

Dear Friends,

Between the 5th and the 24th of July, Open House held its annual Summer Peace Camp in co-operation with Neve Shalom/Wahat as-Salaam. Because the two peace organizations pooled resources, this time we could enroll a record 126 children--not only from the cities of Ramle and Lod, but from 15 different locations, including neighboring villages and towns. The buses bringing campers each morning came from different directions, all of which needed meticulous organization.

Vivian Rabia from Open House, together with Yasmin Al-Kalak from NS/WAS, were responsible for registration and organization, and Costa Mansour from Open House was the camp director. The ten counselors came from both organizations. They were supplemented by volunteers who have been in our summer camps before and who are potential future counselors.

The children ranged in age from 6 years old to 13. The camp was divided into 5 groups, with two counselors in each group, an Arab and a Jew. Overall, the numbers of Jewish and Arab campers were about equal. As a matter of principle, the summer camp is conducted in both Arabic and Hebrew, even though the Arabs understand Hebrew and the Jewish children don't understand Arabic.

One Jewish mother who wanted to expose her young children to "the other" for the first time was very wary, and she called Vivian every day to find out how they were doing. Vivian told me that the children were completely adjusted, so the mother's concern stemmed from the fact that it was the first time these courageous parents let their children spend so much time with Arabs. By the end of the camp, her children invited their new Arab friends to their birthday party.

Costa Mansour, who is active in the Society for the Protection of Nature, created a rich program which included field trips, archaeology, and visits to water sources with an emphasis on protection of this vital natural resource. He also organized a visit to the Latroun Monastery, where the children picked grapes and turned them into juice in the ancient wine press. There were also programs that challenged the children to develop outdoor survival skills, including making pita bread and food in "wilderness" conditions. The campers visited the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, where the children had a guided tour of the science park designed for their age. They learned about recycling, how to make soap, and, more interestingly, how to make ice cream, which they happily consumed.

Respect for living creatures received special attention in our Peace Camp. For example, a tent of colorful butterflies was brought to the camp site, and the vital ecological importance of these beautiful creatures was explained. In addition, there were many fun things: learning dances from other cultures, rapping with the much-admired local rapper Tamer Nafar, creating and flying kites, designing and building large outdoor sculptures which were left on the grounds, juggling, magic tricks, and—of course--spending time in the swimming pool.

Each day, except when there was a trip, we had a morning circle where we

discussed the relationship between Self and Other, with educational activities around this vital topic appropriate to each age group.

In summary, we know that the children and their parents were very pleased by the Peace Camp and that this formative experience in Jewish-Arab co-existence will stay with them, and grow deeper, as they continue in Open House activities.

Shalom, Salaam, Dalia