

## 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.

Three events of the Young Women's Parliament took place from November, 2012 to June, 2013. These followed six events that took place since this activity started in June, 2010. The first session, was titled "When a Legend Becomes Reality." It took place in November 2012, in Kfar Saba and was hosted by Yehuda Ben Chamo, the mayor and by Shelly Amramy, council's member and head of the women's council in Kfar Saba. Vered Swid, the head of the women's affairs authority in the Prime Minister's office, also attended the event. It was organized by Nessia Shtrasburg, the mayor's council on women's issues, and by a group of girls associated with the Young Women's Parliament, headed by Rachel Levi-Hertz. About 100 girls, from Kfar Saba, Bat Yam, Faradis and Jisser A-Zarka, participated in the event.

Professor Miri Baruch gave a lecture on "How Do Princesses' Images Influence Molding of Gender Perceptions of Girls And Women?" Linoy Bar Geffen, a TV journalist, convened the discussion about the impact of children's legends on shaping reality. The panelists were: Anya Bukshtein (actress), Tsipi Rahav (a legendary kindergarten teacher) and Smadar Shir (a writer and a journalist).



**Discussion circle during the 7<sup>th</sup> session of the Young Women's Parliament: women from Kfar Saba, Bat Yam, Jisser A-Zarka and Furedis**

The main message, conveyed in the discussions that took place in a workshop and in the plenary, was that girls and boys grow up from early age with the ideas, representations, symbols and perceptions that construct and sustain the traditional stereotypes and role division. Discussing legends clarified that a fundamental change is vitally needed in education and in parents' and educators' perceptions, in order that substantial social change will emerge and grow new "princesses" and new heroines.

The title of the next event of the Young Women's Parliament was "Girls and Rights". It took place in February 2013, in Bat Yam and was organized by Shani Elbaz, from the youth department, with the cooperation of "Itach Ma'achi" (female lawyer for social justice). About 100 girls from Bat Yam, Kfar Saba, Jisser A-Zarka and Furedis participated in the event.

In the workshops the girls were exposed to the importance of being aware of social rights in general and of womens' rights in particular. The plenary panel, which followed the workshops, was convened by Dana Mirtenbaum (from Itach Ma'achi). The panelists were: Diana Vardinian (from the "fighters" group), Ilana Sushinsky (from Reshet) and Michal Orkavi (the public defense attorney). Several accounts and much information relating to struggles for social rights and especially womens' rights (such as struggles against sexual harassment and for young women's rights in the courts), were presented.



**A woman from Jisser responds to the panelists' discussion**

The title of the ninth event of the Young Women's Parliament was "Girls, Friendship and Social Networks". The event took place in June, 2013, in Jisser A-Zarka and was hosted by Muchamad Chamdan, head of the Education department and of the Cultural Center in Gisser. The event was organized by the local activists of the Young Women's Parliament, led by Watfa Amash, coordinator of the "Women Reborn" project in Jisser. Representatives of Shin attended the event and Dr. Irit Dalumi greeted the girls on Shin's behalf. About 30 local girls participated. The main issue of the event was "social networks and the use of

internet in girls' lives". Some of the girls performed a humoristic play titled "my best friend" and a lecture was given by Saja Amash about the internet, its potential contribution and dangers.

### **Summary**

The last six to seven months of activity of the Young Women's Parliament was mainly based on conferences which were divided into two parts: a plenary panel and workshops or discussion circles. The planned session in the Knesset did not take place because of the elections, which prevented the event from taking place. However, the field activity went on with regard to the law initiatives of various groups. One particular initiative in Bat Yam went as far as drafting a law proposal (adding a section relating to schools into the law on sexual harassment). Another initiative that gained local success (in Kfar Saba) was the introduction of a gender education program into the education system in town. The first initiative was followed by a session attended by young women from several municipalities and by various activities for the leadership group in Bat Yam about human and women's rights. This activity replaced the originally planned workshop on self-presentation in the media, because of local preference. The second initiative is now being implemented gradually in the educational system in Kfar Saba. The first session of the Young Women's Parliament which took place in an Arab village can be considered as an achievement, although girls from other places did not arrive, due to the bad timing of exams. The highlight of the whole project, as in the previous year, is the unique exchange of girls from various places and communities, and especially among Jewish and Arab girls.

The project enjoys a growing support among local municipalities. Departments of education, sports and youth are becoming more and more involved. Moreover, various organizations are indicating their interest in participating in the project. One example is Itach-maachi, a women's lawyers association, which offered workshops and coaching of leading groups of girls on the subject of human rights.