

SEE Inside

Social Entrepreneurship and Volunteering in the Galilee

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An American's reflections of an Israeli experience

By: Bill Crotty

Last year I went on a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip and was infected with a need to return almost immediately. Despite my optimism, reality quickly settled in as I realized returning to Israel was going to cost more money than a recent college graduate with even a proportionately small amount of debt could manage. Betting against all odds, I begged trip organizers to help me in any way they could.

I was quickly accepted into what Masa recruiters called "the most affordable program for volunteers in Israel" - Israel Teaching Fellows. However, I was unable to afford even that. Six months later, I had paid off much of my debt and was on a flight to Israel to be a participant of the second-ever session of a social entrepreneurship and volunteer program called SEE Galilee. This program is similarly affordable and is even more suited to my personal interests and background than ITF.

During the five months I've spent in Israel, I have spent a few weeks assisting children with English in the local elementary school, a day blending wine in a small winery at a nearby kibbutz, and a day harvesting and preparing herbs in a Moshav near our home for a small business. Just before Pesach, I helped distribute food to the needy, and several times each week I taught tennis in the Shlomi community center and played soccer with local youth in our neighborhood and in Kibbutz Hanita. My



SEE Galilee participants on a tour of the Northern Galilee, during a history lesson from an IDF correspondence officer.

primary volunteering has been writing press releases and editing the English content for Galila, a non-profit organization that creates and administers social programs in the Galilee. I also created this newsletter as part of my work there.

Some days, Israel is exactly what I expected; diverse, strange and exciting. Other days, I'm stunned by the hospitality and opportunity that is so different than what I knew back home in California. As the five-month adventure this program offered me came near to an end, I realized I needed more Israel.

In a strange coincidence, I signed up for the following session of SEE Galilee on the anniversary of my first day in Israel on Taglit. After SEEing what five months has done for me, I eagerly anticipate what the future seven months will hold.

English Day at Yitzhak Ben Svi Elementary School

About one month into the volunteer program, the SEE Galilee volunteers visited the local elementary schools to see if helping out in the English classes would be something they were interested in. After only one day, several participants committed to spending their morning volunteer hours at the nearby secular elementary school named after an early Zionist and the second president of Israel. Throughout their stay in Shlomi, Matt and Barrett assisted the English teacher

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Fifth graders during their lunch break with the volunteers.

SEE what they are doing now

Justin Birenbaum was a participant in the first SEE Galilee program, from September 2012 to February 2013. Since returning to the U.S., he has moved from Boston to Brooklyn because of the larger Jewish population that that he hopes to become more involved with. He is in the process of looking for work and is applying for a job at the United Jewish Appeal.



You just returned to America, and your first decision is to move?

Justin: "Brooklyn is the hub, or channel, between youth and maturation into adulthood, so that's where I want to be right now."

Was the SEE Galilee program useful to you? What sort of impact did it have on your life?

Justin: "The See Galilee program made me very pro-Israel and in fact created a strong bond between Israel and I that will never be broken. It allowed me to see all dimensions of Israeli society, Israeli culture and the Israeli aura, which shines as bright as the Summer sun. The See Galilee program allowed me to meet new people from all around the world (fellow Jews), and create lifelong friendships with Jews from all over, which is very special for me because I grew up with the notion that Jewish culture is what really solidifies the Jewish people as a whole. But I did not grow up with many Jews, nor do I have many Jewish friends (prior to coming on this program). This program changed all that for sure, and I am ever more grateful because of the experience."

"For those that come with an open heart, you will be rewarded by the experience."

— Justin Birenbaum

Would you recommend the SEE Galilee program, and what advice would you give future participants?

Justin: "I would recommend this program because of the flexibility surrounding its core structure. This includes the versatility by which you are able to see and conduct yourself in Israel. The different places you can go, the projects you can work on. My advice to future participants, and to all people coming to Israel for the first time, is come to Israel with an open heart. For those who come with an open heart, you will be rewarded by the experience."



Matt Eisenstadter at Ben Svi on English Day before a lesson.

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with lessons for all students from the first to sixth grades.

On June 10, Matt and Barrett planned a variety of activities with the kids; Hangman, Apples to Apples, Mad Libs and Bingo. Many of the kids had never played most of the games and kept the materials the volunteers created for a rainy day.



"Mad Libs" was new to the students, and a big hit.

SEE What's New

The first two sessions of SEE Galilee housed participants in adjacent apartments in Shlomi, but the next session will be located in Kfar Vradim. The change was decided based on the volunteers' feedback. Shlomi is a niche village founded by Tunisian and Moroccan immigrants in what is now a quickly growing community that provided a rural, quiet surrounding for the participants – but doesn't offer the effective transportation available in other places.

Things will be different in Kfar Vradim. There are many Sheirut (shared taxis), and busses to a wider range of places in Vradim because it is located more centrally in the Galilee. There are also many more people in their 20s for the volunteers to connect with. The options for shopping, community activities and night life will be greatly expanded as well.

Meet the Meetnadvim

The five SEE Galilee participants talk about their favorite aspects of the program, where they volunteered and what they plan to do next. (Meetnadvim / מתנדבים = Volunteers)

Barrett Deitz

Age: 23
From: Austin, TX



I enjoyed the freedom and support I received from the program while doing something meaningful in the community that I chose; not somewhere I was assigned to.

I plan on continuing with the third session of SEE Galilee in Kfar Vradim, where I can continue the good things I have been fortunate enough to be a part of.

My volunteering has been in Ben Svi Elementary School (Shlomi) and in the after-school program for children in Kibbutz Hanita. One of my favorite free time activities that has turned into a sort of volunteer position is playing soccer on the courts in our neighborhood, which has turned into organizing games with many children in the afternoons and evenings.

Elan Wischkin | Age: 29 From: Weston, CT

What I enjoyed most are the connections I made with Israelis through my volunteer work. I went to an Israeli wedding for one of my bosses, which made me feel Israeli. I felt like I was part of the group.



I plan to stay in Israel for another five months to study permaculture and sustainability in the Negev. During SEE Galilee, I volunteered with Miftach Proeyctim, a company that designs and builds net housing structures in agricultural fields in the Western Galilee.

Benjamin Yaffe

Age: 28
From: Dallas, TX



I liked that we had freedom to choose where we wanted to volunteer and how we had a chance to meet other people in programs across the country. After the program, I plan to return to America and continue working on my Holocaust documentary and apply the skills I learned.

I started the program as a volunteer in an elementary school in Shlomi, and then volunteered to edit and write scripts for docu-youth, a documentary experience for youth in the Galilee.



Matt Eisenstader

Age: 27 | From: Manchester, NH

What I enjoyed most about SEE Galilee was the opportunity to learn and improve my Hebrew while living among Israelis. Having a host family to celebrate holidays and Shabbat with was an incredibly fulfilling and unique experience, and I hope to keep in contact with them for many years to come.

I had originally planned for the possibility of making Aliyah, but obligations at home forced me to hold that decision for now. When I return to the U.S., I hope to become more involved with my local temple and seek out a group to have Shabbat dinners with. I never got to experience Shabbat before coming to Israel and now I'm hoping to incorporate it into my life.



I volunteered at the local elementary school Ben Svi, where I was as a teacher's aid in the English classes for the third through sixth grades. It was a great way to practice my Hebrew and learn about Israeli culture. The kids really enjoyed having an American to speak English to and apply what they learn in class in a practical situation. Many of the children don't have the opportunity to talk with a native English speaker because their families don't know English. I also volunteered on a nearby Moshav, helping to prepare and package dried fruit for a sole proprietor. It was fun to see some of the successes and challenges of a small business in Northern Israel, and what it means to be kosher and organic.



Bill Crotty | Age: 25 | San Diego, CA

The entire experience of living in Israel has been incredible for me. Immersing in authentic Mid-East culture, traveling, and many of the educational enrichments I have been through will stay with me forever.

The past five months have been an incalculable boost in answering what Judaism means to me. In addition to the intrinsic value of this trip, the program has helped to focus my future goals and given me the confidence to begin a regular blog that is now featured on Times of Israel. When I eventually return to the U.S., I plan to start a magazine on California college campuses that focuses on college life, Jewish values and Middle East culture using the business plan that I have worked on within the SEE Galilee program's enrichment sessions.

Highlights and Features of a Unique Israel Adventure

The Social Entrepreneurship Experience (SEE) Galilee program is a highly subsidized opportunity available to a select group of up to eight highly motivated men and women between the ages of 21 and 28 who demonstrate a desire and capability to have an impact in the Galilee.

In addition to volunteering, participants travel Israel, receive Hebrew Ulpan classes, and are connected with warm and friendly host families. During planned monthly trips, the volunteers meet Israeli peers, attend conferences, and engage in discussions on contemporary and historical events affecting the Jewish community in Israel and the Diaspora.

A key component to the program not offered with other volunteer options is an eight part Social Entrepreneurship Education (SEE) lecture series. Through this unique feature, participants are able to learn and improve upon skills related to creating their own social startups in the Jewish world. The discussions in the SEE program facilitate social plans, expand knowledge of social startups and provide guidance to become leaders in the Jewish world. The Galilee is the frontier of Israel, which gives way to a wide variety of opportunity for volunteers to practice and implement the tools learned during the SEE program and while experiencing Israel itself.

The current program ends on July 18, and the third session of SEE Galilee begins September 30, 2013. Interested applicants can apply through Israel Way [HERE](#).

What's on the Schedule

June 18-20: The Israeli Presidential Conference began by celebrating President of Israel Shimon Peres' 90th birthday, followed by two days of distinguished speakers and panels about leadership and building a better future. Bill Crotty and Matt Eisenstadter were invited to attend this event.

June 19-21: The Shlomi group met up with volunteers from Israel Way's Kibbutz Experience, Tel Aviv Internship and Israel Teaching Fellows-Ramla groups for a three-day excursion into Israel's Southern periphery. The trip took the 100+ volunteer group hiking and camel riding as they learned about agriculture and sustainability in the Negev. The trip included a night of Bedouin hospitality and participant-led activities in the tent camps.

July 1: 'Israeli food night!' The SEE Galilee participants met again with the volunteers living in Kfar Masaryk to make falafel, and spontaneously planned their own "Shabbat Taco Night" at their home in Shlomi. During this visit, plans were made for the Galilee group to visit again during Shabbat on July 6 to participate in the weekly soccer match that the kibbutzniks have as Shabbat ends each week.

July 11: Three participants from a [Presentense](#) fellowship met with SEE Galilee to talk about their experiences and encourage the SEE Galilee group's social project ideas. Presentense empowers individuals looking to start social programs in Jewish communities worldwide, and some of the current participants hope to submit their projects there in the future.

Contacting the Organizations that Make this Program Possible

[Masa Israel Journey](#)

Website: www.Masaisrael.org

Email: Info@Masaisrael.org

US/Can: 1.866.864.3279

Int.(Eng): 972.2.621.6497

[Israel Way](#)

Website: www.Destinationisrael.com

Email: info@Destinationisrael.com

(US): 888.351.9897 (Can): 866.269.6889

Local (IL): 03-920-3999

[Galila](#)

Website: www.Galila.org

Email: Yael@Galila.org

Phone (IL): 972.50.688.6001

There are 10,000 volunteers in Israel on more than 200 Masa-sponsored programs offered by a variety of organizations. Israel Way is one of the largest program organizers that work with Masa to provide volunteer opportunities to Jews in the Diaspora. One of the program options administered by Israel Way is the SEE Galilee volunteer program, offered in partnership with Galila - The Northern Galilee Development Foundation.

Only a small handful of Masa program participants reside in Israel's beautiful Northern periphery. Most spend the majority of their program in central Israel, with only an occasional trip to the Golan for a taste of the Galilee. The SEE Galilee program is the only volunteer program in Israel that combines rural Israeli life in the periphery with social entrepreneurship. Those that embark upon this unique program get a chance to SEE what few others ever will.