

## **The Youth Peace Collective: Building Bridges from the US to Israel-Palestine**

Proposed by Elena Hochheiser of St. John's College, Santa Fe, NM

Project Dates: May 27 – July 28, 2022

### **Background**

The United States has played a disproportionate role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As long as Israel remains the “largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance since World War II<sup>1</sup>”, Americans will hold a moral stake in creating a long-lasting peace in Israel-Palestine. Although in recent years the American political conversation about the conflict has shifted from nearly unequivocal support of Israel to a recognition in some quarters of Palestinian displacement and oppression, these shifts have been marginal and a broader conversation about the American role in funding the Israeli occupation must occur if a lasting peace is ever to emerge. It is particularly necessary to begin these conversations in Jewish-American communities, which are twofold stakeholders in the consideration of the United States' role in the conflict. Traditionally, many dominant American Jewish institutions have taken staunchly pro-Israel positions when discussing the conflict, defining the parameters of the conversation in ways that minimize Palestinian voices.

Although there are American and Jewish-American organizations engaged in peacebuilding and direct-action work in Israel-Palestine, much of this programming is oriented toward adults and college students. This leaves out a crucial group—namely, Jewish high-school students—who are participating in Jewish educational programs (many explicitly about Israel) but are offered neither opportunities to confront the realities of the conflict nor exposure to voices, particularly those of Palestinians, that fall outside of the dominant narrative. High-school students are old enough to have mature, nuanced conversations about the conflict, but young enough to be open to new perspectives without judgement. If they are given the opportunity to re-examine, revise, and re-learn the narrative of Jewish-American engagement in Israel-Palestine, teenagers have the potential to become the next generation of peacemakers, bringing about changes in American foreign policy that are necessary to build a lasting peace.

### **Project Summary**

The Youth Peace Collective (YPC) aims to 1) provide the historic knowledge base necessary to understand the conflict, stepping beyond the stale tropes of the past, 2) illuminate and correct the imbalance in conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in American Jewish communities, and 3) empower American Jewish youth with critical discourse skills and tools required to advocate effectively for peace, starting in their own communities. Through focusing on teenagers, YPC will aim to cultivate the leadership potential and perspectives of the next generation of peacemakers.

This project rests on two central pillars: first, the creation of a website aimed toward Jewish-American teenagers offering educational resources, recorded webinars, and first-person perspectives on the conflict; and second, an intensive six-week summer program for high-school juniors and seniors to learn about the conflict and complete a capstone project designed to give participants an opportunity to a) exercise the skills they have learned throughout the program, and b) demonstrate the complexity of finding peace in longstanding historical conflicts. Program participants will meet over Zoom twice a week for three hours, and each week the program will have one of six different foci, as follows:

- 1) **Dialogue training** to equip teens with the skills to start conversations about the conflict in their own communities; these trainings will be run by trained dialogue facilitators.
- 2) **Dialogue sessions** for considering personal relationships to Israel, Palestine, and the conflict, as well as an opportunity to consider the relationships between anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and Islamophobia; these sessions will also be run by trained facilitators.
- 3) **Exposure to Palestinian voices**, both youth and educators, from interviews conducted by me in Israel-Palestine, and which many Jewish youth have not been exposed to.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel, Congressional Research Service, 2020

- 4) ***Peacebuilding and direct-action strategies***, taught by expert speakers, to understand the broad range of methods used in peacebuilding.
- 5) ***Understanding common elements*** of unjust political regimes and recognizing that the same moral impulse underlies both American social justice movements and efforts to find a lasting peace in Israel-Palestine.
- 6) ***Designing and completing a capstone project*** that leads to real involvement in peacebuilding, using the skills and knowledge acquired in the first five weeks of the program.

### **Project Guidance**

To successfully complete my project, I plan to formalize partnerships with several organizations committed to peace in Israel-Palestine no later than April 1. Candidates include Amal Tikvah, Jewish Voice for Peace, and Resetting the Table. In addition to these partnerships, I will continue to seek the advice of several respected leaders in organizations involved with peacebuilding who have assisted in designing this proposal. These include Amitai Abouzaglo, Founder of Embodying Peace, a peacebuilding fellowship program for young adults; Glen Hauer, former JVP board member; Rachel Libros, Director of Fellowships at Repair the World; and Ariella Kissin, former Projects for Peace grantee working with House of Hope. I intend to continue contacting relevant organizations and individuals and will have formed a board of advisors for my project by March 15.

### **Project Execution and Implementation**

I will begin my project with the design of the website in April; it and social media accounts to promote the project will be launched in mid-May. This will allow for a month of virtual recruitment for the summer program, which will run from the week of June 20 until the week of July 29. Recruitment will occur via social media and by networking with Jewish organizations and youth groups. Throughout the summer, while conducting the program, I will be compiling materials for the website and laying the groundwork to continue this program beyond its first summer. In late May or early June, between the website's launch and the beginning of the summer program, I will travel to Israel-Palestine for ten days, to 1) make contact with and observe existing peacebuilding organizations to expand YPC's partners, 2) conduct interviews with Palestinian teens and educators, to develop program materials, and 3) learn first-hand about the extent and impact of the United States' involvement in the conflict, in order to develop my personal knowledge as I facilitate the educational portions of the program and develop the website.

### **Project Impact**

By the end of the summer, this project will have brought together 20 to 30 American Jewish high-school students of varying backgrounds to challenge their assumptions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, gain concrete skills that allow them to engage in more balanced conversations with their communities, and learn how they can contribute to a lasting peace in Israel-Palestine. My trip to the region will allow me to bring the voices of young Palestinians to program participants and broaden YPC's program partners. Additionally, Projects for Peace funding will serve both a direct and indirect function, funding YPC directly and supporting the work of peacebuilders who will bring crucial expertise to the YPC summer program as speakers. Finally, YPC's website will continue to provide resources, allowing YPC to continue beyond its first summer and serving as an example for similar programs.

### **About the Author**

I am a Jewish college student who has been asking questions about the conflict since eighth grade, when I took a class about the conflict at my local Jewish Community Center. I have experience engaging in advocacy and with the conflict in Jewish spaces, including my experience mentoring B'nai-Mitzvah-aged students through advocacy with Repair the World (a Jewish advocacy organization), and serving as a Diller Teen Fellow (an Israel-education and leadership program for Jewish young adults). However, it was only in college, through my work as an Embodying Peace fellow interning with Tech2Peace, that I was exposed to a broader narrative. Having myself experienced the lack of opportunities for Jewish-American teenagers to discuss and reckon with the conflict, I am a model of the paradigm shift that occurs when high-school students and young adults truly grapple with the question of Israeli occupation, and that is the shift that I wish to bring about for the students who participate in my program.

Name: Elena Hochheiser  
 Project Name: The Youth Peace Collective: Building Bridges from the US to Israel-Palestine  
 School: St. John's College

Dates: May 27- July 28  
 Total Additional Funding:

TOTAL FUNDS REMAINING:  
 10

TOTAL EXPENDITURES:  
 9990

Student Expenses					Project Expenses				
Travel (Including Airfare)	Lodging	Communications	Food (Biweekly)	Miscellaneous	Non-Student Travel and Lodging	Direct Equipment and Supplies	Marketing and Event Support	Staffing Costs	Miscellaneous
R/T airfare Washington, DC to Tel Aviv:	10 nights at \$75/night:	Phone Minutes:	\$300 biweekly; 10 days total	Dialogue Facilitation Training:		Zoom Premium Subscription:	Instagram ads for recruitment:	Speakers:	
1250	750	50	240	400		150	400	2 per session for weeks 3-6 (16 hours @ \$75/hour):	
Ground Transportation (\$30/day)				Zoom facilitation training:		Wix Premium Account:	Dialogue facilitation and facilitation training for program participants (16 hours @ \$75/hour for program weeks 1 and 2):	1200	
300				250		300	1200	Social Media Curator and Advisor (20 hours @ \$25/hour)	
						Materials for 30 program participants @ \$40/ea.:		500	
						1200		Website Contractor (bid as job; estimated cost 40 hours @ \$25/hour)	
						Program Facilitation Costs (movie rentals; permissions to reproduce articles, etc):		1000	
						800			
<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>
1550	750	50	240	650	0	2450	1600	2700	0

Total Student Expenses:  
 3240

Total Project Expenses:  
 6750