

Finding Home: A Creative Solution to Peace (Israel)  
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## Section I

The purpose of our Davis Peace Project was twofold: to support African asylum seekers in Israel and to raise awareness about their situation within the larger Israeli society. With this in mind, our project resulted in our collaboration with two projects within the African Refugee Development Center (ARDC): the Women's Empowerment Group and a summer camp for children and refugee youth.

Our initial idea was to support the Women's Empowerment Group using our skills and professional backgrounds. As a social worker and as a filmmaker, we hoped to contribute through a therapeutic arts-based workshop and a movie reflecting the day-to-day lives of the group. However, shortly after we arrived to Israel and met with the coordinators of the group, we noticed a discrepancy in the way we pictured the implementation of the project. After a lot of discussions, we decided to shift our plans and support the group with their current needs. This process made us realize that the group required concrete support in the areas of business and marketing - not exactly our specialties. Regardless of this, however, Yves was able to support the project by filming two films: a fundraising video, which entered a contest to win a \$25,000 grant and a short promotional video featuring participants and coordinators of the women's empowerment group. Group participants were willing and excited to be filmed while crocheting and creating. However, interviewing them was rewarding but challenging due to obvious reasons, including the normal apprehension to speak to a camera, particularly if it implies speaking about their current situation. However, Yves managed and was able to obtain enough footage to make the movies. On the other hand, Carolina, realizing that her idea of an art therapy workshop wasn't aligned with the current needs of the group, decided to support with other aspects, which included contributing to the group's website, organizing a felt making workshop and networking with various artists.

The implementation of our initial idea was very difficult. There are many reasons for this, including differences in expectations between group organizers and us, as well as, plans that were not fully in touch with reality. Additionally, we became very aware that supporting a group's transition into a sustainable business is more of a "development" project, which needs to be looked at in long term, rather than a concrete project to be implemented in a few weeks. Thus, after considering this, gaining a better understanding of the current needs of the organization and brainstorming on how to better support the African refugee community, we decided to support a summer camp for refugee children and youth.

This second part of the project was very different. First of all, Yves returned to his home country and Carolina implemented this part of the project directly with ARDC staff members. Carolina worked closely with Dafna Lichtman, an African Studies and Art student from Tel Aviv recruited by the ARDC to plan and coordinate the summer camp. From the moment Dafna and Carolina began co-coordinating the camp together, it was clear that the summer camp would be an opportunity for participants to spend the summer like regular children. However, raising awareness and understanding about the lives of these children was also a priority. Therefore, every three days, as we welcomed new volunteers, we explained and discussed the situation of African asylum seekers in Israel including their countries of origin, their experiences on their way to Israel and the policies that were currently impacting them. Most of the volunteers hadn't interacted with this population before; therefore it is our hope that the relay of information and the spontaneous human interactions that took place during the summer camp will be a seed for support and advocacy for asylum seekers' rights in the long run.

During the summer camp, we did encounter some challenges. These were not related to the structure or implementation of the summer camp, but were rather "human" challenges. For instance, as Carolina is not fluent in Hebrew, it was difficult with her to communicate with children and volunteers at first. But

after a few days of charades, broken Hebrew, broken English, broken Tigrinya and patience, bonds were built and messages were conveyed. Honestly, this was a minor challenge compared to other things we experienced, including tensions with youth who were not part of the camp and instances of violence, racism and discrimination against our kids from locals. However, all these challenges did nothing but remind us of our intention to provide a safe space for our kids and raise awareness about their situation.

Beyond all challenges, the summer camp was an intensively positive experience for everyone. 39 children and youth from Eritrea and Sudan living in ARDC's shelter (or adjacent areas) spent 3 weeks of fun with over 40 rotating volunteers from Israel and other countries. Camp counselors learned a great deal and camp participants had the opportunity to take a break from their difficult life in the shelter and experience Tel Aviv as children and youth and not just as African asylum seekers. They went to the beach, the zoo, the movies. They danced, learned arts and crafts and capoeira, among other things.

Furthermore, many positive things happened as a result of the summer camp. For instance, one day a crew from a local channel joined us to interview a few children and youth for a news report on asylum seeking children in the Israeli educational system. This was clearly an unanticipated way to create awareness within the larger Israeli society about the everyday reality of these children. Also, interactions between volunteers and the children planted hopeful seeds. For example, after going rock climbing, the owner of the gym expressed interest in hosting an afterschool program for the boys. In addition, many of the volunteers are now signing up to become mentors for the kids, potentially providing a solid source of psychological support for them. Lastly, after a thorough debrief on the summer camp, Dafna and Carolina are now brainstorming on new projects to support these kids and their families.

## Section II

Peace is the ability to connect with "the other" and see each person's worth and humanity regardless of differences. Peace requires humility, awareness and the ability to detach from our preconceived notions and hierarchies to give room for the "other" to exist.

We hope our project contributed to peace by encouraging connections between people. Whether it is through the purchase of a crochet basket made by an Eritrean woman, through the ongoing relationship of a Israeli mentor and her Sudanese mentee or through an after school program for asylum seeking youth, interactions between different communities and human beings will hopefully shed light on our common humanity. This is the best we could do to promote peace: encourage interactions and support a dignified process of growth involving people who would probably not interact if they didn't have to.

Because of the challenges, surprises and successes of this project, our view of the world, and conflict in particular, have been altered. It is now obvious that speaking about peace is easier said than done. Before trying to push peace on others, we need to engage in the process of understanding ourselves and becoming aware of the impact our egos have on our relations with those around us. Additionally, after experiencing micro-conflicts and witnessing macro-conflict during our time in Israel, we have become more aware of our personal responsibility and the impact we each have on the collective. It is indeed challenging to promote peace through our actions, but through small and conscious steps we can really make this world a home for everyone.

**b.** "This experience was fantastic and really challenging. It showed me once again how complex the world is and how complex human interactions can be. I also learned that in order to be able to bring peace to others, you first need to be in peace with yourself. I am really thankful I was given the chance of experiencing that." Yves Bouzaglo

"Because of the realness of this project, its challenges and its surprises, this experience gave me a more realistic view of conflict and peace, one that extends beyond concepts and ideas. Similarly, this project fueled my hope in our power to connect and reminded me that regardless of our backgrounds we all have the potential to nurture peace inside ourselves and all around us." Carolina Rios Mandel

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