



American Friends of Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish Arab Education in Israel

“The future of Israel is predicated on finding ways for Jewish and Arab citizens to live together and I believe that teaching children, from the earliest ages is the best way to change a society. It is difficult for the adults, but at the Hand in Hand schools, we teach our students pride in their own heritage as well as an understanding of the other. Entire communities and political leadership are influenced by a school community such as ours, which lives and breathes coexistence everyday. In this city, fraught with tension and conflict, we are bringing hope, success, dialogue, understanding and the ability to live together to a new generation.”

Yaffa Shira Grossberg, Teacher, The Max Rayne Hand in Hand School in Jerusalem

Background

Israel is a country with a little over 6 million citizens consisting of 80% Jews, and 20% Arabs (both Muslim and Christian). All Jewish and Arab Israelis live under ongoing violent conflict in the Middle East. While this is primarily between Israel and Palestinian Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, it profoundly affects the relations between Israel’s Jewish majority and the Arab minority, which for the most part live in separate communities, study in separate schools and only have minimal contact and interaction with each other. Arab and Jewish children in Israel have few opportunities to come together, let alone play together, learn each other’s language and culture, or study together in the same classroom. This division between the two populations is part of the difficulty in resolving conflict in Israel.

Learning Together – Living Together

In 1997, Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel was founded to build peace between Jewish and Arabs citizens of Israel through the development of bilingual multi-cultural public schools for their children. Under the unique Hand in Hand education model, each school is co-directed by Arab and Jewish co-principals and each classroom is co-taught by Jewish and Arab teachers. Students at each grade level are balanced between Arabs and Jews and boys and girls. Students at all grade levels are taught in both Hebrew and Arabic, learning to treasure their own culture and language while understanding the difference of others around them.

Despite the fact that such a program was widely considered to be impossible, Hand in Hand schools started ten years ago with 2 classes and an enrollment of 50. Today, almost 1,000 students, from pre-school through 10th grade, are enrolled in Hand in Hand schools in Jerusalem, the Galilee, Wadi Ara, and Beersheva, with waiting lists at each location, and communities across Israel wishing to open a Hand in Hand school to their area. In addition to the expense of managing four schools, the organization also supports development of its unique curriculum, training teachers for a multicultural classroom, and important community outreach programs at each location. A portion of the annual budget is also used for planning and start-up costs for new schools in other cities in Israel.

Your Support

We hope that you will consider making a transformative gift that will dramatically change the lives of our students and the country - changing the ways Israelis see themselves and others see Israel. A donation to support Hand in Hand will help educate the next generation to be catalysts for a better more democratic, peaceful and secure future.

Support for our students is our most basic and also most important need. Your gift will help immeasurably during a difficult economic climate, but also at a time when the need for Hand in Hand and the work we do in Israel was never greater. Your commitment will also demonstrate solidarity with our school communities — our teachers, parent and students — reassuring them that friends across the world are behind our ambitious project and are committed to its success.

The Present and The Future

In the past few years, Hand in Hand has had exponential growth - from opening new schools and moving existing schools to new campuses to accommodate their expanding student body, to beginning a Junior High and a High School program. Our organization has attracted broad support across Israel and around the world, including international recognition and awards for teaching and peace education.

Despite the ongoing violence, the schools have grown steadily and created a viable new form of partnership, dialogue, and coexistence between Arabs and Jews, all in the context of providing a “model of excellence” in education. The influence of this project is one that goes well beyond the walls of the classroom and out to broader circles of parents, educators and the surrounding communities to continue to build bridges and nurture a new generation, prepared to create a more democratic and peaceful future for Israel. The recent war in Gaza, shows how the importance of our work stands out even more. Nowhere else in Israel do Arabs and Jews spend so much time together, daily working out the small and large issues of coexistence—from observing holidays to formulating a shared community response when terror erupts. No other projects in Israel or elsewhere, are creating long-term connections between Jewish and Arab youth, their families and entire communities.

Hand in Hand is a wonderful beacon of hope to Israelis and people across the globe, serving as a shining example of what is possible, as well as living proof that it can be accomplished. We would be honored to earn your support and be able to count you among our supporters. Thank you for your consideration.