

Young Women's Parliament

The purpose of the Young Women's Parliament project is to bring together young women from the Jewish and Arab sectors in Israel to study the legislative process and the history of women's rights, and to work for laws that will address their common needs.

In the period October, 2011, through February, 2012, the project gained widening recognition and interest among women's advisors of mayors; local youth departments; cultural and community centers; the Ministry of Education, and others. The municipalities now involved in the steering committee are Bat Yam (as a leading partner of the project), Kfar Saba, Lev Hasharon, Givatayim and Kfar Kara.

Two major events took place: the Young Women's Parliament in Bat Yam on December 11, 2012 and the Young Women's Parliament and Seminar in Nordiya (Lev Hasharon) on February 23rd and 24th. The latter event was planned to enable more intensive work toward the visit to the Knesset on the 13th of March.

The planning of these two events required cooperation and intensive coordination of all parties through several meetings in Bat Yam and Lev Hasharon. This, by itself, proved to be an enjoyable and productive process, although time-consuming. Particularly helpful was Anat Livnat, the mayor's adviser on women's issue in Bat Yam and one of the initiators of the project.



A Meeting of the Young Women Parliament's Activists: Ariel Bardi, Maria Hannum, Laila Yahya, Tsipi Glickman, and Esther Hertzog

Currently we are busy preparing for the event in the Knesset. This will include a guided tour in the Knesset, a visit to the research center of the Knesset and to the Knesset's television channel, meetings with a few women MPs, and listening to a debate. Most importantly, each group will present its own law proposal. Hopefully, one or more laws will be passed in the Knesset by the end of the year (July).

We have encountered a number of difficulties in Kfar Kara and Lev Hasharon during these months. We found that it is almost impossible to get ongoing activity in the form of weekly or bi-weekly meetings. The difficulty in Lev Hasharon is connected to the fact that it is a regional municipality, and it is not simple to get the girls from the disparate villages to meet together. Additionally, in both places the high-school girls are pressured by exams that limit their ability to participate in regular activities.



and offering them models for identification, encouraging their critical thinking and more.

However, we have found that the format of concentrated activity, like the one we had in Nordiya, works well. The achievements of the seminar, the panel, the social activity, etc., were amazingly fruitful in many ways – empowering the girls personally and collectively, discussing ideas and processing preliminary law proposals, enriching them

The Young Women's Parliament in Bat Yam, November 11, 2012

The event's title was "Girls demand social justice." Some 250 young women from Bat Yam and from some other 5 municipalities (Jewish: Lev Hasharon, Chulun, Givataym, Kfar Saba and Arab: Kfar Kara) participated. The evening was divided into two parts. The first one was in the form of a panel, which consisted of three young high women, and three prominent adult feminists: a well-known actress; one of the summer protest's leaders; and the head of the Israeli women's lobby. The discussion brought up expectations, frustrations and hopes of young women with regard to women's rights in Israel and the struggles to change things.

The second part dealt with the notion of enriching young women and expanding their knowledge and insights with reference to issues discussed in the first part. During the second part, the women from Kfar Kara and Lev Hasharon were indeed actively involved and cooperated by sharing their earnest views, with confidence and eloquence. Without a doubt, this was quite a remarkable achievement. This was a unique experience for the girls, many appreciating the opportunity to engage in the debates and the insights they gained and internalized.

Some of the Kfar Kara participant comments:

- "for me it was a new experience, I enjoyed every minute, this experience expanded my knowledge about the Young Women's Parliament, and for me it's the beginning of taking part in these activities. It is not enough to watch passively the distortions screened on TV. We have to be active and express our opinions."

- "I liked the second part. I enjoyed the cooperation with Lev Hasharoon girls, I also discovered that I have new capabilities like how to take part in a debate and I discovered my desire to be active in this universe..."
- "I would love to participate in such activities because today I felt that I live for a reason and I have a voice, and I can have influence on others".

On February 23rd and 24th, the Young Women's Parliament organized a preparatory seminar before the Knesset event connected to a session on media representation of women. This event was hosted by the mayor of the regional municipality and took place in a youth hostel in Nordiya. Lotem Kohen, the project's coordinator has led the organization and was assisted by the steering committee of the Young Women's Parliament. Forty three women from five local



municipalities participated in the seminar. On the first day, the documentary "Miss-representation" was screened and an open discussion followed. The girls were profoundly impressed by the dramatic facts.

After dinner all gathered again in the Auditorium to listen and react to the panel on which were an ex-model who is now involved in feminist activity; the mayor of Lev Hasharon and two senior female officials from the municipality; and MP Orit Zuretz who is our partner in the project. During the evening there was a feminist singing activity, which was exciting for the girls.

On Friday we had a workshop on "appearing in public" and then the girls worked in groups, elaborating on the various law proposals. We summarized the event in a plenary where the topics and proposals were presented by the groups. The event turned out as an exciting experience for all and as a very efficient format for promoting our purpose: empowering girls through political activity, bringing them together, encouraging their cooperation and coordination.

Visit to the Knesset, March 13, 2012

The program participants visited the Knesset on March 13, 2012. They were hosted by MP Orit Zuretz. The event included a guided tour in the Knesset, a visit to the research center of the Knesset, and listening to a debate. Each group of the

participants presented a separate law proposal. The young leaders were very excited after the visit. They said that they hoped to inspire other young women and to make a significant change in their community.

Two of their ideas have a good chance to be passed by the Knesset:

- Bat Yam's proposal focusing on a revision to the sexual harassment prevention law to include schools as organizations which must enforce the law. Bat Yam recommended adjusting policies for youth, relying both on the law against sexual harassment and against harming minors. As a proactive step, they set up a meeting with the mayor of Bat Yam to present their proposal and to hang posters in all high schools and middle schools in the city, detailing do's and don'ts according to the proposed law.
- Kfar Sabba's proposal to include gender studies in the education program of all schools in Israel, starting preschool up to high school seniors. They proposed practical steps of implementation, starting with teachers' training. A significant step was taken while collaborating with MITPAKDOT, a group promoting equality between women and men in Israel, through pressure on MP's to promote legislation.



Kfar Sabba girls group in the Knesset with Anat Livnat (3rd from left), Prof. Esther Hertzog (4th from left), MP Orit Zuaretz (7th from left), and their tutor Rachel Levi-Hertz (9th from left), March 13, 2012