



# NEWSLETTER



## **A Message from the Minister of Diaspora Affairs, Omer Yankelevitch**

Recently, the world has collectively experienced vulnerability and tragedy which have impacted Jewish communities globally. Without prior notice, the world was expected to shut everything down.

Our careful plans and expectations that we have come to rely on, ended suddenly. Everyone was left scrambling and adjusting to a new unprecedented, uncertain, and frightening reality.

Yet, through it all, we were reminded of what is truly important, caring for each other. Now more than ever, it is our responsibility as the Jewish People to step up and support our fellow Jews who are struggling. We are motivated to meet the needs of Jews around the world. With everyone's cooperation to help each other, especially our most vulnerable, we will emerge unified, healthy, and strong.

It is during times like these when we witness incredible generosity and kindness. We have seen people who are struggling themselves with an uncertain future, sincerely reaching out to help family, friends, and community members. Some examples of these heroic efforts include young adults checking on and shopping for the elderly, neighbors sharing limited resources with others, communities donating to families hit by tragedy, healthcare providers tirelessly providing care and healing, educators adjusting to and shifting to remote teaching, and parents juggling childcare with work to maintain our economy.

As Jews, throughout history, we have experienced and prioritized the importance of mutual responsibility and support. This is how we have survived and thrived. I want to personally thank you, the Mentors of Israel Connect, who dedicate time and effort to help young Israeli youth year-round. Your work during the intense period of the unpredictable waves of school closures and last-minute openings has been invaluable. It is individuals like the Mentors of Israel Connect who keep the eternal bond of the Jewish People strong. In my few short weeks as the Minister of Diaspora Affairs, I have witnessed how Jewish communities around the globe are stronger when we connect and support each other.

Thank you for being there when your help was so crucially needed.

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## A Message from the director, Sarah Gordon



During this pandemic, it has confirmed to me what I have always known to be true. Our Israel Connect family is made up of the most incredible and giving people in the world.

When schools and countries shut down due to COVID-19, many were left scrambling without any plans. As an organization that has been teaching students at home, we were in a position to help. When the Ministry of Education in Israel reached out to us and asked us to be part of the new at-home education system, we decided we would step up to the plate. In the last few months, Israel Connect mentors have been able to serve hundreds of high school students whose academic plans disappeared overnight. Together, we were able to provide them at-home education to help salvage their academic year.

This was by no means an easy or smooth road. With only three days of notice, Israel Connect hired and trained four additional staff members to onboard hundreds of students. Everyone had to adjust to the "new normal", clogged internet lines, Zoom being overloaded and pushing out changes, cancellations due to illness, and the list goes on and on.

Yet through it all, our family of incredible mentors has been so flexible, understanding, and as always, rolled up their sleeves and stepped up to the challenge. We have been able to serve hundreds of new students providing them with online education during this time.

As most of you know, English language acquisition is considered one of the top barriers to social mobility in Israel. When times get tough, these gaps widen. Those that have less, fall further behind while those that are more privileged are able to keep afloat. As a family, we successfully provided a needed boost to allow them to progress during these uncertain times. Thank you for making that opportunity possible for them. All of this brings to mind the quote from Fred Rogers, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" In this case, I would like to say, "Thank you to our incredible family for being the helpers that others can look to for inspiration!"

## A message from a mentor, Trevor Barnett

I am proud to say that I am one of the founding mentors at Israel Connect. I have been with the program since the second year. Both my wife and I feel very passionately about education and we are well aware of the importance of English education for Israeli students. When we first started, my wife was mentoring and I was really impressed with the purpose of the program. At the time I was still working my way into retirement and did not have the time to devote to the program. As time became available, I too began mentoring.

Initially, Israel Connect certainly had its ebbs and flows. There were many technical difficulties as well as sound issues, which detracted from the lessons. However, I believed in the program and did not want to quit. I believed that the process would improve and it certainly has. I am very happy to be one of the pioneers of such a wonderful program and to have been a part of the initial trial and error.

This year I had a student whom I was tutoring at school but when Covid-19 hit, the school closed and our sessions unhappily ended. Fortunately, the program was reorganized to allow tutoring with the students in their homes. I have found the at-home forum to be much better. The students are much more relaxed and it is easier to engage with them. They are not running to catch a bus or rushing to their next period. The students are, as well, less stressed by peer pressure of speaking in front of their class. I have seen significant progress by my student during the semester. It has been most rewarding to observe the progress of my student, Rotem. My wife has substituted, on a few occasions, for me and it has been wonderful for us to get to know Rotem and hear about her other interests. Rotem is an accomplished Ballet dancer and we have discussed her passion for dance. To sum it up, it has been a wonderful experience to be involved in this remarkable program.



## A message from a student, Rotem Kadosh

My name is Rotem Kadosh and I live in the North of Israel. When my school announced it was closing for Corona it was like a dream come true. I would close my webcam and take my classes in my PJs. I got to wake up as school started, and make breakfast while listening to my classes.

I got to accomplish so many things while at home and my classes were playing. I was a little nervous that I would fall behind on some classes, and that was indeed what happened. Classes, like Math, that I found challenging before, were that much harder from home. I, like most students in school, did not complete my curriculum for the year from home. But, for classes that I excel in, it was so much better to have a little more freedom.

When my mom told me about Israel Connect I felt that it would be very awkward and embarrassing to speak English in front of someone else. I also realized this was an incredible opportunity, so I decided to do it. I do not know yet what I want to be when I grow up, but I know that any road I take will require English. I do not get many opportunities to speak English, only a little bit during English class. I am lucky to be in a family where my mom can help me with English and English has always been a priority. But, even though I have pretty good grades in English, I still worry my grades will not be high enough.

I loved loved loved Israel Connect. I would look forward to it. Every week when I would get my materials I would practice over and over. My mentor was so patient and never laughed when I spoke. It was so much better than school; in school when I speak I have to speak in front of my entire class and sometimes I am too embarrassed. This was much less scary than I originally imagined. Learning English in school is much less enjoyable and more tedious. I am so happy I took this opportunity.



## A message from a parent, Evelyn Kadosh

My name is Evelyn Kadosh and I am the mother of Rotem Kadosh. This year has been quite an interesting year. When the Corona pandemic hit out of nowhere it changed life entirely. I tried not to think about the global impact and live in the moment. For my family it was wonderful to have life slow down, to take walks alone, to take walks in nature with my dog, to spend time together as a family, and I learned to cook and bake. At the same time, it was very hard to not see or get extended together with family. This was my first time making Passover alone.

For my kids as well, this was a major change. All their after-school activities were cancelled: the dance, the basketball, everything.. It took time, but we settled into the new normal, school started up on classes on Zoom and life went on.

As I work in the Ministry of Education's English department, I was asked to pass along the information about Israel Connect to teachers. I was very intrigued by the program and excited that my daughter could participate. For me this was a way of using this new-found time to excel. I could not be more happy and thankful for what the program has given her.

My daughter looked forward to her session every week. As a mom of three teenage girls, I can absolutely say this was a miracle. This is also something very unique for her. In Israel most emphasis in English education is placed on written English. As the classes are large, there is no time for every student to practice speaking. As the students grow, you can find many very well-educated individuals who cannot converse in English. They can read in English, but when they open their mouths they lack the confidence and ability to speak. My daughter was very embarrassed to speak to her mentor in front of us. As can be expected from the teenage years, my daughter took her computer into her room, put on headphones, and locked the door. She did not let anyone in the family see her participating initially. But every week she would be able to tell us how much she had learned and was excited for the following week. As someone who works in education, I could not have asked for anything more.

