Often when working in the field of reconciliation one hopes for an overwhelming amount of participants who are eager to make a change. This is especially true when working with the younger generation who are supposedly more open to trying new things and learning about new perspectives. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in our Palestinian-Israeli context. It was quite difficult to recruit for our young adult trip Building Bridges to Norway, in part because the age group is so busy, often traveling for university or work. We also encountered young people who faced strong opposition from their faith leaders. As a result, the trip consisted of a smaller group in comparison to other trips. At first, these recruitment challenges were very discouraging. The participants did not find the trip with less participants than expected, we had the smaller group dynamic and historical or theological positions before. But there will always be a few who are willing to take on the challenge seriously and engage with the other side. The faithful few shine a small but vital light in the midst of hopelessness and despair. And as a result, strong relationships were built. There was a sense of family, comfort and joy at the campsite where we stayed. Because of this atmosphere we not only could cover some of the basic chapters from Musalaha’s curriculum, but also examined some of our historical and theological differences. These two subjects are probably the most emotionally charged and hardest to cover; for many people these controverted topics can be a deal breaker in terms of continuing with the reconciliation process. The participants did not find these discussions easy at all. Some indeed withdrew and did not want to continue engaging with the other side, especially the ones who had never heard the other side’s political, historical or theological positions before. However, the smaller group dynamic created the safe space needed by the participants facilitated meaningful, respectful and productive discussions. Both sides could express their positions without feeling attacked or blamed. Rather, at times the discussion felt like a seminar where participants were held to opposing perspectives in order to learn and possibly bridge the gap between the different narratives. Altogether, the participants, including the ones who were extremely challenged, benefited from the teaching portion and the small group dynamic played a big role in this.

All in all, in this young adult trip the faithful few came through. Working for reconciliation is extremely challenging in general; there is not much focus on Palestine and Israelis running to facilitate or engage with the other side. But there will always be a few who are willing to take on the challenge seriously and engage with the other side. The faithful few shine a small but vital light in the midst of hopelessness and despair. A light that shines on a new path of peace, reconciliation and hope.
Learning To Love Their Neighbor

Musalaha Camp Through the Eyes of a First-Timer’s Mom

Even before I first joined a women’s group of Musalaha, I inquired about camps for Israeli and Palestinian kids aged eight and up – the ideal age group for my daughter. I was resigned to sign her up, no matter what, which turned out to be a bit of a challenge as my daughter insisted on taking a friend with her and most of the people we asked already had other plans or were hesitant to send their children. Knowing my girl and her outgoing nature, I decided to take a leap of faith and register her anyway, praying that she would make new friends at camp. What a relief to find out later that she would make new friends at the camp. What a relief to find out later that she would make new friends at the camp. What a relief to find out later that she would make new friends at the camp.

This was my daughter’s first time away from home for five nights and we were a bit tense beforehand, as she had a rather tough time at scouts camp earlier this summer. She was really excited to go through, especially since the Musalaha camps were hosted in a Kibbutz guest house with a swimming pool and large play area. On site their wonderful counselors received her with little gifts and personal notes and were always close. My worries that there might be a language barrier were totally unfounded as all the counselors communicated in both Hebrew and Arabic and made sure everyone understood everything. On the contrary, the camp instilled a keen interest for Arabic in my daughter, a language previously rather foreign to her. One of the experiences she keeps recounting excitedly time and again is the joint bilingual singing. She came home with some new songs and decided to learn Arabic as soon as she gets the chance in the Israeli school system.

Another major highlight was the daily pool time. My girl loves water so the pool was a real treat for her, but she enjoyed the other group activities, sports, games and crafts, as well. Apart from fun times, Musalaha camps also introduce the young participants to the spiritual aspect of reconciliation. This year’s theme was the parable of the Good Samaritan and during the week different workshops and role play focused on Jesus’ commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Sad to say, the reality in the Middle East is not a summer camp and it was on a day of great hardship that we went to pick up the girls from the camp bus. Violence in the recent crises surrounding the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem peaked, and love was lost. In times like this it takes a conscious effort not to give in to frustration and depression even for a moment; please, optimistic, I looked comfort in my daughter’s smiling eyes and a knowing nod that we are in a new generation. With hope like this allow Israeli and Palestinian children from different backgrounds to connect and see their neighbor in a new light, or even for the first time at all. Let us be encouraged and continue to invest in a new generation of reconcilers.

Musilaha Camp

By Hadassa, Musalaha Participant

Musalaha Camp for Israeli and Palestinian kids aged eight and up – the ideal age group for my daughter. I was resigned to sign her up, no matter what, which turned out to be a bit of a challenge as my daughter insisted on taking a friend with her and most of the people we asked already had other plans or were hesitant to send their children. Knowing my girl and her outgoing nature, I decided to take a leap of faith and register her anyway, praying that she would make new friends at camp. What a relief to find out later that she would make new friends at camp. What a relief to find out later that she would make new friends at camp. What a relief to find out later that she would make new friends at camp.

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FAMILY UPDATE

Some news of the family:

- Jack and Rawan are busy looking for more permanent accommodation and saving up.
- Daniel visited us for a week and we pray for his safety as he works with refugee ministry from the Middle East. He took the girls as a riding from God.
- John begins his MA in International Relations in the Middle East with a years intensive Arabic at Edinburgh University. He takes his work as a calling from God.
- Sam continues to explore possible BA subjects for 2018, getting ready to take his TOEFL exam, teaching swimming in Jerusalem and Baptism with all sorts of other part time jobs in between.
- I am hoping next time I write we will have moved back into our rented house and much more home friendly flat with easy to clean windows and kitchen cupboards that don’t need yanking on to open and close. Small worries on the scale of things I know, and I really do know after this summer.

Until next time, please pray for all of the above, we could do with the help.