

Immigrant children at night

Small groups of children, aged 12-18, wandering in the streets, sitting on park benches. Their parents are immigrants. They themselves arrived in Israel at a young age, but still feel alienated from their environment. Not only is the weather different than it was in the Former Soviet Union, but the language, the customs, the schools, and the other children are all different as well. Yaroslav Gavriellov, 21 years old, was such a child. He immigrated to Israel 15 years ago from Tashkent in Uzbekistan. Now, together with two other friends, he works to make a difference. 'TAS – Talking about stereotypes', a Euromed Youth exchange seminar, paved the way.

By Yair Qedar

Photos by Edward Kapov

"We explain to them the effects of drugs on them, and we try to convince them to come with us: to do more sport for example. I also teach Kapuera and breakdancing . It's better they do some sport than hang out and do drugs".

Jerusalem - At night, the loneliness is worst. Small groups of children, aged 12-18, wander the streets, sitting on park benches. Their parents are immigrants. They themselves arrived at a young age, but still feel alienated from their environment. They stick together, sometimes take drugs, and drink alcohol. Most of the time, they feel lonely and depressed.

Yaroslav Gavriellov, 21 years old, was such a child. He immigrated to Israel 15 years ago from Tashkent in Uzbekistan. Now, together with two other friends, he works to make a difference. At nights, he is a guide for Night birds, a municipal program aimed at capturing lost souls. "We go out at night to various parks and streets, and talk to the young people there", says Gavriellov, "We explain to them the effects of drugs on them, and we try to convince them to come with us: to do more sport for example. I also teach Kapuera and break dancing . It's better they do some sport than hang out and do drugs".

What is the schedule?

"I start at eight and finish around three in the morning. In every park there are at least twenty guys sitting around and getting up to mischief. And there are dealers hanging around selling drugs too".

▲ Yaroslav Gavriellov, 21 years old, together with two other friends. Working to make a difference





◀ A Euromed Youth training: "Inter-religious Dialogue" seminar in Jordan

We are talking about young people coming to a new place from the former Soviet Union where they were called Jews. Here they are called Russians.

Why do you think that so many of these lost children are immigrants?

"It is because of the stereotypes. We are talking about young people coming to a new place from the former Soviet Union where they were called Jews. Here they are called Russians. They feel alienated and try to run away from their problems. There are many problems when you arrive in a new country and try to build new life".

Is there a lack of support for immigrant children in Israel?

"Of course. The families usually come from a higher social class and education. And when they come here the parents don't find their place, and they get depressed and the children are influenced by this".

Two months ago, Gavriellov participated in a seminar about stereotypes held in Jerusalem. It was organized by the Israeli Association for Immigrant Children, and sponsored by the European Union's Euro-Med Youth Programme. In the seminar, he met youth from Jordan, Estonia and Romania.

How was the seminar?

"It was an important experience. We worked on stereotypes and talked about

different cultures and how to break stereotypes".

"Not only is the weather different"

Yivgeney Sidiakin, 21 years old, a youth counsellor, also participated in the seminar. He immigrated to Israel from Odessa, Ukraine, nine years ago. He focuses on a different kind of counselling – through music.

Sidiakin: "I hand out musical instruments to the young people I meet, and arrange for a place for them to get together. Then we practice and sometimes hold concerts".

So you also do some music?

"Yes", grins Sidiakin, "I write lyrics for hip hop songs, and sometimes I perform myself. Altogether we have five rock bands and one hip hop band in which I sing and write".

What are your lyrics about?

"I try not to write about drugs. If you try not to think about a green elephant, you cannot avoid thinking about a green elephant. So I try not to write about drugs. I prefer to write about love".

The "Israeli Association for Immigrant Children" (Iaic), an organization dedicated to protecting the rights of immigrant children



◀ Yulia Dor is a special consultant for community programs

"I am happy that as an Israeli organization we can be a part of the world and to work with partners like the Romanian, Estonian and Jordanian partners we worked with".

and promoting their integration in Israel, organized the Euromed Youth seminar.

The data is discouraging: while 11% of all Israeli children are new immigrants, their school dropout rate is about 42%, with nearly 46% not finishing 12th grade! In addition, the rate of involvement in criminal activity is twice as high among immigrant youth in comparison to veteran peer groups.

As the Iaic's leaflet explains: "Not only is the weather different than it was in the Former Soviet Union or in Ethiopia, but the language, the customs, the schools, and the other children are all different as well. Without appropriate intervention, the sense of alienation, rejection and lack of a clear Jewish identity experienced by many immigrant children can lead to aberrant behavior, with serious consequences for both

While 11% of all Israeli children are new immigrants, their school dropout rate is about 42%, with nearly 46% not finishing 12th grade.

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◀ Night birds is a municipal program aimed at saving lost souls. “We go out at night to various parks and streets, and talk to the young people there”, says Gavrielov.

I hand out musical instruments to the young people I meet, and arrange for a place for them to get together. Then we practice and sometimes hold concerts.

the individual and Israeli society as a whole". Yulia Dor is a special consultant for community programs and runs external relations in IAIC. "I am a social worker by profession", says Dor, "I worked with Jewish communities in the former USSR and in Germany, and for two and a half years I worked with immigrant children in the city of Bat Yam".

What was the idea behind the Seminar you organized in Jerusalem?

"TAS – Talking about stereotypes' was a youth exchange seminar, and inter cultural meeting where examined issues of personal and social identity. First, we proposed the seminar to the Euromed Youth Programme , then we found partners. Next we held a preparatory seminar with counsellors, and now following the seminar, we are at the stage where each participant

is carrying out a follow-up project".

What would you say are the main issues that a young immigrant child or teenager confronts?

"The main problem is definitely the problem of identity – Who am I? What am I in relation to the original culture and to the new culture? The 'who and what am I' question is common with adolescents in general, but when it comes to an adolescent immigrant, the answer is much more complex. The child is caught between the receiving society that wants him to integrate, and the desire of an immigrant community to preserve its original culture, between

the parents' need to preserve their roots and between the adolescent's desire to integrate. It becomes an inter-generational and cultural conflict".

How was your experience working with the EU?

"I am happy that as an Israeli organization we can be a part of the world and to work with partners like the Romanian, Estonian and Jordanian partners we worked with . I would also say that this is a miracle for us. This is the first year we are working with the EU and we already working on two projects. So I hope we can work more and pass on some of our experience to other countries dealing with the same issues". ■

The families usually come from a higher social class and education. And when they come here the parents don't find their place, and they get depressed and the children are influenced by this.

Without appropriate intervention, the sense of alienation, rejection and lack of a clear Jewish identity experienced by many immigrant children can lead to aberrant behavior, with serious consequences for both the individual and Israeli society as a whole.

Name: EuroMed Youth III
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Participating Mediterranean Partner Countries: Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey.

The programme promotes intercultural dialogue and understanding among youth in the Euro-Mediterranean region, through activities and funded projects
 It aims at fostering mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue among young people in the Euro-Mediterranean region by promoting active citizenship and their sense of solidarity. It also seeks to support non-governmental youth organisations and contributes to the development of youth policie.

Website: www.euromedyouth.net

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