

Using dialogue & film to break down barriers

Two Seeds participate in Peace it Together's program to empower young Israeli, Palestinian & Canadian leaders through film-making.

IHAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO work with young people from the other side of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict this summer at Peace it Together's camp on Bowen Island, near Vancouver, Canada. Ten Israelis, 10 Palestinians, and 10 Canadians came together, each with his or her own opinions about the other side—opinions based mostly on the information received through the media.

The first week involved tough dialogue between the Palestinians and Israelis. Each side tried to present the other as the guilty party, sharing very emotional stories about the difficult



Mahmoud
(Hebron)

situations in which both sides live. The Palestinians focused on suffering from the Separation Wall and Israeli checkpoints located inside the Palestinian territories, and shared their personal experiences about how the Wall separates their lands and their life and how they feel humiliated at the checkpoints.

The Israeli participants spoke about their suffering from the Qassam rockets fired from Gaza and the suicide

bombers, and how these affect their daily life—how they can't ride buses or do normal things that most other people in this world can.

The dialogue process imposed respect by giving every side the freedom to speak. Everyone had to listen to the other side completely, before they had the right to ask questions and comment.

At first it seemed hard for both sides to keep listening, because you could only speak when the other person was done. But day by day, we become more aware of the importance of



CAMERA MAN: Shadi, an Israeli Seed, films a scene for "Heaven Forbid."

AT FIRST, THE DIALOGUE sessions were not that hard, because no one wanted to hurt anyone's feelings. But as we got deeper and deeper into the history of the conflict, people started to open up and talk about the way they see the conflict and their real thoughts about the other side.



Shadi
(Tira)

After dialogue, we started making movies. First we learned about different types of film. Then we were separated into three- or four-member groups that included all nationalities. My group decided to create a story connected to the conflict that would represent all of our thoughts and feelings about it,

and that would be balanced to both sides.

Our film, called "Heaven Forbid," is a drama about two girls that meet on an island after escaping a drowning death. Neither one has any memories about their past. They become friends discovering the island together, until at the peak of their relationship, they begin to recall their past: one of them is Palestinian, the other Israeli. They meet on the beach, facing each other, and the film ends with a final flashback of them at the Separation Wall, one as an Israeli soldier holding a gun, the other as a Palestinian holding a rock.

We had great communication within the group, and I think the result was very good. After completing shooting and editing, we screened the film for 500 people in Vancouver.

FILMMAKERS: Palestinian Seed Mahmoud learns about making movies with an Israeli & a Canadian.

this process—how important it is to listen and feel what other participants have to say—which in turn helped us realize how similar our connections, dreams, hopes and problems are.

We spent the second and third weeks learning how to make films. Israelis, Palestinians and Canadians worked together in small groups based on the subject of their film. It was the start of having one goal. The groups were like a small family; people started caring about each other.

It was also very emotional. At one point, Avner (an Israeli participant) requested that his group adjust focus and show more about Palestinian life

in its film. The moment inspired Majd (a Palestinian participant) who continued to be inspired by Avner.

As we ate together, laughed together and thought about each other, the human connections became stronger than any other feelings, and we started to understand one another more and more.

Each side found the other to be normal people who want to live and to be part of the democratic nations. At some point, both sides found they had the same needs—both want to feel safe.

We also found that the image the media presents about the other side was not reflected at camp. Instead, we discovered that all of us teenagers have very similar dreams and wishes.

This leads to something impor-

tant and something that is ignored by many people, which is that our common humanity is the main link between us. It is therefore possible to break the fear and boundaries which were created inside us. Fear that is the result of what the media shows us or what people who do not represent the majority of our societies do.

Respect, listening and understanding are the principles that we took back home with us. These are not easy concepts, but they will stay with us forever as tools to improve communication between Palestinians and Israelis.

We will be showing the films that we made to our communities, each one of us in his own way, improving ourselves as young leaders who are willing to fight for peace.