

American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam School for Peace – Youth Encounter Workshops Proposal

1. Organization's history, mission and goals

The American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam is dedicated to dialogue, cooperation and a genuine and durable peace between Arabs and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis by encouraging, supporting and publicizing the projects of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, the "Oasis of Peace." Over the last thirty years, the community of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam has grown from a handful of individuals with dreams of living together in harmony to a mature and viable community imbedded in the reality of the conflict. Started as the vision of Father Bruno Hussar, the "Oasis of Peace" demonstrates daily that residents from both national groups and three faith communities can live together peacefully and equally with shared values, despite the conflict surrounding them. The community recognized early on that in order to have a sustained impact and to build positive relations in the region, residents would need to establish and engage in programs that spread its message. Today, the community's bilingual, binational Primary School, internationally recognized School for Peace, and Bruno Hussar Pluralistic Spiritual Center are significant programs in the region that bring Jews and Arabs together on a daily basis.

Established in 1979, the School for Peace is an integral part of the Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam's mission to build relationships between Palestinians and Jews through communication and respect. Long before the 1993 Oslo Accords openly encouraged Jewish-Arab projects, the School for Peace brought together Palestinian and Israeli, youth and adults, with diverse and often diametrically opposed ideological backgrounds for youth encounter workshops, university courses, teacher trainings, and facilitator trainings.

2. Purpose of the request

Overview of the proposal:

The School for Peace builds relationships between Palestinians and Jews through conflict management workshops. Over 45,000 people—Palestinian and Israeli, youth and adults—with diverse and often diametrically opposed ideological backgrounds have participated in youth encounter workshops, university courses, teacher trainings, and facilitator trainings. Youth encounter bring 30 Jewish and 30 Arab 11th graders together for three-day workshops. The School for Peace's unique method for these encounter workshops places the conflict at the heart of discussion with issues such as language, land, rights, and equality. Instead of asking participants to put away their differences and attempt to find a common ground to get along, the method of the School for Peace calls for discussion of stereotypes and biases and the reasons behind them.

Problem to be addressed:

In Israel, young people grow up with a historical and political conflict that greatly impacts their lives. Through the media, they are often taught to distrust and disregard the other side. To create a dialogue through which mutual respect and understanding can be attained, the School for Peace offers encounter workshops between Jews and Arabs. Youth encounter workshops, one of the cornerstones of the School for Peace since its inception, bring 16 and 17-year-old Jews and Palestinians together to learn to listen to each other's concerns about the conflict that surrounds them.

Population served: Youth encounter workshops involve youth who are 16-17 years old from Jewish and Arab high schools throughout Israel. In some cases, the School for Peace goes out and offers its services to high schools; in other cases, the high schools seek out the expertise of the School for Peace. Many of the high schools that have participated in the past are yearly participants who continue to send a new group of students to the School for Peace every year. Approximately 60 young people (half Jewish and half Palestinian) will participate in each encounter workshop. Although the youth are the ones who participate in the encounters, their experiences make an impact upon their individual spheres of influence, including their families and friends in their respective communities.

The School for Peace reaches a variety of socio-economic groups. Preparation for the project involves a process of selection to ensure that those who participate have sufficient motivation to do so (regardless of their political inclination). Preference is given to those who are shown to have influence on their peers (leadership potential). The selection process is based on questionnaires that are distributed to all of the 11th grade classes of the participating schools.

3. Measurable outcomes and timetable

The project includes a preliminary day of uninational activity in each school, a 3-day encounter workshop at NSWAS and a follow-up meeting with participants in their schools. The follow-up includes an in-depth discussion with the group to help them to process the experience, and the writing of a questionnaire, to assist us in reviewing the impact of the project.

Objectives:

- To increase each national group's awareness of itself and its relations with the other group.
- To learn to experience the conflict in all its complexity while acquiring tools to deal with it.
- To demonstrate the importance of coming to grips with the conflict, and to enhance the ability of the individual to make choices and to exert an influence on it.
- To encourage the choice of positions and conduct which give equal place for the needs, rights and aspirations of the two peoples.
- To provide the Jewish and Arab participants of the encounter project with the experience of working together in a positive way.

To measure these objectives, the SFP conducts both written exit feedback and oral follow-up interviews; the SFP recently published a book reflecting its findings from youth encounter workshop evaluations. This evaluation process (and the SFP publication) informs the SFP's continued work and allows it to adjust future programs accordingly.

Activities:

The participants of an encounter workshop are divided into small groups, with 12 to 14 Jewish and Arab participants in each group. Two facilitators - one Jewish and one Arab - work with each group. Most of the activity is conducted in the framework of these small groups. The participants learn through their experience in the group process. The workshop provides the participants with an opportunity and with the legitimacy to raise and process feelings, fantasies and images pertaining to Jewish-Arab relations and, through dealing with these, to arrive at a new understanding of the subject. The School for Peace works on the premise that the dynamics in the workshop are a reflection of the relationship between Jews and Arabs in general. Phenomena that arise in the small group are used as a basis for learning about the relationships between the two conflicting groups outside of the workshop.

Parts of the workshop are conducted in a uninational framework. The mixed group separates into two; the Arab facilitator works with the 6 or 7 Arab participants of the group, and the Jewish facilitator works with the 6 or 7 Jewish participants. Participants often find in the more protected environment of the uninational forum an opportunity to step back, reflect upon and work through some of the processes that occurred in the encounter work. A **simulation game** and evening activities are conducted with all of the 60 participants together. The simulation game allows the participants to come to terms with the fundamental questions of coexistence in the country, such as education, security and the place of the Arab minority in Israel. They negotiate on the key points in controversy between the sides and attempt to reach agreements. They learn from this process the complexity of the problem and of strategies in negotiation. Arab youths experience a process of empowerment: Though in the beginning they believe it is almost impossible to change anything, they come to experience leadership, negotiation skills, and strategies to demand their rights as a minority, etc. Jewish youths come to learn the complexity of the relations between the two peoples, rather than seeing them in simple, unequivocal terms. They experience the gap between making facile declarations about equality and the difficulty in bearing out these declarations in reality. They learn that in negotiation and dialogue there are alternatives to the zero-sum game. They learn that through compromise, both sides have something to gain from the process of negotiation. The School for Peace manual Walking the Tightrope provides an in-depth presentation of the rationale and methods of the Youth Encounter workshops.

Working methods:

At the School for Peace we have developed a unique working method for conducting encounter workshops between conflict groups, particularly in the context of the Jewish-Arab conflict. The method includes the following elements:

- The facilitation places the conflict at the center of the group experience and emphasizes the inter(national) - group aspect rather than other possible aspects.

- The facilitation reflects conscious and unconscious group processes and enables the participants to understand and deal with these processes.
- The facilitation draws a constant link between events and processes within the group and the reality outside of it (and vice versa), with the assumption that the group provides a microcosm of reality.
- The learning process is achieved in a **binational** forum of Jews and Arab participants with Jewish and Arab co-facilitators, and in the **uninational** forum, in which the Jewish and the Arab groups meet separately with the facilitator of their own side.

Evaluation of Youth Encounter Projects:

Evaluation of a project is based on:

1. A written summary by the participants at the conclusion of the workshop.
2. The closing discussion with the participants.
3. Questionnaires distributed to the participants one month after the conclusion of the project.
4. At the project's conclusion, the School for Peace staff members, who have coordinated it, analyze the above written and verbatim data, comparing the feedback from the Jewish and Arab schools.
5. In-depth interviews a year later.

Measures of success:

- 1) The School for Peace is consistent in fulfilling its commitments to go through with the planned projects.
- 2) Feedback from questionnaires show that the participants leave the workshops enriched and satisfied by the experience.
- 3) Schools taking part in the workshops show satisfaction with the program and often continue from year to year, so that a permanent relationship is formed with the schools. Every year, several new schools begin to take part in the projects.

Evaluation of Programs as a whole:

Study days are arranged for all of the staff on which the conclusions of the evaluation sessions are discussed and important questions that concern all of the staff are discussed.

In recent meetings, we looked at the issues of:

- Language, and how it is used in encounters between groups in conflict.
- Co-facilitation: the Jewish-Arab model
- The uninational forum: rationale and expectations.
- The way each national group experiences the workshop.
- The struggle between cultures; the East versus West aspect.
- How the peace process affects the facilitation staff.
- The meaning and implementation of political education.
- The working model and its suitability to our objectives.

- Each facilitator specializes in the compilation of information about one of these topics. In addition to these more general topics, questions specific to particular programs are asked.

Key Staff members

The School for Peace employs the following staff to lead and implement its programs:

- Ahmad Hijazi, Director – Mr. Hijazi has been a facilitator at the School for Peace for more than 16 years, designing and implementing encounters workshops between Israelis and Palestinians. He has been facilitating workshops dealing with conflict in many countries. Mr. Hijazi is regularly giving lectures at the Hebrew University on the psychological components of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and co-instructs classes for the “Conflict Resolution” Program. He holds a Masters of Organizational Behavior from the Polytechnic University in New York, and a Masters of Sociology from the Hebrew University.
- Nava Sonnenschein, Adult Department Coordinator - Ms. Sonnenschein, one of the founders of the SFP, has 29 years of experience with conflict management programs. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Haifa University and a master’s degree from San Francisco State University, and a Ph.D. from Hebrew University. She currently leads the USAID pilot program at the SFP.

Appendix A: Budget for One Youth Encounter Project:

Facilitation (\$528 per facilitator x 8)	\$4,224
Coordination \$1,200 x 2 coordinators (one Arab, one Jew)	\$2,400
Room & Board at NSWAS Guest House (\$60 x (60 participants + 10 staff members) x 2 nights)	\$8,640
Educational supervision and in-service training	\$480
Travel per diem (on basis of 6 journeys x 250km)	\$720
Office and educational materials	\$120
Printing & Publication	\$120
Insurance, utilities, telephone and maintenance	\$480
Administrative costs	\$2,577.6
Subtotal	\$19,762
Income participation fees (60 participants x \$36)	-\$2,160
TOTAL COST	\$17,602

Appendix B: Schedule of a Youth Encounter

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Opening, in large hall (11.00 a.m.)	Breakfast	Breakfast
	Political discussion: open discussion, clarifying of positions and feelings in regard to the conflict.	Letters: writing of letters for a book distributed to the participants.
Acquaintance 1: Name games and crystallization of the group.	Politics: continuation of discussion.	Group summary, on a personal and group level.
Acquaintance 2: “Carrousel”- hobbies, family, studies, food, etc.	Uni-national session: Meeting to work through and understand the group process.	Closing ceremony and distribution of diplomas.
Lunch	Lunch	Departure (11.30 a.m.)
Culture: Discussion in groups of four, relations between girls and boys, customs and holidays, relations between parents and children.	Simulation game: negotiations between Jewish and Arab participants on the character of the nation and the relations between the peoples.	
	Ceremony at the conclusion of the simulation game.	
	Analysis: understanding the process that the group has passed through in the encounter.	
Dinner	Dinner	
Culture: Discussion in the group on subjects that arise.	Free evening	
Uni-national group: separate meeting for Jews and Arabs intended to work through and understand the group process.		

Appendix C: What the participants gain from the encounter

The youth and teachers who take part in School for Peace programs learn new ways to look at social and political realities and acquire tools that enrich their lives as responsible citizens.

☆ Education for Critical Thinking

Arab student: “We talked and finally reached an agreement to make an effort to build a new society together.”

We teach the participants to question the existing realities of relations between Arabs and Jews. Confronted with the unexpected complexities of these relations, we encourage them to be creative in finding new solutions and modes of behavior.

☆ Learning Responsibility

“The conflict always gave me a headache. Now, after the encounter, I have a stomach ache too!” (A Jewish teacher explaining how whereas before she saw the problem on an intellectual level, she now felt it on an emotional level.)

The participants experience their place in the conflict; they learn that minority -majority relations affect each person’s behavior and understanding. This is the first step to personal and social change.

☆ Active Listening

Jewish student: “We sat and talked and all of a sudden she said, ‘I understand you.’ It was a breakthrough.”

The participants learn to state their desires, claims, pain, dreams, demands and anger.

The Jews realize for the first time that they are not the only citizens of Israel. Their accustomed ethnocentricity makes consideration of the Arab group a new experience for them. The Arabs, for the first time, test their ability to be assertive with the Jews; even at the risk of alienating their new found friends.

☆ Reduction of Fear

Jewish student: “I never dreamed I’d remain in the same room with Arabs who were singing and dancing... not me!”

The workshop experience, including the discussion groups, the social activities outside the classroom, the meals in common and the overnight stay, work to develop in the participants a sense of trust they never before thought possible. This helps to reduce the fear that all participants report to be a major factor in their daily lives.

☆ Communication Skills

Arab encounter graduate, 12 years later: “The Arab participants were given the opportunity to express their opinions freely and everyone listened to them in all earnestness.”

In a society where inequality and racism prevail, it is crucial to develop the ability to hear “the other’s” story and to tell one’s own. In a vicious circle where both Jews and Arabs feel they are victims, the workshop enables participants to widen their perspective and learn problem-solving techniques which address the deep needs of each society. By

giving legitimacy to these needs, Jews and Arabs can learn to accept each other and to treat each other as equals.

☆ **Strengthening Self-Esteem.**

Arab student: "It helped me to find my voice when we could speak in Arabic in the uninational group." The SFP's method of working in small groups of 15 for the greater part of the workshop, and subdividing each group even further to uninational forums of 7 - 8 enables each participant to play an active role and to contribute to the discussions. In a country where high schools are segregated and classes average 30 - 40 students, such an opportunity is rare and significant in building the students' self esteem.

☆ **Deconstructing Myths**

A Jewish student: "I learned we are not alone in this country."

The encounter exposes the teachers and the students to first-hand information which is far different to what they have heard. This is even truer for the Jews, who have heard only officially sanctioned versions of modern Israeli history. The latter tend to omit Israeli Arab perspectives of the same period. Staying together and participating in the workshop introduces a more complex view of the other group. The participants learn new information about their history, civil rights, economic discrimination and political realities.

☆ **Breaking-Down of Stereotypes**

Arab student: "I was surprised to hear that the Jews feel scared in their own country."

Jewish student, "After the meeting, when there was a terrorist attack, everybody was angry and there were calls for revenge. Then I said we shouldn't generalize: it is impossible to get angry at all the Arabs in this country because of what happened."

During the workshop, the participants come to see the other group in a new light. They find themselves less inclined to view its cultural, social and political identities in generalized, stereotyped ways

☆ **Education for Equality**

Jewish participant: "When they first spoke Arabic and I didn't understand, I felt so small."

Against the backdrop of inequalities that exist in Israeli society, the equality experienced in the workshops allows the participants to glimpse a different and more hopeful scenario for Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. The numerical equality of Jewish and Arab participants and facilitators, the Jewish-Arab venue, the binational flavor of the food, the music and other factors, the bilingual printed materials, and the legitimacy given to the two languages during the discussion; all these factors give experiential support to the values of equality and tolerance stressed during the encounter. The students fully learn and experience the advantages of an equal, tolerant and democratic society.