

100 Projects for Peace- Final Report , Summer 2007  
Dafna Ashkenazi (Wellesley College) and Noga Ashkenazi (Grinnell College)

Title: **Language for Coexistence**

Schools: **Wellesley College and Grinnell College**

Students' Information: **Dafna Ashkenazi, Israel.** (Attended UWC-U.S, class of 2003)  
**Noga Ashkenazi, Israel.**

1. **Project Summary:** Describe location, timeframe, participants, other funding involved, scope of work, and goals intended.

The intended goals of our peace project were to promote the studies of the Arabic language among Hebrew-speaking Jewish Israelis and **create a meaningful cultural exchange between the Jewish and the Arab residents of Israel**, our home country. We created unique weekend-long Arabic language workshops which took place in the Arab village of Arara in Wadi Arra. Participants were introduced to both the language and the local culture, thus overcoming a linguistic-cultural barrier.

We collaborated with the Almutada Altakadumi non-profit organization. Together we created intensive language courses for beginners in 'spoken Arabic' which were held during the months of July and August.

Our goal was to recruit as many participants as we could through a country-wide advertising campaign (internet, newspapers, radio, posters and direct presentations) which we accomplished during the month of June. We intended to have enough participants to fill 8 weekend workshops (approximately 100-120 participants) during July and August. Overall, we anticipated our project to be a summer-long commitment that will begin in June and end in August.

Our funding was granted by the Kathryn Wasserman Davis foundation through "100 Projects for Peace." We planned to use the majority of our budget for subsidizing the workshop's fee in order to attract a diverse group of participants from varied socio-economic backgrounds.

We planned that during each weekend (Friday morning through Saturday afternoon) participants would be taught 'spoken Arabic' by professional Arab teachers from the village and would then spend the night with host-families from the village, where they would be able to practice the language skills they have learned. **By placing the learning experience in its original context, i.e. in an Arab village, we hoped to combine language and culture which we believe to be inseparable.**

2. **Project Results:** Self-evaluate the project; your assessment should enumerate what goals were and were not accomplished.

Looking back on the past three months, we feel an incredible sense of satisfaction from what we have achieved. Before addressing the project's results, we personally feel that we have learned so much simply from the process of trying to achieve them. Moreover, living in an Arab village and spending every weekend with different people from all over Israel has been a privilege and an experience that we will never forget.

As for the project itself, we feel that we have achieved all of our intended goals and more:

**Advertising-** Our advertising campaign included an article which was written about our project (an interview) in "Maariv," one of Israel's two leading daily newspapers. Following the publication of this article we received hundreds of e-mails from people from all over the country, who wanted to sign up for our courses. By the end of June we have successfully filled all the workshops (most of them overbooked), and have created a long waiting-list.

**The courses-** we dramatically changed the structure of the courses by creating a new academic syllabus that focused on 'spoken Arabic' rather than on reading and writing. Additionally, we changed the length of the courses from three to two-day-workshops (Friday-Saturday) since we believed it would allow more people to participate without having to take

time off from work. We used a part of our budget to subsidize new teachers' training and brought in four new Arabic teachers. Together with the organization we compiled the new program of studies, the daily schedule and the cultural events that constituted an integral part of the weekend. In addition to studying Arabic for 7 hours a day, participants heard a lecture titled "Feminism, Women and Islam", visited a modern art exhibition in the village, and were taken on a tour of the village of Arara where they had a chance to practice their new vocabulary and meet the village residents.

Since the demand was very high we tried to accommodate the number of interested participants but experienced some logistical problems. For example, the organization's facilities in Arara (classroom and dining area) were only large enough to accommodate up to 15 participants per weekend (instead of twenty as we originally assumed). Similarly, the number of available host-families was limited. Therefore, we embraced the intimate atmosphere created by having smaller groups of students and adjusted our plans accordingly.

**Consequently, we have managed to fill all of the July and August workshops to their full capacity, an achievement we are very proud of.** We subsidized the courses' fees by 50%, which made them significantly more affordable and accessible to all. As we succeeded in recruiting more interested participants than the organization could logistically host, we view this as a long term opportunity for continuing to hold such workshops long after our departure in the end of August.

3. **Implications:** What are the project's implications for peace? What are the future prospects for the project? What have you learned?

Our project came to life out of our belief that in order to make peace with our neighboring countries, we must first create a change in the attitude of Israeli-Jews towards their Israeli Arab neighbors within Israel. Since no real dialogue can prevail without a direct interaction between individuals, we designed a project that facilitated such an interaction between members of the Arab and Jewish communities. We invited Jewish Israelis to break through their stereotypes and gain an initial exposure to the Arab language and culture.

In the feedback-questionnaires that we distributed at the end of each workshop, participants thanked us wholeheartedly for creating an experience they have been wanting to have for many years. They said they had been driving along the nearby highway dozens of times before, always passing the Arab village without even considering a visit. Now, having shared an intimate weekend there, they will never look at it the same way. The same is true for the Arabic language, for now they have greater awareness and accessibility to Arabic and its culture.

Each of our participants left the village of Arara having taken important first steps towards acceptance, trust, and peaceful coexistence. Our participants learned basic communication skills in Arabic, many with great motivation to further pursue the studies of Arabic. Moreover, all of our participants demonstrated tremendous interest in returning to the village for advanced courses and further interact with the new Arab friends they have made. Wanting to bring their families and friends along in the future, participants have turned into agents of change within their own communities.

"I would like to start by saying "Thank You" to anyone and everyone involved in this amazing initiative. The region in which we live is like a desert waiting to be watered and each drop of water instantly brings life, growth and beauty. On the weekend Arabic course which was run by Dafna and Noga Ashkenazi I felt the rains pouring down upon our region- true dialogue was created, true interaction was encouraged and seeds of hope were planted... that's a lot for one weekend! Dafna and Noga managed to bring Jews from all over Israel together for a taste of the Arabic culture and language in order to bridge the gaps which are filled with stereotypes, stigmas, ignorance and fears. Participating in this weekend initiative filled my heart with joy and hope. I also hope and pray that more interactions such as this will continue to fill the gaps which are so destructive. Thank You for making this possible! Toda Raba (in Hebrew)... or as I learned to say in Arabic: "Shukran Kthir"

(Yochai Cohen-Benveniste, Participant in the July 27-28, 2007 course)