



# People To People

Young Detroiters help teach English to Israeli kids.

Detroiters Noah Zucker and Israeli co-teacher Batsheva Dovry with fourth-graders at Yigal Alon School in Migdal HaEmek

Israeli schools in Michigan Jewry's partner region in the Central Galilee were loud and at times unruly when a group of 59 young adults from North America arrived to teach English in a summer school program serving as a pilot for the Ministry of Education.

Strong English language skills help young Israelis develop additional skills. The ability to speak English as well as Hebrew is a steppingstone to future success.

The influx of young, wide-eyed instructors — 50 Teach for America alumni and nine Jewish Detroit young adults, all ages 20-28 — certainly helped enrich the learning environment at English Summer School, dubbed TALMA/The Israel Language Program for Excellence in English.

The Ministry of Education chose the Central Galilee for the pilot because of Michigan Partnership2Gether's long involvement in English language education. Partnership2Gether (P2G) is in its 20th year nurturing relationships between the people of the Central Galilee and Michigan Jewry.

"Interestingly, when my co-teachers and I presented the students with high expectations, introduced a classroom management system and absolutely stuck to that system and held all children accountable, changes in behavior were observed almost immediately," said Noah Zucker, among the local participants who taught English to third- through fifth-graders for three weeks beginning July 1 at English Summer School.

## Local Legacy

The Jewish Federations of Detroit, Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids help fund English Summer School, which serves 1,000 kids in 30 classes at 10 schools in Migdal HaEmek and Nazareth Illit. Enrollment is optional.

The principal of the school where Zucker taught liked the innovations so much that she asked him and his teaching colleagues to help introduce some of their tactics into the normal school year — a clear sign the program mattered.

"I was shocked to see the cultural differences between there and here," Zucker, 22, told the JN in an interview. "Educators often admitted there is not much that can be done. TALMA proved to be a one-of-a-kind experience for me."

Zucker, a Grand Valley State University-Allendale and West Bloomfield High School graduate, is newly enrolled in the University of Michigan Medical School. He applied for TALMA because he wanted to travel over the summer, preferably to Israel, and do something meaningful in the process. He previously visited Israel with peers in 2011 as part of Taglit-Birthright Israel. He's former president of Grand Valley Hillel.

## Summer Rewind

Zucker isn't sure how much English his young charges learned in July. But he thinks they're more at ease with the language.

"Hopefully," he said, "they'll be more inclined to continue learning it, which is more important than saying they learned a finite number of words or sentence stems."

Crucial to planning English Summer School was the participation of native English speakers.

TALMA is a joint project of the Schusterman Family Foundation, the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life, the Rashi Foundation, the Ministry of Education and Michigan P2G. During orientation, Schusterman representatives urged TALMA teachers to find personal growth in the jitters associated with this challenging, new experience. Zucker isn't going into teaching, but he did gain a new respect for teachers. He drew inspiration from the rest of the TALMA teaching corps.

"Everyone had a life plan and was dedicated to that," he said. "Working with them side by side with their teaching and life experience was extraordinary."

English Summer School kicked off a week before Israel launched Operation Protective Edge on July 8 in response to continuous Hamas rocket and missile attacks.

"We had to do a missile attack drill where we lined our students up and took them to the underground shelter," Zucker said. "While this seemed fairly routine for students and faculty alike, it was hard to imagine a situation in which this would



Robert Sklar  
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This bookplate goes inside the cover of each book given by Michigan Jews to Central Galilee students. It includes the name of the donor family.

actually have to be implemented."

"All day and every day," he added, "we could hear fighter jets flying over our school. We could only imagine where these jets were going to or coming back from and what their missions were."

Spending so much time in the Central Galilee, which also includes the Jezreel Valley, enabled Zucker to regularly interact with Israelis.

"I hope these relationships deepen my personal connection to Israel and help

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strengthen the bonds between the partnership regions," Zucker said.

### Behind The Scenes

To help Michigan and Israel young adults connect, Michigan P2G helps support costs and programming for TALMA teachers as well as their Israeli teaching peers from the Central Galilee and other young Detroiters living in the Jewish state.

The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit taps its Annual Campaign allocation to P2G to support English Summer School and English language education in general. For 2014-15, Federation allocated \$635,000 for P2G. Federation also arranged for new English books to be donated to P2G schools. It is encouraging local Israel mission-goers and b'nai mitzvah students (for their community service projects) to donate books as well.

English Summer School will be measured by how well students test in their grasp of, and their willingness to converse in, English. Israeli kids can't become Israeli campers at Oakland County-based Tamarack Camps without proficiency in English. English skills also help determine placement in the Israel Defense Forces. Later, such skills enhance university studies and career planning.

The bonds P2G has built between the Central Galilee and Jewish Detroit are reinforced every time a Jewish Detroit agency, synagogue or community partner group travels to Israel. That's because Federation often arranges for mission-goers to enjoy time in the Central Galilee to bond with the region and build friendships there. Such an opportunity, including home hospitality, has been a highlight of the Israel missions I've joined.

Having our young adults mix with Israeli peers as teachers at English Summer School in the Central Galilee is indeed a fine example of augmenting Michigan-Israel young adult engagement.

### On the Periphery

The Central Galilee is located in Israel's north.



Betsy Heuer

"There, like Detroit, financial and human resources are often more limited than in areas such as Tel Aviv in the center of the country," said Michigan P2G co-chair Betsy Heuer of West Bloomfield.

So it's more difficult to attract and retain young adults, top educators, physicians and other professionals there, she said.

"Less English is spoken in the periphery and there is a large population of *olim* [immigrants] in the region, where Hebrew is not even their first language," she said. "These factors combined to create a situation where English language education in the schools was not really working."

In 2006, P2G and its three municipalities

as well as the Ministry of Education and the Rashi Foundation partnered to create an umbrella English language program in the Central Galilee. Today, the program serves nearly 4,000 students in 31 schools, grades 4-12.

In the early years, Federation, in conjunction with its partners, helped advance teacher hiring, development and support. Weaker students received supplementary instruction as well as other services.

The English language program continues to change and improve. Its newest component, English Summer School, dovetails into Israel's movement toward year-round school.

### A Fruitful Notion



Tova Dorfman

Tova Dorfman, who previously headed the Detroit Federation's Israel office, advanced the prospect of English Summer School as a way to add to the teaching of English in Israeli schools. She was instrumental in developing Michigan P2G.

Today, she's a consultant to our Federation on Israel and overseas matters. With foundation funders on board, she approached the Ministry of Education, which gave a thumbs-up to English Summer School.

Dorfman, who lives near Tel Aviv, called the pilot "very successful."

"We really feel confident the kids got a basic understanding of English," she said. "We'll do intensive evaluation of their retention level."

Dorfman loves that English Summer School resonated beyond the classroom: "We had a song contest where the kids learned songs in English. Each school competed against another. Close to 1,400 parents and grandparents in Nazareth Illit and Migdal HaEmek came out. It proved a great way to involve municipal communities in the education process."

English Summer School will return to the Central Galilee next year and may be expanded to Jerusalem. The future might see Jewish Detroit young adults spending a year in the Central Galilee to co-teach English and do onsite teacher training.

Dorfman is aglow with English immersion ideas and is eager to share them.

As she put it: "In Israel, learning English is a tool for life. Without it, you are at a distinct disadvantage."

The Detroit Federation's investment in English Summer School is prudent as long as evaluation findings confirm an excitement among the Israeli kids to learn and speak English. They are the program's true torchbearers.

That's a wonderful trans-Atlantic prospect as we welcome the High Holidays of 5775. *L'shanah tova tikateivu*. May you and yours be inscribed in the book of life this new year. □

## An Enlightening Summer



Detroiters Molly Goldsmith with fourth-graders at Natofa School in Nazareth Illit

By teaching English in the Central Galilee this past summer, Molly Goldsmith, 21, said she developed a strong, more-grounded connection to Israel and its people.

"There was a palpable anxiety surrounding the Israel-Hamas war," the Michigan State University senior said. "People worried for their friends and family who were called up for reserve duty. We swapped rumors about Hamas' military capability. Nobody knew how long the operation was going to last or what it would cost."

Despite all of that, life continued.

Said Goldsmith: "We went to work. We drank endless cups of coffee. We joked with our coworkers and took weekend trips to Jerusalem, Haifa and Tiberias. Conflict didn't define our trip just as it

doesn't define Israel life."

Goldsmith, a Berkley High School graduate, is from Huntington Woods. She has visited Israel five times now, including spending a spring semester in 2010 at Ramah Jerusalem High School. She'd like to become a professor of writing and rhetoric.

The inaugural TALMA summer will be remembered for the dedication of the leadership and the courage of the U.S. and Israeli teachers to try something new.

"I now have a deeper understanding of the Israeli education system," Goldsmith said, "and how both students and educators can empower themselves from just three weeks of dedicated teaching." □

— Robert Sklar

## TALMA's Local Lineup

Listed below are Jewish Detroit's 2014 participants in TALMA/The Israel Program for Excellence in English. TALMA operates in schools in Israel's Central Galilee, Michigan Jewry's partner region.

- Erica Broder, West Bloomfield, University of Michigan, junior.
- Danielle Gittleman, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan State University, spring 2014 graduate.
- Molly Goldsmith, Huntington Woods, Michigan State University, senior.
- Allison Kramer, West Bloomfield, Michigan State University, senior.
- Sean Martin, Oakland Township, Oakland University; junior status but not currently enrolled.

• Amanda Segal, West Bloomfield, Oakland University, 2009 graduate working toward a Master of Arts degree.

- Julia Simon, West Bloomfield, Michigan State University, junior.
- Abigail Sobel, Farmington Hills, Michigan State University, spring 2014 graduate.
- Noah Zucker, West Bloomfield, Grand Valley State University-Allendale, spring 2014 graduate.

For information about the 2015 application process, contact Lori Davidson-Mertz, senior associate, Israel & Overseas Department, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit: mertz@jfmnd.org, 248-203-1493. □