon advocating for immigrant and refugee rights
- Leadership at local synagogue in raising support for Green Empowerment (<https://www.greenempowerment.org/>)

- Volunteer leadership in Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP), an umbrella of NGOs in Israel and West Bank promoting Jewish-Arab, Israeli-Palestinian peace and reconciliation (<http://www.allmep.org/>)
- Served for three years on board of Jewish Federation of Portland (<https://www.jewishportland.org/>)
- Gave approximately 75 lectures and presentations on Israel-Palestinian conflict in schools, Rotary clubs, universities and other forums
- Active in leadership as parent at my children's schools.

EDUCATION

1995-1997: Mandel Institute's School for Educational Leadership, Jerusalem Israel
Post-graduate two-year fellowship program, aimed at creation of new Educational initiatives in Israel

1984-1987: Hebrew University, Jerusalem Israel. MA degree in social work.

1976-1980: University of California, Berkeley; BA in Sociology

LANGUAGES: Fluent in Hebrew; conversant in Spanish. Native English speaker



Hand in Hand

Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel

יד ביד | המרכז לחינוך יהודי ערבי בישראל (ע"ר)

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An Overview of Hand in Hand's Model and Principles

Executive Summary

Since the foundation of the State of Israel, relations between Jewish and Arab citizens have been characterized by tension, fear and mistrust. This tension escalates with each successive confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians, or Israel and other countries in the region. Day to day Arabs and Jews generally live, study and work separately from each other. This is both a reflection of, as well as contributing factor to, the tensions, as the lack of contact creates a vacuum filled by stereotypes and hatred.

Hand in Hand counters this reality through a growing network of integrated, bilingual and multicultural schools and communities. What began as two classes of 1st graders in 1998 is now a thriving network of 6 schools throughout Israel with 1,564 students and some 9,000 adults involved as parents, staff and community members. At Hand in Hand schools, children learn each other's languages, cultures, traditions and histories. Their own identity is reinforced, while their sense of

interconnectedness is also strengthened. Students, staff and parents deal with the reality of conflict, and, aware of its bloody price, recommit themselves to working together on a daily basis – because no matter how tough things might be, tomorrow is another school day and they must find a way to learn and live together in a way that is both true to themselves but does not destroy what they have created. When hovering on the seam line between despair and determination, they realize they cannot give into despair, and must choose determination.

As government schools, Hand in Hand schools receive public funding and support, and are changing the views of decision makers and policy makers. Parents' fees and philanthropic support complete a three-way partnership, which enables this unique educational model.

While the absolute numbers may still be relatively small, Hand in Hand's impact is increasingly felt countrywide, amplified out to the broader public through a growing number of community events and media attention.



Imagine if every child in Israel were to grow up in schools which nurtured deep friendships and mutual understanding between Jews and Arabs. There is no question it would be a different society, with stronger social ties between individuals and groups, less fear, more understanding, and one much better equipped to break the cycle of violence that too many feel is inevitable. While Hand in Hand does not expect every family in Israel to make such a choice, Hand in Hand does intend to grow its network to 10-15 public schools throughout Israel and make it a viable choice for those who want it, and in doing so exemplify that this is a broader choice for all of us.

Each of our schools is surrounded by a vibrant adult community. They are interconnected, coming together for countrywide events and weekends based on discussion, study and social activities, aware that they are part of something bigger than their individual classroom experience. This daily example of living together will be amplified out to the public through media and community events, such that the citizens of Israel see that, in fact, Jews and Arabs can live together. The message

that is amplified is that our institutions, social fabric and daily experience can be one of mutual respect, recognition and inclusion. This will be a game changer, reconstructing Jewish-Arab relations in Israeli society and ensuring that we can create a shared society.

We, each of us - whether as citizens or those who from afar worry and care about what happens in this country which two peoples call home - have a choice. As complex as it is, it is also fundamentally simple. We can resign ourselves to a destiny of endless conflict and accept that this is what awaits us and future generations. Or, if we don't like that, we must do absolutely everything we can to create a path in which our two peoples, Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians, can live together.

Hand in Hand is enabling thousands of people to work together to make this path a viable option for all of us. Yes, this is obviously an increasingly difficult path. But we are not willing to accept that "there is no partner." Because in each other we have found a partner. We cannot do this alone, and we hope that you too will join us as a partner as well.



In the words of a Jerusalem teacher:

“When we live every day with others, we see everyone as their own person and we stop indulging in stereotypes. We're aware of the nationality and the religion of those around us, but we also know their dreams, their talents, how they speak when they're tired, how to be sensitive when they're irritated, what they love to read, how they make us laugh, and so much more. As we live every day with other people, so they start to appear in our dreams, join us in our celebrations and share our sorrows. Through these daily meetings, the stereotypes around us dissolve away without eating away at our souls.”



Mission and History

The Hand in Hand (HIH) mission is to create vibrant and inclusive shared society in Israel through a growing network of integrated bilingual schools and organized community activities bringing together Jewish and Arab citizens on a daily and sustained basis. In doing so HIH, with a growing number of Jewish and Arab citizens and government partners, is forging robust practices of mutual understanding and cooperative living between these otherwise conflicting communities. HIH's work exemplifies that this is a legitimate choice for Israeli society and a viable alternative to endless cycles of violence and conflict.

Starting in 1997 with 50 children in two classes, one in Jerusalem and one in the Galilee, Hand in Hand has grown to six schools throughout the country. Schools are located in Jerusalem, the Galilee, Wadi Ara, Haifa, Tel Aviv/Jaffa and our newest location, Tira-Kfar Saba. These are public schools with core government support, upon which HIH builds a bilingual and multicultural program. Students grow up together, learning each other's languages, cultures and histories, and putting into daily practice the values of equality and mutual respect. Whether motivated by ideology, our academic excellence, or the warm family like environment,

parental demand outstrips capacity. This year we have 1,564 students across our six schools, though, as in years past, this still left hundreds on waiting lists.

At the community level, more than 9,000 parents and adults participate in our community building activities, creating a civic infrastructure for social inclusion and civic equality beyond the walls of the school. Activities include sports, cultural activities and excursions; adult education programs focused on learning each other's language, culture and traditions; inter-group dialogue and social action. As HIH becomes more well-known, and media amplifies this example out to the public at large, more than a dozen parents' groups in other cities have turned to HIH requesting that we open a bilingual integrated school in their city. They see in HIH schools and communities a model enabling them to live and raise their children according to their hopes and aspirations for a life and society that will eventually emerge from conflict.

Over the next decade, Hand in Hand's goal is to expand our network to 10-15 schools and communities, involving more than 20,000 Arab and Jewish citizens, and exemplifying that Arab-Jewish shared living is both viable and scalable.

Need for Bilingual Schools and Shared Communities

Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel, comprising 79% and 21% of the population respectively, generally live separately from each other. Most cities are either Jewish or Arab, and within mixed cities they generally live in different neighborhoods. The K-12 public school system, a reflection of Israel's main communal groups, is divided into Hebrew and Arabic language tracks with few children attending schools of the other's language/communal track. The lack of exposure, knowledge and interaction, embedded in the broader context of intergroup conflict, contributes to stereotyping, mistrust and fear. The language barrier further impedes communication and socialization between Arabs and Jews.

Almost half of Jews and Arabs in Israel think that the greatest tension in Israeli society is that between Jews and Arabs, according to the 2015 Israel Democracy Index by the Israel Democracy Institute. Both groups show high levels of mutual fear and mistrust. Growing numbers of Jews feel that Arab rights should be limited while growing numbers of Arabs feel decreasing levels of belonging to Israel. In a comprehensive analysis President Reuven Rivlin laid out the challenge that Israel risks becoming a state of divided national ethnic groups and must instead become a state of all its citizens, which recognizes the language, tradition, identity and rights of each of its core groups, including Arab citizens. Schools bear a heavy burden:

The fact that Israel has separate education systems is the primary catalyst for rooted prejudice to the 'other' . . . and a central cause of hostility between different population groups and trends of societal fragmentation. (Prof. Mordechai Kremnitzer, Israel Democracy Institute - 2016)

Research indicates that the degree of contact between individuals of the conflicting groups is the single biggest contributor to attitudes, with negative attitudes

decreasing with increased contact, and that attitudes are formed at the very youngest of ages.

Hand in Hand addresses these issues with a comprehensive solution. The formation of a growing network of bilingual schools and shared communities, working with children from early childhood through young adulthood, as well as parents, government, the broader community and the media, to create a viable societal option of social inclusion rather than division.

Hand in Hand believes that the day-to-day living experience of its students, teachers, parents and others who participate in its schools and community activities, creates the institutions and practices of mutual respect, recognition and understanding in our otherwise divided society. Each Hand in Hand school and community influences its local surroundings, impacting not only personal networks, but also the local government and the general public. Working together, the network as a whole provides a vibrant example of the viability of civic equality and inclusiveness for Israeli society.

Demand for Hand in Hand schools outstrips our capacity. Student enrollment increases annually, with 20% growth each year for the last two years. More than 600 children were on waiting lists across our 6 schools for this school year, and more than 12 groups have asked us to start schools in their cities.

The fact that demand for Hand in Hand schools is so high is testament to two things: firstly, our growing reputation for providing an experience that is both academically and socially excellent, as well as welcoming and community oriented. And secondly, that many Jews and Arabs are fed up with the dominance of violence and conflict. They want to be part of living and shaping an alternative, starting with their most precious assets: their children, their family, their time, their hopes for a better future and willingness to work for it.





Hand in Hand – Circles of Impact

Hand in Hand has multiple levels of beneficiaries, and the transformative impact is felt at multiple levels: the individual level; household level; governmental level; and the broader public.

The Students

Hand in Hand strives for an equal balance of Jews and Arabs in each of its classes and across its schools. Student origins reflect the local populations, secular as well as a religious Jews; Arab students who are Muslim, Christian and Druze, and others. As Hand in Hand has grown from 50 students to 1,564 students across its 6 locations, the students and families are increasingly diverse in their backgrounds, economic, professional, communal and ideological.

Selection criteria: HIH schools function on a first-come first-served basis, and do not apply selection criteria according to academic ability or income level. This means that families come from a wide range of economic and educational backgrounds. Parents who decide to send their child to a Hand in Hand school are willing to overcome a variety of difficulties, including geographic, cultural and social barriers, in order to send

their children to a school that is inclusive and seeks to reduce the fear and alienation that exists between Arabs and Jews in Israeli society. Their decision to go against the mainstream is not always a simple one. Hand in Hand tries to reduce the parental financial burden as much as possible by raising funds that will enable the schools to offer tuition and transportation scholarships.

The Teachers

Our teachers are key social change agents and civic leaders, whose work with the students and the parents is foundational. Success in the classroom is critical for the schools, the communities and HIH's effort to prove that inclusive civil society is viable and scalable in Israel. No academic certification exists in Israel to prepare teachers for bilingual education. Hand in Hand's Education Department provides professional pedagogical training, guidance, supervision and teaching resources for our teaching staff. The Education Department conducts extensive ongoing work with the principals, teachers, curriculum development and overseeing implementation of the bilingual and multicultural model in HIH schools.

Parents and Community Members

The entire burden of social change cannot rest on the shoulders of children alone. As such, we have established flourishing adult communities around each of our schools that live, learn and celebrate together throughout the year. Parents are profoundly impacted by their children's learning experience and the social interactions that come about in this integrated environment, and their experience often has a ripple effect into their personal social and work circles. HIH community activity builds on this natural change, targeting the parents and broader community directly to ensure that the impact goes well beyond their individual experience. Cultural events, excursions, sports, and holiday celebrations help build social ties between Jews and Arabs. Language classes, text study groups, dialogue groups and social action help address the underlying social tensions. Parents and community members play a lead role in working with the local municipality to recognize our bilingual integrated school.

The Local Municipalities

Hand in Hand believes that our grassroots activities must be supplemented by institutional change on

the policy level. HIH works closely with the local municipality and the educational authorities in each of its locations, from the very first step of starting a new school, to the ongoing work years down the road of how the school and community impact the city. This work often has a profound impact on the involved government officials. The request to allow for a school to be integrated, bilingual and reflective of the different cultures and communities, invariably compels those involved to undergo an intensive reflective process. What are the results of a separate system, and why do members of both communities feel the need for an integrated system? What makes a minority group feel a sense of belonging and identification with the broader society?

The General Public

At the broadest level Hand in Hand is affecting the general public. This happens both bottom up as parents, staff and students at HIH affect their personal, professional and communal circles. It happens top down as government officials and decision makers have their perspective widened through their work with HIH. And it happens en masse as HIH examples are increasingly featured in local communal spaces or featured in the general media.



Hand in Hand's Bilingual Integrated Schools

Core Principles and Characteristics

Begun together with parents who simply wanted their children to grow up together and not separate, and hoping for something better for all of us, Hand in Hand has developed a pedagogical model defined by the following core ideas and characteristics¹:

- **Integrated:** Equal representation of Jews and Arabs in students, staff, curriculum and the overall school experience. Generally, all are citizens of Israel with the exception that in Jerusalem, some Arab/Palestinian families are permanent residents residing in East Jerusalem.
- **Bilingual:** Schools are bilingual, operating fully in both Hebrew and Arabic, both of which are state languages. This is achieved through:
 - A co-teacher model for all the younger grades (preschool through elementary), whereby two teachers, one Hebrew-speaking the other Arabic-speaking, co-run the class.
 - Formal instruction takes place in both languages;
 - Announcements and notices are posted in both languages.
- **Public:** HIH intends for each of its schools to be public schools, recognized and supported by the government at the same level as any other school, with core budget, curriculum and supervision coming from the government. This:
 - Ensures sustainability of the schools and the model;

- Mainstreams this model of integration in a society defined by inter-communal conflict;
- Expands the impact beyond the school.

While HIH's new schools may sometimes start with daycare/preschool age groups in a private framework (as has been the case in Haifa and Kfar Saba), HIH works intensively to garner municipal support towards eventual recognition.

- **Multicultural:** HIH schools celebrate the different cultures and communities, instilling pride in one's own community, as well as appreciation and knowledge of the other communities.
 - The schools operate with a shared calendar (Jewish, Muslim and Christian holidays, and all three religions are taught);
 - Music and art from both Western and Eastern traditions are brought in;
 - An identity program helps students explore and understand the many aspects of their identity.
- **Evolving and evaluating:** From its very beginnings HIH staff and parents have had to develop many of their own ways, curriculum and pedagogical techniques. Drawing on their own ideals and hopes, research, and the lessons of daily implementation over time, HIH is constantly trying to improve the work we do.
- **Reality-based:** Children in Israel grow up fully aware of and surrounded by the conflict, such that the question is not whether but how to deal with this reality. HIH helps its staff and students contend with this in multiple ways:

¹Hand in Hand staff and parents have developed this model through a combination of commitment, professionalism, intuition, hope, hard work, trial and error. [The article](#), "Peace Education in Societies Involved in Intractable Conflicts: Direct and Indirect Models" by Daniel Bar-Tel and Yigal Rosen provides an excellent overview analyzing the conditions of intractable conflicts and the steps that can and must be taken to forge a pathway out of intractable conflict. While Hand in Hand has not modeled itself on the findings of this article, every key aspect of Hand in Hand's own analysis, rationale and model is also explained here.

- **Conflict resolution skills** are developed at all ages, whether in helping children find constructive ways to resolve the normal daily tensions of sharing toys and sandbox space; through civics courses and class discussions on current events and societal issues in elementary school; and a dialogue program to help high school students contend with the issues at more sophisticated levels.
- **Formal Dialogue Facilitation:** Intensive dialogue activities and ongoing training and support for staff as well as dialogue programs for parents are critical. Only if they have processed the very personal and emotional aspects of living in conflict can they help students do the same and forge a constructive path out of conflict.
- **History and communal narrative:** Overcoming the broader inter-communal tensions and conflict requires first learning about and understanding the history of each community. This includes understanding the historical events, the human experience of those events, and the narrative arc that a community chooses to understand their past experience. For example HIH has developed a history curriculum for its middle and high school students presenting both Israeli and Palestinian historical experiences and perspectives, including role playing characters of the other side, to enable them to both understand the position of the other group as well as to empathize emotionally.² This also includes observing the key commemorative days from both groups are part of the school curriculum so that they can each understand their own and the other's communal turning points. Only by understanding these aspects



and their significance for the other group can the communities work together to create a new narrative of shared living, that is rooted in the past but grows beyond the conflicted beginnings to a way to live together.

- **Empowered to make change:** Staff empower students to find ways to be agents of change through various actions, discussions and projects. This counters the ever-present threat that the feeling that the conflict is intractable can make all involved feel that their efforts are meaningless. For many parents, staff and students being part of Hand in Hand is a profound response that they can take as individual citizens to counter the dominance of conflict.
- **Tools and skills: Critical thinking, empathy, non-violence:** all of the above help instill reflective thinking, and critical-thinking skills; high emotional intelligence and the ability to empathize and understand other people's perspectives, even ones that might threaten the listener; skills and preferences to find ways to understand and connect rather than turning to violence or aggression.

²Initial research that a University of Chicago researcher has conducted on this approach to teaching the two historical perspectives indicates that our students have achieved notably high levels of empathy and an ability to understand the experience and perspective of the other.



Hand in Hand's Education Department

The Hand in Hand Education Department was established and has developed over the past several years to provide the needed support in curriculum development, pedagogical development, training and leadership support for the Hand in Hand schools. The role of the Education Department is central to the successful growth of all Hand in Hand's schools. The education team is comprised of a team of experts that now includes: Pedagogic Coordinators who helps oversee the implementation of HIH's methodology and curricula in its veteran schools; Jewish and Arab Early Childhood Coordinators responsible for weekly training and supervision of the early learning staff; and Pedagogic Counselors inside the schools who are in close contact with teachers on a daily basis.

Throughout the school year, the Pedagogic Coordinators meet with the school and preschool staff two times per month, sometimes individually and sometimes as a group, to observe, train and offer guidance on these vital issues. They help teachers articulate their daily goals and determine if the activities they were planning, met those goals. They work with teachers on how to co-manage a classroom, work as a team, and teach in two different languages; how to discuss and celebrate all three religious traditions, Jewish, Islam and Christian; how to teach the values of equality, empathy and respect for others; how to sensitively deal with the national days; and how to engage in open dialogue about the difficulties students encounter as a result of the increased hostilities and violence in the country.

In addition to ongoing supervision and guidance described above, the Education Department organizes several joint staff training sessions for staff from different schools. Besides providing educational enrichment, the joint staff training sessions are an important tool to help our growing staff get to know one another, to hear different perspectives, and to foster in them the realization that they are part of a country-wide network that is initiating long-lasting changes in social attitudes.

Six Hand in Hand Bilingual Schools

There are currently 6 Hand in Hand schools in Israel located in Jerusalem, the Galilee, Wadi Ara, Haifa, Jaffa, and the Hasharon / Triangle area (serving Kfar Saba, Tira and Taybe). These six schools fall into two categories - veteran schools and new schools. The Jerusalem, Galilee and Wadi Ara schools are the veteran schools, established in the last two decades, continually seeking to meet their own goals of academic excellence and social change and serving as models for others as to what is feasible. Haifa, Jaffa and Kfar Saba are the newer schools, established over the past five years, growing from daycare/preschool age groups into elementary school, still gaining full municipal support. (An appendix includes a brief table summarizing simply where each school is at in its growth).

- 1. The Max Rayne Hand in Hand Bilingual School in Jerusalem** is our largest and flagship school, extending from Pre-K–12th grade with 696 Jewish and Arab students. The Jerusalem School's reputation for academic excellence, high matriculation scores, teaching of tolerance and mutual respect, and winning of prizes, including 1st prize in a national science competition three years in a row, has made the school very competitive. Its multicultural educational model enables students to learn about different cultures and religions, to understand complexity and to think more critically. In addition to academic excellence, the school is continually strengthening leadership and social awareness programs to ensure that students leave with a strong basis in civic literacy and a commitment to civic engagement.

The Jerusalem Municipality is very supportive of the school and also turns to the school frequently to help them contend as inter-communal tensions have also affected the schools and classrooms throughout the city.

The Jerusalem Foundation has been a key partner in nurturing this school as well, providing initial support for a beautiful campus built ten years ago as well as ongoing

support for the bilingual and multicultural programmatic elements. Now the Jerusalem Foundation, together with Hand in Hand and with municipality support, is beginning the process of constructing a high school for the thriving school.

- 2. The Galilee School** was one of the two original schools that HIH opened in 1998 with 25 kindergarten students. Today the school has 207 students in grades 1-6. Two Arab towns and 28 small Jewish communities feed the Galilee School, located in the rural area of Kibbutz Eshbal, next to the Arab town of Sakhnin. Last year the school hired a new principal who introduced a variety of pedagogical innovations including Project Based Learning (PBL), allowing students to elect the classes they take, and making the school look and feel like a home. The school is being looked to for its innovative educational methods and the principal was asked to make a presentation about the school's new pedagogic ideas to other educators in the Misgav Region at an Innovation in Education Conference.
- 3. The Gesher School in Wadi Ara** opened its doors in 2004 with 105 students from kindergarten through 3rd grade. This year the Gesher School has 277 students from pre-kindergarten through 6th grade. The Gesher School is one of the few places in the Wadi Ara Region of sizeable Arab towns and smaller Jewish communities and kibbutzim, where Jews and Arabs interact in a deeply meaningful and ongoing way. Israeli Jews commute from their towns sometimes more than a half hour way to attend this school located in an Arab town. The school's continued growth is a tribute to its positive reputation for tolerance and mutual respect, and its multicultural curriculum and elective programs that transmit a variety of important values and life skills.



“The impact of Hand in Hand is so positive ...
It is historical.
It is not just another school.
It is fundamentally different than all other
schools or specialty schools.”

The Kfar Kara municipality and Ministry of Education have always been highly supportive of the school and just built a new school building which opened this September 2016.

- 4.. **The Haifa School** started from a group of Jews and Arabs in Haifa who wanted to develop a truly shared community and start a bilingual school in which their children could learn together in a framework that fully recognized both groups. Out of this was born the HIH Haifa community which established a daycare center that opened in 2012-13 with 13 infants. In 2016-17 the preschool has grown to 114 children in 5 age groups. In the coming year we have received Ministry of Education approval to open a 1st grade in an existing public elementary school.
5. **The Jaffa School** opened in September 2013 with a single class of 35 Jewish and Arab children and has grown today to 8 classes

of preschool, first and second grade classes serving 233 students. Ami Katz, CEO of the Tel Aviv City Administration in Jaffa, in encouraging his senior municipal partners to approve the expansion of the school, stressed the tremendous contribution that the preschool is making to the social fabric of Jaffa:

6. **The Tira-Kfar Saba Preschool**, HIH's 6th school, opened in September 2015 with families from Tira, Taybe, and Kfar Saba who wanted us to open a bilingual preschool. Hundreds attended the community activities organized to kick off these efforts. The preschool opened with the help of Beit Berl and the Berl Katznelson Foundation, and now has two classes with 37 children. As with our other schools, our goal is for this school to add a grade per year at least through elementary school. The Mayor of Kfar Saba met with our staff recently and is eager to extend formal recognition to a bilingual elementary schools, beginning with grade 1, and projected to open in September 2017.



Academic Success

Our schools have results notable both for their academic excellence and communal values, some of which are included below:

- Elementary School mathematics (National Generalized Testing Program) – ranked 1st in Jerusalem (2016)
- High School Matriculation Exam (Bagrut) – we achieve 85% eligibility vs 72% national average in Jewish schools and 54% average in Arab schools (2015)
- National Science Research Projects Fair – 1st Prize (2012), 1st Prize (2013) & 2nd Prize (2014)
- Award for Excellence from the Ministry of Education in the Ambassadors that Open Hearts program focused on values of tolerance (2013/14);
- Two Hand in Hand Middle School teachers were awarded prizes by the Jerusalem Education Authorities for their values education work with students re. community responsibility (2013/14).
- Science Olympics on Astronomy and Space Research in Memory of Ilan Ramon and the Crew of the Space Shuttle Colombia -- 1st Place (2012) (junior high school)
- Civics matriculation exam – ranked 1st in Jerusalem (2010 & 2011)
- Galilee School – bilingual story books project recognized by Educational Initiatives Foundation (a division of the MOE) (2015-16)
- Kfar Qara School – municipal recognition and prize for focus on environmental sustainability (2014/15)

Our Alumni — Young Leaders



We have no doubt that these graduates will indeed become leaders in their fields and in society more widely, and we are working closely with them to that purpose.

One of the most telling examples of our work is of course our alumni. With the end of the 2016-17 school year, the Jerusalem high school graduated its 7th cohort bringing the total number of Jerusalem graduates to 164. Together with graduates of the Galilee and Wadi Ara schools (elementary schools) we have 270 graduates who have gone through the HIH school experience. Those who have begun their university studies have chosen a variety of fields including, law, dentistry, political science, architecture, social work, business administration and international relations, and medicine.

Having grown up in the bilingual integrated school framework, our alumni have strong social ties with both Jews and Arabs; they are fluent in both Arabic and Hebrew; they have in depth knowledge of each other's communities, cultures, histories; and they have a deep understanding of each other's perspectives. They are equipped to grapple with the stereotyping, fears and discrimination that plays out between the two communities. Accustomed to examining issues from many perspectives, they have learned to be critical thinkers but with empathy and without being

judgmental. With these skills and values our alumni are well suited to be ambassadors of Hand in Hand's message and actively work as young leaders for social change. Hand in Hand created a new Alumni Program spring 2015 to provide support for our graduates and to encourage and empower them as they transition from being students to active and engaged citizens.

Our alumni have internalized the Hand in Hand vision to build a more integrated society in Israel based on equality and mutual respect. They are giving back to their alma maters and are using their skills and background to be change agents and impact upon broader society. For example, Mahmoud Abu Saleh is bringing together Jewish and Arab students on the Ben Gurion University campus:

"Growing up at the Galilee school I learned how to be a leader, how to listen to others who disagree with me, and how to express myself in a way that allows others to listen. I'm doing all I can to affect my surroundings here at the university, and my friends from school are doing the same."

Hand in Hand's Community Program



It is insufficient, and, arguably, irresponsible, to leave the work of truly addressing this ongoing conflict to our children alone. It is the adults who must first and foremost lead the way in proving that the model and practices of inclusion, equality and recognition are realistic. For this reason, Hand in Hand began to work formally at the adult community level in 2013.

Launched with a significant grant from USAID (the United States Agency for International Development) Hand in Hand's Community Program ensures that the HIH experience and its impact are elevated from the individual level to a broader societal level. Parents are beneficiaries of their children's school experience of bringing their children to school, interacting with staff and other parents, attending class celebrations, and being exposed through their children to the unique learning experience the school provides. Very quickly a group of parents becomes a community.

The parents as well as other community members develop personal relationships by taking part in the wide-range of community activities organized by the Hand in Hand community organizer and community activists which both increase social ties and address social tensions: from sports, cultural activities and excursions; to participating in adult education programs focused on learning each other's language, culture and traditions; to inter-group dialogue and social action.

HIH also runs an annual country-wide community program where participants have a chance to get to know one another, to share their successes and challenges and can feel they are part of something bigger than themselves, something that is enabling social change.

Recognition for Hand in Hand's Societal Mode

Hand in Hand is increasingly viewed as an example and source of unique expertise for our work at both the national and local levels.

In April 2016 Nadia Kinani, principal of the Max Rayne Hand in Hand Bilingual School in Jerusalem, was recognized by former President Shimon Peres as one of eight women country-wide “making major contributions to Israeli society.”

The Chair of the Budget Committee for Higher Education in Israel, Manuel Trajtenberg, visited our Jerusalem school two years ago to understand how our bilingual model works and how our practices can help the committee improve the academic opportunities for the Arab student population in universities. He observed:

“What’s happening here is amazing ... I can see that we can learn a tremendous amount from bilingual education and we can implement parts of it in broader contexts in the education system. In this complex and volatile atmosphere, this is a brave, interesting, and pioneering experiment. There is outstanding pedagogical innovation here.”

The Ministry of Education has recognized Hand in Hand’s success in transmitting values of equality, inclusion and mutual respect for others who have different perspectives and beliefs. For example, as part of Jerusalem’s Municipal Principal’s Forum, which convenes all of the city’s school principals on a regular basis, they have brought principals from all over Jerusalem to the Max Rayne Hand in Hand School in order to learn how the school helps its students cope with escalating tensions in Jerusalem, racist graffiti sprayed on school walls, and has managed to have one of the lowest rates of violence.

In speaking to a delegation of senior policy makers and officials from the Tel Aviv municipality who visited our Jerusalem school in spring 2013 to determine if they would want such a school in Tel Aviv, Moshe (Kinley) Tur-Paz, the Director of the Jerusalem Education Authority, expressed strong support for Hand in Hand, stated:

“The city of Jerusalem benefits a great deal from this school. This school is an inspiration for the



Jerusalem Principal Nadia Kinani receiving her award.

entire education system of Jerusalem with regard to values of inclusion, dialogue and co-living. I think that every city in Israel must have such a school and I believe that Jaffa and Tel Aviv will feel enriched by it the way we do.”

The Tel Aviv municipality decided to grant permission for Hand in Hand to start with one preschool class in Sept. 2013, which has since grown to 4 preschool classes and 4 elementary school classes as of this Sept. 2016.

Following an arson attack at our Jerusalem school in Nov. 2014, the Jerusalem Post and Haaretz both wrote compelling arguments³ analyzing the separated school system as a contributor to perpetuating societal tensions, and identifying Hand in Hand as a critical model which must be expanded to address these tensions:

The educational model developed by Hand in Hand screams for much greater support... Now is the time to replicate it throughout the country to help reduce the polarization between Arabs and Jews.

From “[A Worthy Response To Racist Pyromaniacs](#)” Haaretz (December 2, 2014), following arsonist attack by extremists at Hand in Hand’s Jerusalem school

These are just some examples of how Hand in Hand’s schools are serving as an inspiration for what is possible to others.

³ “Is Separate Education Working in Israel?” ([full article here](#)) by Seth Franzman, in the Jerusalem Post Nov. 30, 2014 and “A Worthy Response to Racist Pyromaniacs”, Haaretz Editorial on Dec. 2, 2014. ([full article here](#))

Amplification of Hand in Hand's Message

Hand in Hand's transformative experience must go beyond the individual level to the societal level to have real impact. We realize that this can only be achieved through ensuring that our story becomes part of the Israeli public consciousness as a normal viable option. This requires that both decision makers and opinion makers be aware of Hand in Hand's work and public desire to have it, and that media amplifies this experience out so that even those who do not take part in it know of it and accept it. While such exposure also brings risk, as extremists on both sides are against such efforts, Hand in Hand staff and parents have realized that broader change will only come about if alternatives such as this become widely known and viewed as viable.

Media

Hand in Hand has received growing media attention, with over 17,000 social media likes and views on our Facebook and YouTube sites, and more than 300 pieces in the local and foreign press over the last two years, including Time Magazine, MSNBC, PBS, the New York Times, Washington post, Boston globe, and Haaretz, altogether reaching millions of people around the world.

Within Israel increasingly media is turning to us with the explicit desire to share Hand in Hand's story as a viable alternative to the escalating tensions around us. Three items that came out on prime time evening news programs over the last two years, reaching hundreds of thousands of viewers, and showing complex but real pictures of the need, challenges and successes, included features on Channel 10 (Oct. 2015); Channel 2 (Jan 2016); and [Channel 1](#) (Sept. 2016).

Israeli Public Support

Key Israeli public figures, from policy makers and politicians, to cultural icons, have visited or worked

with our schools, to understand our model better or show their support. Prominent individuals include President Reuven Rivlin, Former Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni, Former Minister of Education Shai Piron, the Mayors of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, and many others.

"You are proof that we can live together in peace and we can't let the difficult experiences that you went through this week harm our faith in our ability to live together," observed President Rivlin when he met with our 1st grade students after their classrooms had been attacked by arsonists, extremists who oppose Jewish-Arab cooperation.

International Attention

While our main focus is on increasing the social impact of Hand in Hand inside Israel, we are receiving growing international recognition.

In May 2014 Muslim, Christian and Jewish students from Hand in Hand were invited to personally welcome Pope Francis I as he arrived in Jerusalem.

December 2014 Hand in Hand was honored to have two students, a mother and staff person, join President Obama and the First Lady at the White House Hanukkah Celebration. The Hanukkah they lit was made by Hand in Hand students. Built from olive wood and painted colorfully, each branch of the Hanukkah had core guiding values written in Hebrew and Arabic, as well as English: friendship, community, education, equality, solidarity, freedom, human dignity, and peace.

This past summer Carlos Santana, who supports Hand in Hand through his Milagro Foundation, invited Hand in Hand families to join his concert in Israel, and featured a Hand in Hand [video](#) to share our story with the 25,000 concert attendees.

These efforts are important for ensuring that Hand in Hand's example has far-reaching impact.

A Three-Way Partnership – Parents, Government and Philanthropy

Hand in Hand schools are a shared venture operated in a close three-way partnership including: parents, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and local educational authorities, and our philanthropic partners. On average the cost share between the Ministry of Education, philanthropy and parents is 40-40-20% respectively.

HIH invests considerable effort into continually strengthening the relationship with the Municipality and MOE, and often those who work with HIH become strong supporters of our educational goals and agenda. Hand in Hand's goal is that its schools receive support and recognition from the Ministry of Education. Currently each of our schools is recognized and part of the municipal system, with the exception of our newer preschools in Haifa and Kfar Saba, which receive partial support but are still in the process of becoming municipal schools.

The local educational authorities provide core support, in accordance what other schools get, including a standard number of teaching hours, standard core curriculum, administrative support, and basic facilities and maintenance.

HIH builds upon this standard to provide our multicultural and bilingual model, with additional resources from parents' fees and philanthropy covering: the additional teaching staff for bilingual education; multicultural curriculum development and supervised implementation; pedagogic training and guidance; leadership development of the school principals, and dialogue training for the educational staff.

Philanthropic resources come from private donors in the US, UK, Europe and Israel; US and European foundations; USAID; American Jewish Federations; Israeli businesses and supporters both Jewish and Arab; and synagogues and churches.

Sustainability

Our educational model and resource partnership has proven to be robust. After almost two decades



of operation and growth, Hand in Hand has survived the vicissitudes, and ultimately thrived, coping with both external crises and the inevitable challenges of developing this pioneering model. This includes coping with the 2nd intifada, withdrawal from Lebanon, renewed violence between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon and constant tensions in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza; ups and downs in student numbers and the balance between Jews and Arabs; struggles to raise the additional funds needed to implement our model as we see is needed. As we enter the next stage of growth this gives us confidence that the model we are building is sustainable even under the most challenging circumstances.

Hand in Hand seeks to make the choice of integrated bilingual education available for Jewish and Arab families around the country, and with it, normalizing the idea and practices of living together. Our goal is to expand the network to 10-15 schools and communities throughout the country. Each mixed city and areas where there are high concentrations of both populations living would have this as one of its choices for public school. In each location ongoing community activities would take place that are open to and known about by the broader public.

Hand in Hand's next stage of growth requires the following:

- Maintain the academic and social excellence of the three veteran schools in Jerusalem, the Galilee and Wadi Ara while and ensure that each continues to thrive, especially the Jerusalem school which is now embarking on a high school construction effort for its rapidly expanding high school;
- Stabilize the foundations and ongoing growth of the three new schools in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Haifa and Kfar Saba until each reaches its maximum growth point (at least K-6 for all three, and likely middle and secondary school for Jaffa and Haifa);
- Strengthen the educational capacity, community work and administrative capacity of Hand in Hand organization. We need to be robust enough to both manage a growing school network and lead a social change organization which much constantly overcome the shocks of ongoing conflict while pioneering profound societal change.
- ⇨ Lay the groundwork for the next stage of growth – identifying the next cities for school locations, parents’ groups committed to a school there, municipal supporters, philanthropic partners.

With a country-wide network of public schools, some 20,000 individuals involved on a daily basis in the schools and communities and a much wider circle hearing about it regularly Hand in Hand believes this would help shift public perception about the viability of living together as Jews and Arabs. In the Israeli context these numbers, together with amplification through media, are sufficient to have an impact. Like the kibbutz movement whose numbers never included more than a small portion of the overall population (7% at its height) and yet had considerable impact on Israeli society and perception, it is less about numbers and more about the example and hope it offers. As one supporter at the Jerusalem Foundation said, “Hand in Hand is like a lighthouse showing us what is possible.”

Philanthropic partners

We are now building our philanthropic base. We must bring in major philanthropic partners willing to be part of making Hand in Hand a stable network over time. Whether \$25, \$25,000, or \$250,000 a year, Hand in Hand must be confident that with each new class we open and each new school we found, our partners will remain with us.



Conclusion – Looking Forward

Every day more people are searching for an alternative path - one that is shared and inclusive, and they turn to us because they share Hand in Hand's vision and values.

We offer an immediate alternative for the individual families who want to be part of this, and a long-term alternative for Israeli society. It's real and it's working.

We refuse to subscribe to the belief that Israel will live forever in a perpetual cycle of violence and fear. Change won't happen by itself – the parents, staff, alumni, community members of Hand in Hand are taking responsibility to build a shared future together.

Hand in Hand's schools will continue to grow year by year, in grade levels, numbers of students, community activities and overall impact. We are entering a pivotal stage of our growth towards 10-15 schools and communities. The model has proven its durability; parental demand is high; and governmental support is growing. We are actively working to strengthen our capacity to support and sustain this level of growth.

We invite you to join Hand in Hand and the thousands of Jewish and Arab students, teachers, families and activists who stand with us as we make this vision a reality.

Appendix 1: HIH Organizational Structure

Hand in Hand acts as the umbrella organization to the Hand in Hand schools and communities network, providing programmatic, pedagogical, financial and administrative support to the school and community activity. The organizational structure is outlined below:

- **Hand in Hand schools** represent a public-civic partnership in that they are public schools, recognized and funded by the government, that are part of HIH's network. The schools utilize the government curriculum, and receive standard funding and pedagogical supervision. Upon this base HIH builds all the components that make it integrated, bilingual and multicultural. Core aspects include a co-teaching model whereby all younger grades have a Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking teacher working together, and older grades have classes taught in both languages; additional curriculum or materials to bring in culture, literature, religion, history from both groups; and a shared calendar bringing in Jewish, Muslim and Christian holidays and traditions.
- **The Education Department** is responsible for the pedagogical oversight and training of the bilingual and multicultural aspects of HIH schools, working closely with the principals and teachers in developing leadership, conducting

teachers training, and developing innovative pedagogy and curricula which fulfill the HIH mission.

- **The Community Department** works closely with the schools, parents and broader public in each of our locations to create a vibrant adult community supporting the school and open to the broader public. A wide range of community activities help build social ties between Jews and Arabs, and address the underlying social tensions. When HIH starts in a new location, work begins at the community level with a core group of committed parents and activists whose community activities include the establishment of a new school.
- **The Communications team** works across our network to help share the story of this daily reality of shared living both within the HIH network and with the broader public. This two-person team produces everything in Hebrew and Arabic on HIH social media, and work closely with the general media in both the Jewish and Arab sectors.
- **Financial and administrative support**, as well as resource development and communications are based primarily within the HIH organization and service all HIH schools and communities.

Appendix 2: Overview of HIH Schools

School	Year Established	Current Grades & Student Numbers	Public / Private
Jerusalem	1998	- Pre-Kindergarten through 12 th grade -696 Total students	Public
Galilee	1998	-1 st grade through 6 th grade -207 Total students	Public
Wadi Ara	2004	-Kindergarten through 6 th grade -277 Total Students	Public
Haifa	2012	-Kindergarten through 1 st grade -114 Total students	Preschool receives some municipal aid; 1 st grade part of public schools
Jaffa	2013	-Pre-Kindergarten through 2 nd grade -233 Total students	Public
Tira-Kfar Saba	2015	-Kindergarten -37 Total students	Still private but municipality beginning process of recognition





News Coverage



Common Ground News Service

Riding the school bus together in Jerusalem

by Khaled Diab

29 July 2011

Jerusalem - The mutual distrust between Israelis and Palestinians is such that almost every action by the other side is viewed through a prism of suspicion. Take the Jerusalem light railway. When it finally starts operating, it will connect the Jewish west of the city with the Palestinian east.

Many Palestinians, concerned over Israel's ongoing settlement expansion, see the new tram not as a useful transportation service but as part of an Israeli plan to cement its grip on the whole of Jerusalem. For many Israelis, the idea of becoming fellow passengers with Palestinians is a prospect that elicits both fear and loathing.

This is partly because, with little personal contact between the two sides, the voices of extremists are the loudest. Avoiding an arrival at this terminal state of distrust is a long journey that should start as early as possible in life. Perhaps persuading Israelis and Palestinians to become fellow passengers on the school bus, so to speak, is one of the biggest challenges facing those who seek a future of coexistence.

The Hand in Hand bilingual education network aims to provide just such an opportunity. Founded in 1997 by an Israeli-American social worker, Lee Gordon, and a Palestinian-Israeli teacher, Amin Khalaf, the network is currently comprised of four schools where Israeli-Jews and Palestinians can study together in both Arabic and Hebrew. The largest school, with some 500 pupils, is in Jerusalem.

In line with the school's aim of promoting complete equality between Arabs and Jews, the children often don't know or care about the ethnicity of their schoolmates. "The children at the school don't look at each other as 'Jews' and 'Arabs', they use their own criteria," explains Ira Kerem, an American-Israeli social worker and my guide for the day. "What they're interested in are things like: is this person good friend material, is this kid cool, how good is he at football?"

"We learn to love people for who they are more than where they come from or what religion they believe in," says Ruth, a Jewish pupil.

Nevertheless, despite the school's best efforts, inequalities do creep in. In theory, the school's bilingual approach should ensure that all the pupils become equally proficient in Hebrew and Arabic, explains Inas Deeb, who is in charge of educational programmes at the school.

"However, Arab pupils generally speak better Hebrew than Jewish pupils speak Arabic," says Deeb. "Hebrew is the dominant language... Arab kids speak Hebrew outside the school, unlike most of the Jewish kids [who do not speak Arabic]."

Despite these linguistic disparities, which the school and parents are working to tackle, pupils confirm the general sense of equality and trust. "There's no difference here between the Jewish kids and the Palestinian kids. Unlike outside the school, here we feel equal," agreed Mu'eed and Jouhan, two Palestinian teenagers studying at the school.

But the reality of the divided city is never far from the school gates. When I probed the youngsters about whether they socialised with their Jewish friends, both answered in the affirmative, but noted that Jewish and Palestinian neighbours were not always as tolerant and understanding.

As its name suggests, Hand in Hand does its best to promote honest and mutually respectful dialogue among pupils and parents alike, says Kerem. "We teach that bloodletting will not resolve the conflict or bring about peace," adds Deeb.

Although this is commendable, the question of how much difference the few thousand children who have studied at Hand in Hand and other schools like it can make is a poignant one. "We have no illusions that this school will bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians," one Israeli-Jewish father admitted to me. "But you have to do something and every little bit counts. And you have to start with yourself."

"This school offers a glimmer of hope for the future, and for the sake of our children, we need to provide them with every bit of hope we can," his good friend, a Palestinian mother, chimed in.

But to keep this glimmer alight and perhaps help it burn more intensely requires support. Hand in Hand depends for at least a third of its funding on international private donations, which have been hit hard by the global recession. If it fails to raise more funds, it may be forced to cut back its activities.

It is the opinion of this author that not only does Hand in Hand deserve a helping hand, but that this kind of bilingual education should become more universally available in order to help the next generations to learn to live together.

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* Khaled Diab is an Egyptian-Belgian journalist and writer living in Jerusalem. He writes about a wide range of subjects, including the EU, the Middle East, Islam and secularism, multiculturalism and human rights. His website is www.chronikler.com. This article was written for the Common Ground News Service (CGNews).

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On remembrance and hope for peace and equality

How sad it is to watch irresponsible adults, Jews and Arabs, developing expertise in the building of walls of alienation, fear and prejudice while children at Bridge Over the Wadi bilingual school learn tolerance and hope.

By **Akiva Eldar**

When the siren sounded in the elementary school courtyard last week, Tamar and Lin, both nine years old, were holding hands. The pupils, all wearing white shirts, stood silently. Their teachers shed tears. The teacher, Sabrine, conducted the ceremony with great emotion. At one point, they sang "Tears of Angels," and released kites. The principal quoted Mahatma Gandhi, who said that wherever people follow the principle of an eye for an eye, everyone is blind - and then added "we've decided not to be blind."

Tamar is my oldest granddaughter; Lin is an Arab girl. The two of them study at the bilingual school, Bridge Over the Wadi, in Kafr Kara, in the Wadi Ara area. Sabrine is a Palestinian-Israeli. The school's principal, Dr. Hasan Agbaria is an educator whose personality is a combination of serene cordiality, intellectual integrity and courage. This is his first year at Bridge Over the Wadi - and the first year that the school, located in the heart of an Arab village, conducted a memorial ceremony for those who fell in Israel's war with the Arabs. Agbaria has dared to do what Jewish principals before him at the school did not do before. In the past, the pupils were sent home before the siren sounded. But together with his colleagues on the staff, and in consultation with parents, he came up with a detailed plan of activities for the national holidays of the two peoples.

In a letter sent to parents, the school's administration wrote: "Last week we devoted time to exposing pupils to, and studying, the events that occurred in 1948. The pupils studied the two narratives, the Palestinian and the Israeli, while displaying respect for the other and listening even at moments of disagreement, and contradiction [between the narratives]. The learning was based on our belief in the importance of knowing the past, and becoming acquainted with the other side, so that we can live together in the present, and guarantee a better future."

Yesterday, when media outlets incessantly reported about the security forces' preparations for "disturbances" on Nakba Day, Jewish and Arab pupils at Bridge Over the Wadi united to honor Palestinian memories. Less than a week after they stood together to honor the fallen in Israel's wars, Jewish and Arab teachers alike asked that everyone become acquainted with the people and places on the other side of the conflict, which has yet to end.

The activities were conducted under the shadow of the new legislation that threatens to cut government allocations to any institution that dares to refer to Israel's Independence Day as a day of mourning. But Education Minister Gideon Sa'ar and Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz will not find even a trace of offense in this activity; it is utterly devoid of malice and lacks any reference, heaven forbid, to a day of mourning.

The pupils were exposed yesterday to the stories of villages that were abandoned in Wadi Ara. The information was conveyed via biographies of persons who lived in the region, and by memorializing their names both verbally and in drawings. The youngsters learned to express their feelings, criticism and longings also, in part, by reading poems by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. They studied works rendered by Palestinian caricaturist Naji al-Ali that have become iconic images in his people's struggle for independence. They children also were asked to come up with their own protest, on any subject that came to mind, and to present it in songs and cartoons. They concluded the activities by stressing the longing for a better future, one of peace and truth.

Agbaria did not conceal his pride. "There is nothing more moving, during the current period, than seeing our children at Bridge Over the Wadi severing themselves from national and language-related differences, and connecting with a shared sense of humanity and with the ostensibly simple concepts of fraternity and solidarity."

At this oasis of sanity at Kafr Kara, parents, teachers and pupils proved that our own narrative can be honored, without invalidating the other narrative. They taught and learned that the Palestinian memory can be cultivated, without repressing our own memory.

How sad it is to watch irresponsible adults, Jews and Arabs, developing expertise in the building of walls of alienation, fear and prejudice. In contrast, how inspiring it was to see Tamar and Lin, two girls who with their own small hands held the keys to equality, reconciliation and hope.

In Divided Jerusalem, a School Bridges Boundaries Between Young Israeli Arabs and Jews

Originally the brainchild of an American Jew and an Arab Israeli, now a model for a small but growing educational trend

By Shira Rubin | November 7, 2013 12:00 AM

The walls at the Max Rayne Hand in Hand school in Jerusalem, located along the Green Line in the city's southwest, are draped with hand-painted murals, squiggly sketches, and paper cutouts around words like “dignity”—but, like everything else at the school, it's written twice: once in Hebrew, *kavod*, and once in Arabic, *karam*. Each class is run by two teachers, one Jewish and one Arab, and the 600 students are split evenly between Israeli Jews and Arabs.

In a diverse yet deeply segregated Jerusalem, where mundane public places can quickly become social battlefield, the students at this school are an experiment in coexistence. They are the leading edge of a small but growing trend toward bilingual, multicultural education in Israel. Ten-year-old Atalia Davidoff, a Jewish student, says that while she regularly gets flak from her neighborhood friends for going to school with and hanging out with Arabs, she likes that it's something out of the ordinary. “It's really fun to learn with Arabs,” she explained. “It makes me feel special.”



Jewish and Arab schoolfriends share the playground during recess at the Hand in Hand Center for Jewish-Arab Education, Oct. 9, 2007, in Jerusalem. (David Silverman/Getty Images)

That view can be hard to come by these days, when 64 percent of Jewish Israelis and 39 percent of Arab Israelis say they don't expect a permanent peace to ever be achieved between Israel and Palestine, according to a recent Gallup poll. But egalitarianism is the code of law at Hand in Hand. Kids have days off for Jewish, Muslim, and Christian holidays and learn about them comparatively. On Israeli Independence Day—which celebrates the creation of Israel in 1948, and which Palestinians refer to as Nakba, or catastrophe, Day—students discuss their intertwined, and respectively fraught, national narratives, in both languages. They are not required to agree, only to listen.

This model of cooperation and co-existence in the Israeli capital is the brainchild of an American Jew named Lee Gordon, a peace activist who wanted to create a pluralistic school in the 1990s, during the euphoric optimism of the early Oslo peace process. With Amin Khalaf, an Israeli Arab activist, Gordon opened the Max Rayne campus in 1998. Today, while Oslo has failed to produce peace, there are five Hand in Hand campuses—in Haifa, Wadi Ara, and the Galilee as well as Jerusalem and, most recently, in Jaffa—educating more than a thousand students a year.

Unlike most Israeli schools, which are typically grouped along demographic lines—ultra-Orthodox, secular Jewish, or Arab—the integrated, bilingual Hand in Hand model is designed to facilitate natural and constant interaction between Arab and Jewish children. Gordon and Khalaf wanted Arab and Jewish kids—and their parents—to have a free space in which to explore emotionally charged issues of conflict and identity. Also, and perhaps more important, they wanted children from each sector to just be kids together, rather than grow into the teenagers or adults they saw encountering each other awkwardly at one-off dialogue sessions or community-building events. “Kids are a captive audience,” Gordon jokes.

Over the next decade, administrators aim to build 10 to 15 more Hand in Hand schools throughout the country, and others are copying the model throughout Israel, despite challenges from the Israeli education ministry, which recently attempted to cut back the schools' yearly tuition charges—5,000 shekels, about \$1,400—which are crucial to providing double the usual staff. Education Minister Shai Piron accused specialized schools such as Hand in Hand of being a “back road to creating private schools with state funds.”

This year, the Haifa campus was denied accreditation and is operating as a private school, without government funds, and accreditation for future years is in no way guaranteed for the other campuses, which supplement state funding with tuition and backing from individual donors, private philanthropies like the Jerusalem Foundation—a nonprofit founded by the city’s former mayor Teddy Kollek, and devoted to fostering pluralism in the city—and the U.S. government, which last year gave Hand in Hand a million dollar grant to seed three new campuses.

Gordon, now 57, grew up in Portland, Ore., the son of political activists who joined protests against racial segregation and the Vietnam War. The family wasn’t religious, but Gordon, like many in his generation, felt an affinity with Israel and visited as a high-school student in the 1970s, working as a volunteer on kibbutzim. As an undergraduate at the University of California, Berkeley, he got involved with the emerging peace movement, hosting a delegation from Peace Now. In 1983, he made aliyah with his wife, Wendy, and enrolled in Hebrew University for a Master’s degree in social work. Almost immediately, he began to run Jewish-Arab dialogue groups among his classmates.

Nearly a decade later, as the Oslo peace framework was beginning to emerge, Gordon—who was doing a post-graduate fellowship focused on creating new education initiatives in Israel—was running a community dialogue at a high school in Ramallah and struck up a conversation with a couple of English-speaking Palestinian teenagers. They said they wanted to join in Gordon’s monthly meetings, which covered every issue from the conflict to the complexes of Israeli and Palestinian identity, to everyday banalities, from the emergence of checkpoints to societal attitudes toward a growing wave of violence that would eventually become the Second Intifada. Hundreds of Jewish and Palestinian teenagers joined the monthly meetings.

In 1991, tragedy struck: Gordon’s wife, a clinical psychologist, was killed by one of her patients, an Israeli in his 20s who had been kicked out of the army for violent behavior and severe mental health issues. Suddenly a single father of a 2-year-old boy, Gordon took solace in his organizing and devoted himself to creating something lasting for the young people he’d met through his groups.

With Khalaf—a fellow Hebrew University alum—Gordon laid out a plan to establish the first Hand in Hand school, in Jerusalem. “We met right away and it was like bursting open the door,” says Gordon. And while for Gordon the idea was more ideological, his co-founder Khalaf’s motives were more immediate: He was looking for a school for his son where he could learn the Israeli curriculum and also feel welcome as an Arab Israeli.

It took 15 years of trial and error of polishing a largely untested framework to get it to where it is now. Originally, Arab Israelis enrolled their children in the bilingual schools to give them a chance to study sciences within the superior Israeli system and to acquire the linguistic and cultural tools necessary for integration into Israel. Israeli parents, who had generally more ideological motivations, often eventually transferred their kids to more competitive, humanities-focused schools once they approached high school.

Today, the Jerusalem campus—the only one to run all the way from kindergarten through 12th grade—is known for academic excellence. Students there score higher on standardized high-school exit exams similar to AP tests and have a higher presence on university campuses, when compared to their Israeli peers attending monolingual schools, according to Dr. Zvi Bekerman of Hebrew University, who has researched Jewish-Palestinian bilingual schools since 1999.

They’re also more mature and more critically thinking, argues Arik Sporta, the principal of the middle and high schools at the Jerusalem school. In contrast to the adrenaline-saturated atmosphere of skimpy outfits and excessive public displays of affection, as seen in many Israeli high schools, Sporta says, the kids here—including two of his own—are “calm.”

When Operation Pillar of Defense erupted a year ago, students and parents made a film condemning the violence in both Gaza and southern Israel, under the direction of a documentary filmmaker and school parent. In one scene, Aya, a teenager, stares into the camera and says in accentless Hebrew that she didn’t want to see her people die, or for others to judge her because she identifies with her people. She then shifts into Arabic, “I don’t want to see killing or rockets, I don’t understand why a 3-year-old child, instead of watching Pokemon on TV, needs to see people dead.” She exhaled anxiously.

But teachers agree that the real test comes only after graduation, when Jewish and Arab students will come in contact with a more mainstream, more polarized, Israel. Yasmin Jabber, a Muslim from the Palestinian village of Taybeh, and Meodi Ben Hurn, a Jewish Israeli from Jerusalem, are well versed in handling ignorance and prejudice. Though most Hand in Hand students go on to serve in the army after high school, Meodi has refused to sign her draft letter, saying she doesn’t “believe in, or agree with, a lot of the things going on there.” Now tenth-graders, they have been best friends since kindergarten and plan to keep it that way. “When we speak Arabic with each other or people find out that I’m an Arab, they’re really scared, or they say that I’m an exception, but, no, we’re not an exception,” says Yasmin, proudly.

Arab-Jewish preschool an island of sanity amid violence, parents say

Shira Rubin, Special for USA TODAY 12:10 p.m. EDT October 29, 2015

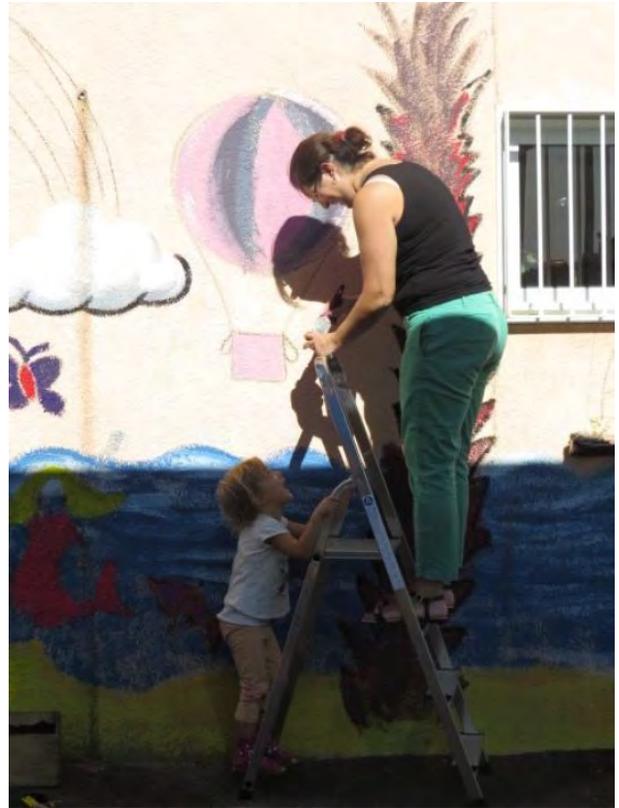
JAFFA, Israel — Amid ongoing violence between Palestinians and Israelis, a school in this city seems more determined than ever to teach Arab and Jewish children about coexistence.

In a sunny playground here just 3 miles south of Tel Aviv, children paint recycled tires in vibrant colors and refurbish wooden furniture to beautify a place that many in the community say is their best chance at a peaceful future.

This is the Jaffa branch of “Yad b’Yad” — or “Hand in Hand” in both Hebrew and Arabic — a school made up of four kindergarten and two first-grade classes that aims to respond to growing Jewish-Arab segregation and violence with mutual respect and open dialogue.

“Psychologically, this is the only place where we feel that my children, and my neighbor’s children, are secure,” said Hani Chamy, an Arab engineer and generations-old resident of Jaffa who was one of the first parents to send her two girls to the pre-school. “It’s a great relief.”

The current round of violence began in mid-September over tensions at a holy Jerusalem mountaintop site sacred to both Muslims and Jews. Since then, confrontations have increased. So far, 11 Israelis have been killed, mostly in stabbings, while 55 Palestinians, 35 of them identified by Israel as attackers, have been killed by Israeli fire.



(Photo: Handout)

Bringing together Jewish and Arab students is a revolutionary idea in Israel, where children usually register for schools along demographic lines — Arab, secular Jewish or religious Jewish. And it appears to be gaining traction.

When Hand in Hand opened its Jaffa branch — one of six schools — three years ago, 35 Arab and Jewish students attended. Today, enrollment is 170, split almost evenly between Arabs and Jews, and applicants are expected to grow each year.

Each class has two teachers — one Arabic-speaking and one Hebrew-speaking — and students learn to master both languages. The schools mark all Jewish, Muslim and Christian holidays.

Anat Itzhaki, director of the Jaffa branch, said teachers and parents welcome complicated issues, such as how to handle sensitive dates like Israeli Independence Day and “Nakba” Day, when Palestinians commemorate of the “catastrophe” they say was the creation of the state of Israel.

The school is vital for the community and parents — who understand their 5-year-olds may not yet grasp the implications of their ethnic, religious or national identities — to show that it is possible to “be together, while still different, and learn about each other,” Chamy said.

A PTA meeting last week functioned as a kind of support group, where parents expressed mutual feelings of frustration and despair over the growing violence. One Arab parent spoke about how one of her relatives had been doused with acid, and another about how a relative was fired from work because she expressed support for Palestinians.



Today, enrollment at the Jaffa branch at Hand in Hand is 170, split almost evenly between Arabs and Jews, and applicants are expected to grow each year. (Photo: Handout)

Hand in Hand sought a different approach last week when Tel Aviv and three other Israeli cities barred the mostly Arab custodial staff from campuses during school hours for security reasons. The Jaffa branch brought cakes for its janitors as a sign of solidarity and to show appreciation.

Israeli-Palestinian coexistence projects have been around for decades, from groups like Combatants for Peace — which brought together former Israeli soldiers and former Palestinian militants — to Seeds of Peace — which placed Israeli and Palestinian children in summer camps in Israel and abroad — and a long list of Israeli-Palestinian magazines, dialogue programs and economic initiatives.

Seeds for Peace introduced a follow-up program in March for its 5,000 graduates, more than half of whom are now leaders in their fields, and one in five of whom are working in the coexistence movement, according to studies by the group's former Middle East program director, Ned Lazarus.

Even though Jaffa is known for its liberal politics and large activist community, such initiatives remain important because segregation poses a threat, said Dafna Kaplan, a photographer and Jewish Israeli mother at the Hand in Hand School. Since the recent spike in violence, she said her daughter — who studies at another school in Jaffa — for the first time referred to Palestinians as “dirty Arabs.”

“This is the only sane place,” Kaplan said about Hand in Hand. “But also I feel like it’s a mission. You have to create it. It won’t happen by itself.”

Kaplan's doing just that by spearheading a project to show the diversity of voices in the community. She's taking a series of photos of those connected to the school and will project them on a clock tower in town, along with a paragraph about their stories.

While parents are eager to foster mutual understanding during these tense times, it's easy to see a sense of normalcy back at the school's playground when Jewish and Arab children go to class together.

“It’s fun to know other languages because then you can speak with all kinds of people!” exclaims Ofri Druckman, 5, as two of her friends, one Arab, one Jewish, nod in agreement, before they all resume playing on the wooden jungle gym.



The Jaffa branch of “Yad b’Yad” — or “Hand in Hand” in both Hebrew and Arabic — is a school made up of four kindergarten and two first-grade classes that aims to respond to growing Jewish-Arab segregation and violence with mutual respect and open dialogue. (Photo: Handout)

THE JERUSALEM POST

School for Arab, Israeli students a shelter of calm coexistence amid geopolitical storm

By DANIEL K. EISENBUD 09/02/2016

"We don't see people as an Arab kid or a Jewish kid, we just see them as friends who are equal," says student at Jerusalem's Hand in Hand School.



Walking into Jerusalem's bilingual Max Rayne Hand in Hand School is akin to entering a portal to another world – where hate, intolerance and elitism are strictly forbidden, and kindness, humanity and selflessness are generously rewarded. In this world, situated on the Green Line between Beit Safafa and Pat, nearly 700 Arab and Jewish children from pre-kindergarten through high school learn and socialize together under the watchful eyes of teachers and administrators from both communities.

Despite numerous divisive radical outside forces from both sides of that line that have attempted to infiltrate this bastion of coexistence with hatred, the Hand in Hand School has proven itself impervious to such hostilities, time and again. Indeed, it has become a highly successful social and educational paradigm since its doors first opened in 1998. This was clearly evident on the first day of school Thursday, where Arab and Jewish children as young as five held hands to celebrate their reunion.

"We're opening the school year with a lot of excitement and a lot of growth in all six of our schools," said communications director Noa Yammer, moments before a ceremony in the gymnasium welcoming first-graders back from summer vacation.

The Jerusalem school is Hand in Hand's flagship, with institutions in the Galilee, Haifa, Jaffa, Wadi Ara, and Kfar Saba, working with 1,550 students.

Noting the sweeping views of Beit Safafa, Yammer said that despite the school's unique environment, it is important to not insulate the children from the outside world. *"There aren't walls separating us from the rest of the world,"* she said. *"We are not creating a bubble or an insulated environment that is disconnected from the outside. We really want to see what's happening out there, take it in, talk about it, and put it on the table."* Moreover, Yammer said, one of the school's primary objectives is to positively impact the outside world.

"This year we really want to continue to both grow within our education and development," she said, noting that roughly 60% of students are Arab and 40% are Jews. The expansive

school, which is funded by the Jerusalem Foundation, was started by Jewish and Arab parents whose kids were in a preschool together, then separated when they entered first grade. *“They said, ‘We don’t want to separate our children, we want them to grow up together,’”* explained Yammer. *“We want them to see the challenges that come with growing up together, and to learn each other’s languages and cultures, and create a real sense of a shared identity, while still empowering their own identities.”* That first class had 20 children, who graduated together in 2011, she said.

Sarah Sheikh, a 17-year-old senior from Abu Tur, who has been enrolled in the school since the first grade, said she agreed. *“I like that this school is different than any other school in the country because it has Jews and Arabs here, which is really unique,”* she said. *“It’s also good that we get to see both sides here, and listen to each story, which gives us another point of view that not everybody sees outside the school. It really helps us to live in this country in a more peaceful way.”*

Sheikh noted that she has never experienced tension with Jewish students at Hand in Hand. *“In this school, we don’t really feel the tension that’s happening outside,”* she explained. *“We don’t see people as an Arab kid or a Jewish kid, we just see them as friends who are equal.”* Outside the school’s walls, however, is a different story, Sheikh conceded. *“I have a lot of friends who are not really supportive, because they don’t understand the point of the school,”* she said. *“When they hear that I’m in a school that has Jews and Arabs, they think: ‘Oh, you’re a Jew now. You’re one of them.’”* What those outsiders fail to understand, Sheikh added, is that *“when you come here, you don’t erase your identity.”* *“You just build it, and it becomes stronger here,”* she said. *“I have cousins and friends that don’t see the side I see in Jews; they see the soldiers and those things, but I see people who are just like us – regular people.”*

Alumnus Adan Kinani, 19, now a student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Mount Scopus, who leads a coexistence program between Arab and Jewish students there, said her education at Hand in Hand helped her to look beyond socially reinforced stereotypes. *“We learned how to live with each other,”* she said. *“It’s a way of life, and you wake up and know you can’t judge someone for his religion, gender, or whatever. You don’t think about it here.”* Echoing Sheikh’s sentiments, Kinani noted that studying and socializing with Jews in no way mitigates her identity as a Muslim, but rather empowers it. *“You get to know your own religion and your own community, with the other community,”* she said. *“You learn Hebrew and Arabic in the first grade, and I don’t think about if a friend is Jewish or Arab.”*

Math teacher and community organizer, Aharon Gefen, who has two children enrolled at Hand in Hand, said the lessons the school imparts go well beyond the classroom. *“I think it’s very important to emphasize that this school is not just about the children,”* he said. *“It’s a school that has an ideology of bringing Jews and Arabs together, and that means that the parents also have to take an active role, myself included.”*

Indeed, noting that he knew few Arabs before becoming involved with the school, Gefen said the experience has had a profound impact on his thinking of the greater Arab community. *“I remember the first time my wife and I did a tour with the principal here, and we thought it was so beautiful, but when we went outside we saw two Arabs walking by us speaking Arabic, and I remember clenching a little bit because when I used to hear Arabic I became frightened.”* *“Now,”* he continued, *“I don’t feel that way at all. If I see a person wearing a hijab, it’s just a person, and I talk to them and get to know them.”*