

USA Volunteer Felix Lufkin Returns for Second Stint at Negba to Lead Environmental Activities

Negba is delighted when friends from around the world visit and volunteer their time and expertise. When they come back again and build their connection with Negba’s children, it is particularly meaningful. Felix Lufkin is one of these special friends of Negba. Last winter he led a week of nature education activities at Negba’s after-school Homes. And he came back again this winter for a second tour of duty.



“I came back because I was very touched by Negba’s kids, and I wanted to develop deeper relationships with them,” said Felix. “Also, because last year was a *Shemitta* year (7th year in the biblical cycle in which the land is traditionally not worked), we couldn’t plant. I wanted to do more with them.”

And more he did. This time Felix spent two weeks with Negba’s children engaged in tree planting, herb gardening, and- the highlight of his visit- constructing a Cob cooking oven made from clay, which Negba’s kids will use for baking bread and other foods. “This time we were able to accomplish more things, and I was able to bond with the kids beyond the environmental activities, such as helping them with their homework. I was able to settle into their routine as opposed to imposing my nature agenda on them.”

After a second stint with many of the same kids he knew from last year, Felix connected more deeply with the children, gaining more insight into the home life of Beersheva’s kids, who are not that different from their peers elsewhere. “I’ve had similar experiences with urban kids in the USA. First they are hesitant to engage and get their hands dirty and leave their comfort zones, but afterwards they are really proud of what they’ve done. Such as the oven we built, which will be a source of pride for the kids down the road when they bake things in it and benefit from it.”

For a second time, Negba’s kids were lucky to benefit from Felix. “It was fun for them to connect with a cultural outsider, and I think they were moved that a person of the world sought them out and came here to be with them,” said Albert Cohen, a Negba social worker. “Felix increased their comfort with the wilderness and with the land and nature.”



And for Felix, it is indeed a mutual relationship. “It was a chance for me to connect with land in another time zone, and being the land of Israel, it’s also my way to connect to Judaism.”

Negba is grateful to Felix and hopes to see him again next winter!

Former Addict Speaks to Teen Club as Part of Drug and Alcohol Prevention Project

Youths at Negba’s Teen Club sat enraptured as they listened to a guest speaker, a former substance abuser, who began to drink and take drugs at the age of 14. Now clean for seven years, the former addict was a user until the age of 33. The encounter was part of the Teen Club’s participation in a 13-week project of the Beersheva Municipal Authority for the War on Drugs and Alcohol. The project will culminate with Negba’s teens designing their own anti-drug and alcohol sticker, distributing 500 of them throughout Beersheva, and competing in a city-wide contest.



The former addict addressed the peer pressure he experienced as a teen, to which he unfortunately succumbed. Negba’s teens took much from his experience and insight. “I learned that we don’t have to give in to social pressures even though they are very strong,” said Aviv, 15. “I can, and should, stick to what I believe in and know is right.”



Though they are certainly exposed to drugs and alcohol, Negba’s teens are thankfully not substance users. But many have friends who use them, and even parents. The social pressures to use drugs and consume alcohol are very palpable in their daily lives. Dana, 15, captured the sentiment of most of the teens: “I don’t believe that drug or alcohol addiction will happen to me. But I know that it can happen.”

Negba's Newsletter Has a New Feature!

The **PROFESSIONALLY SPEAKING** column will periodically invite a specialist to share his/her point of view on Negba's activities and provide insight into the lives of Negba's children.

This month: **A Psychiatrist's Perspective - Interview with Dr. Jocelyn Hattab**, psychiatrist for children, adolescent and adults, psychoanalyst, former director of the Child and Adolescent Department of the Jerusalem Mental Health Center at Hebrew University's Medical School, and Negba Board Member.



Negba calls its after-school frameworks for children at-risk "Houses of Hope" because our desire is to help them achieve their hopes and desires and achieve a better life. It's not wishful thinking, or even a prayer, but an action based on our knowledge of and experience with a world of suffering in our childhood. Many children from poor neighborhoods in Beersheva or elsewhere are from immigrant families. The grandparent generation has been relegated to the periphery, and suffered a major cultural shift. Because of a poor educational background often these immigrants were

dependent on public welfare subsidies. The parent generation then approached adulthood with a heavy economic and social handicap, which was passed on to today's children. These are the children that we care for at Negba, and try to help them escape the vicious circle of poverty, unemployment and juvenile delinquency, not to mention drugs and domestic violence. The reality is that in western society, social progress is interdependent on social class level. Now these children are no more or less intelligent than their classmates. But to express their real capacities, they need to be stimulated and engaged, and appreciated for their achievements.

The last ten years of Negba's experience demonstrates the validity of our actions. Our effectiveness is easily verified by the academic progress and improvement in conduct of Negba's children, both at school, at Negba, and at home. In principle, a child's place is with his family, with his parents and siblings. We also invest efforts with the parents to improve their parenting skills and help them out of this vicious circle. They are more likely to participate in Negba group activities to demonstrate the skills they possess- be it cooking, sewing, cosmetics or art- and then engage in these activities at home with their children.



As part of the biennial of the France-Israel Conference of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the French participants were invited to visit Negba's after-school Homes in Beersheva to discuss our model of care for children at-risk. The visitors were impressed by Negba's offering counseling in the afternoon leisure time, and by the quality and diversity of services offered to the children. They were also surprised by the educational assessment tools used at Negba. And Negba's rich activities for adolescents at its Teen Clubs, a natural progression from the Houses of Hope, allow experts to consider Negba as an important and effective player addressing social needs in Israel.



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