

Anglo File

MK: Too few women lead major Jewish Federations

By Mordechai I. Twersky

A special Knesset subcommittee is eliciting candid assessments about the role of women in Jewish community life, while posing searing questions about the relative lack of women in Jewish leadership roles.

Some 10 presenters from leading organizations in Israel and North America addressed a special subcommittee of the Knesset's Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Affairs Committee during a 90-minute session Tuesday, chaired by MK Dr. Einat Wilf (Atzmaut).

"Is the glass half empty or full?" asked Shifra Bronznick, founding president of the New York City-based Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community, who addressed the subcommittee for Relations of Israel with World Jewish Communities.

Bronznick mapped female leadership positions according to what she called "spheres" – start-ups, the rabbinate, Jewish media and social justice organizations. "Many more women lead these organizations, and we are seeing a bifurcation between these groups and the veteran agencies of Jewish life," said Bronznick.

Wilf – who noted in her opening remarks "that there are more Jewish women in the United States Supreme Court than in the leadership of major Jewish Federations" – was quickly corrected.

Both Bronznick and Gail Norry, chairwoman of the National Women's Philanthropy of Jewish Federation of North America, cited two women who now serve as CEOs of large-city Jewish Federations: Deborah Corber in Montreal, Canada; and Jennifer Gorovitz in San Francisco, California. Of the 157 Jewish Federations, 50 have female executives, according to Norry.

"The more we can understand what links us together and where we can work more constructively going forward, the better," said Norry, who challenged the Israeli government to become "greater advocates in leadership positions in the Diaspora." She challenged the government to support scholarships for women and the inclusion of more women in Israel's premier educational institutions. She

also called for the creation of professional cooperative positions for female leaders to work alongside female Israeli leaders, and for the expansion of groups of women involved in established Jewish Federation leadership programs for youth, such as Otzma, the 10-month leadership program for 20-somethings in Israel.

Nadia Ellis, an associate fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute, presented a range of data demonstrating that a lack of parity in Jewish leadership of Jewish organizations abroad is comparable to the absence of women in the highest echelons of Israeli and American society in general. "We believe that Israel has to set the example and stand for the values that it expects Jewish organizations to adopt," she said.

Bronznick – who cited a direct link between equity and effectiveness – said it is both "significant" and "distressing" that there is little to no female advancement or ascension to leadership positions in what she called the "alphabet soup" of century-old U.S. Jewish organizations still headed by men. She maintained that 80 percent of professionals in the Jewish community are women.

"If 80 percent of your talent pool is not being groomed for top leadership positions, then obviously we are not making the most of the talents within these long-standing organizations," said Bronznick, who cited in her presentation the recent annual Forward survey documenting the salaries of CEOs of 76 national Jewish organizations.

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Shifra Bronznick at the Knesset meeting on Tuesday.



From left, Rachel Davies, Nicole Hazan and Shani Wahrman, with Teach For America CEO Wendy Kopp at Beit Berl college last week.

On-the-job teaching

U.S.-modeled program catapults first-time teachers into the classroom

By Mordechai I. Twersky

Three native English speakers are participating in an ambitious school program that is daring to cast inexperienced teachers into the cauldron that is the Israeli classroom.

"It was a shock for me, just a nightmare," said 24-year-old Nicole Hazan, an immigrant from North London, referring to her first encounter with 37 disadvantaged seventh-graders suffering from a litany of personal and academic problems. "But things have straightened out somewhat," she said. "I'm starting to win them over."

Hazan is among 89 participants in the Teach For America Program – modeled after the 20-year-old "Teach For America" program – that places young Israelis in some of the country's toughest inner city and periphery schools while offering them on-the-job support, training and leadership development. Each of this year's three Anglo participants are working in Israel as English teachers.

Now in its second year, with a total of 143 teachers serving 19,000 students, the program was co-founded by Israel's Education Ministry, JDC-Israel, the Hakol Hinuch Movement for the Advancement of Education in Israel; and the Bedford, New York-based Naomi Foundation. It is also supported by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.

Like many of the program's participants, Hazan, who immigrated to Israel over a year ago, entered the program with relatively little teaching experience. After earning a degree in English and creative writing at England's University of East Anglia in Norwich, she worked as a project worker for Maccabi Great Britain's Streetwise educational and community outreach program. But nothing, Hazan says, could have prepared her for the past six months in Bat Yam, where she has dealt head-on with the troubled, turbulent, lives of 120 youngsters.

Over time, Hazan has learned of some of her students' chilling back stories – parents serving time in prison, abandonment, and emotional and physical

neglect. Her challenge as an English teacher is daunting: to lead her students to matriculation and bolster standard reading comprehension matched by bouts with low self-esteem and lack of motivation.

"Many of my seventh-graders can't read an English sentence," Hazan laments.

Racheli Davies, a 26-year-old immigrant from Bergen County, New Jersey, describes her initial encounter with a class of more than a dozen unruly Jerusalem high school students as "a horror story."

"I had to push myself hard to make it to the end of the day," says Davies. Although she had been forewarned by colleagues about the "battle for survival" for first-year teachers, she is determined to learn from the experience. "It's not always going to be like this," she says.

A broader incentive

The two-year mentored program, which culminates with a teaching certificate, requires each participant to undergo an initial five-week summer session at Haifa University. One day of training each week supplements the teachers' four-day work week, which includes classroom, group, one-on-one teaching, and lesson plan preparation.

The trainees, who are employed by Israel's Ministry of Education, and who receive an additional stipend from Teach For America to cover their weekly training, earn a combined salary of NIS 6,000 – the national average for starting teachers, according to Sagit Lehman, a spokesperson for Israel's teachers union.

Trainees in their second year teach full-time and are eligible for two years of fully funded graduate study in Israel in any field of their choosing.

"The program is very intricate, but there is a broader incentive," says 25-year-old Shani Wahrman, a participant in Teach First Israel.

Wahrman, a native of Israel who grew up in the United States and England, traces her interest in "changing lives" to

her visit to a Teach For America-affiliated school in Jackson, Louisiana – though that model, like the one here in Israel, is not without its critics.

Teach For America officials cite studies showing that their program produces teachers who are more effective than other beginning teachers. Yet critics contend that the program replaces veteran teachers with young trainees with insufficient experience, thrusting them into disadvantaged school districts while paying them beginners' salaries.

Wendy Kopp – founder and CEO of Teach For America, who visited Israel last week and met Teach First Israel participants – dismisses those concerns, stating that participants are not displacing veteran teachers. She said there is "vigorous" evidence to suggest that the program produces highly effective teachers and improves student performance.

Wahrman also is not concerned about her lack of training.

"You can study, but nothing in the world will prepare you for standing in a classroom in front of 40 students with the door shut," she says. "You learn from the experience."

Though the program in Israel is in its infancy, some educational experts are cautious.

"The introduction of young fresh teachers with no burn-out into a very challenging teaching environment of a periphery is a very complex matter," says Dr. Daniel Tropper, a former adviser to Israel's education minister, and president of the Geshet movement, which attempts to bridge gaps between various segments of Israeli society. "It involves a trade-off between professionalism and enthusiasm, and this can go either way." Tropper noted that employing Anglos, "for whom the complicated Israeli cultural context is foreign, makes it all the more difficult."

Teach First Israel is already recruiting for next year's class. An estimated 1,800 applicants will vie for 120 positions, said the program's director of development and communications, Danielle Israel.

Rank and File

◆ **BLACK TIE FOR TISHMA:** Jerusalem Charity Events' "Young Professionals Gala," formerly known as the "Jerusalem Winter Ball," returns this year on Thursday, February 23, with proceeds benefiting the Tishma School and Center for Autism in Jerusalem. "Young professionals in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas have so much to offer, besides the money in their pocket," said Yoni Wiseman, co-founder of the all-volunteer charity. "We want people to contribute to the local scene and have a great time while doing it." The organizers say they expect hundreds of young adults from Jerusalem to "dress to the nines" for a "night of cocktails, gourmet dinner, an open bar and dancing" at the Masik event hall in Jerusalem. For more information, or to buy tickets, visit www.jceorg.com or e-mail JCEorg@gmail.com

◆ **RUNNING BOY:** A 10-year-old dedicated his 10k run to charity on Friday, raising over \$1,000 to save a Jerusalem home for at-risk youth. **Raphy Lustman**, who lives in Beit Shemesh, initiated the project after hearing about the Reut Home for Boys, which cares for 24 boys who have been removed by social welfare services from their own homes, according to **Elise Rynhold** of Orr Shalom, which runs the home. Orr Shalom is responsible for 1,300 at-risk minors across Israel. The Welfare Ministry is demanding the Reut Home undergo a NIS 600,000 renovation to stay open, said Rynhold. The son of **Selwyn Lustman** (originally from Newcastle, England) and **Michaela** (a native of Melbourne, Australia), Raphy ran the race on Friday in Hayarkon Park with his father in 57 minutes and raised \$1,046 through yesterday.



Courtesy of Orr Shalom
Raphy Lustman

◆ **LET'S READ TOGETHER:** More than 50 book lovers met at the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel's Jerusalem center last Thursday for the first-ever conference on "English Libraries and Collections in Israel." Librarians, volunteers and other interested guests from across Israel heard **Sandra Morgeli-Shechory** present the findings of a just-completed survey of English-language libraries in 14 cities in Israel, indicating that they have become more accessible, more user-friendly and more often free-of-charge. Morgeli-Shechory, a native of Calgary, told Anglo File this week that in some areas, "libraries help new immigrants in their absorption process ... by giving them a warm community of English-speakers." The survey was undertaken by AACI with support from the Joseph and Harvey Meyerhoff Family Charitable Funds. Speakers included U.S.-born **Elhanan Adler**, head of the M. Ed. program for librarianship at David Yellin College, who gave the keynote address; and **Liz Trakeniski**, representing the fund.

◆ **WHAT THE DICKENS:** Tuesday marked the 200th birthday of one of Britain's most famous authors – Charles Dickens. To commemorate the bicentennial, the British Council Israel is running an extensive year-long campaign aimed at bringing British literature and culture to teachers and students through a series of workshops, events and free educational resources. For the campaign's signature event, taking place next week, the British Council is bringing to Israel author **Jeremy Harmer** and world-renowned violinist **Steve Bingham**, according to council representative **Hannah Glass**. The two performances are scheduled for Monday and Tuesday in Haifa and Tel Aviv, respectively. Glass added that the council is providing free resource packets to teachers through its website, www.teachingenglish.org.uk/dickens.

(Rank and File was compiled by Steven Klein.)
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CityKids on its way to becoming a bilingual school

By Mordechai I. Twersky

Plans to transform a popular Tel Aviv community center and nursery school for English speakers into a full-time bilingual school are moving forward at breakneck speed.

Following a Wednesday night meeting attended by more than 75 families, CityKids founder and director Elvia Fisher confirmed to Haaretz that a formal application to become a full-time bilingual school will be filed with the Education Ministry by the March 29 deadline.

Fisher first began publicly floating the proposal two weeks ago.

Together with her business partner, Yuval Berman, whose son attends the 14-month-old privately run center, Fisher is now multitasking to bring the plan to fruition: She is finalizing the application with a legal expert; crafting an edu-

cational model with academic and linguistic experts from two leading Israeli universities; working with parental subcommittees charged with evaluating candidates for principal; searching for a prime city location that will comply with city zoning and safety codes; and securing the initial financing.

"I told parents that this program is feasible," said Fisher, a 26-year-old immigrant from Guilford, Connecticut, who said she has encountered some skepticism from parents about the center's chances of clearing a seemingly insurmountable wall of bureaucracy. "We did not say this was an option until we knew it was possible. This has been in the planning stages for three months."

Fisher declined to reveal the names of candidates being considered for principal, nor

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Families gathering at the CityKids center in Tel Aviv Wednesday.

JNF ushers in a new year for new trees

By Mordechai I. Twersky

This week's observance of Tu B'Shvat – the Jewish New Year of the Trees – marks the inauguration of a new planting center made possible by an 83-year-old Floridian with deep roots of his own.

Harvey Hertz, a retired senior vice president at the Florida-based financial services firm of Raymond James, says he was affected by the fire that engulfed the Carmel region of Israel last year, leaving 42 Israelis dead and destroying scores of homes and more than 12,000 acres of forest.

"When the Carmel fire was burning, my heart was burning," says Hertz, speaking from his home in St. Pete Beach, Florida.

"When I read about the devastation of the fire, I knew I had to do something," he said.

The new tree planting center, a Jewish National Fund-USA project, is named for Hertz and located at Neot Kedumim, a biblical landscape reserve.

Located some 20 minutes from Jerusalem, the center offers visitors the opportunity to plant saplings that will later be transferred to sites throughout Israel, according to a Jewish National Fund statement.

The grandson of an immigrant Orthodox accountant and cantor from Bucharest, Romania, Hertz has been involved with the Jewish National Fund for decades.

As an 8-year-old walking to the subway in his native Brooklyn, New York, Hertz remembers his mother instruct-



Harvey Hertz at the new tree planting center at Neot Kedumim this week.

ing him to hold on to the carriage's center pole with one hand, while clutching the legendary blue-and-white Jewish National Fund *pushke*, or charity box, with the other.

"I would shake the *pushke* up and

down," recalls Hertz, who notes that the Jewish National Fund's major thrust at the time was buying land – a cause for which some passengers inserted 25 cents, more than the hourly wage at the time.

"It worked like a charm," he says.

Israeli classifieds site launched for English-speakers

By Alona Ferber

Two U.S.-born Israeli entrepreneurs have launched a website intended to ease the pain of Anglos trying to buy and sell second-hand goods in Hebrew online.

Founder and CEO Yitz Lefkowitz, a Brooklyn native who moved to Israel 12 years ago, identified a gap in the market after he and co-founder Dovy Schwarzmer discovered a "lack of clarity" on Hebrew-language shopping websites.

The exclusively English-language Shuk.co.il went live in May 2011, joining platforms such as Janglo – established in 2001 as a Yahoo group, and now a website in its own right – aimed at helping Anglos in their efforts to buy (or sell) that perfect second-hand fridge.

The company estimates that there are close to 1 million Facebook users in Israel who speak English, representing the core of Shuk's target market, according to Lefkowitz.

"The Shuk was founded

with the goal of bringing Anglos together to buy and sell products and services in an environment in which they can feel completely comfortable and secure," he says.

Visitors to the Shuk can list or browse items in categories including electronics, Judaica and toys; list items they wish to give away for free; or advertise their "Moving Sales."

Users do not pay commission; the site's business model is based on advertising revenues.

Since setting up the website four months ago, the founders say they have received nearly 700 visitors a day, and they predict that the number of visitors to their site will increase to 2,000 within the next four months.

For Lefkowitz, part of the potential of a website designed almost exclusively for the English-speaking marketplace is the sense of trust among Anglos in Israel.

"The reality is that we tend to find our fellow Anglos more believable and trustworthy," he says.