



# NEWSLETTER



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

Mazal tov and kol hakavod, Israel Connect, on your inspiring work bringing together Jews across generations and around the world. This wonderful initiative is a testament to the spirit of volunteerism and generosity of the Jewish people

Breaking down barriers of age and distance, Israel Connect matches needs with opportunities and empowers American Jews to share their English skills with young Israelis. I am personally inspired by the dedication of Israel Connect's passionate core of mentors. This initiative shows that by reaching out and sharing what we have to offer, we create a stronger and more unified global Jewish family. Israel Connect champions the notion that each Jewish individual has something to offer within the Jewish people -- whether it be one's time, skills, efforts or experience. Israel Connect is a model for how to utilize online platforms to build dialogue in the Jewish world.

This effort ultimately helps to create a shared language that brings together our people near and far, old and young. Thank you and B'hatzlacha!

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## **A message from a mentor, Phyllis Serfaty**

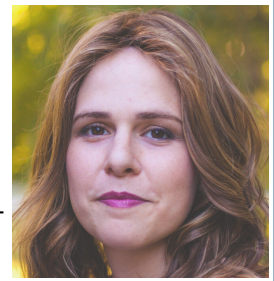
It was my daughter, an English teacher in Israel, who brought this wonderful program to my attention. She had heard about it through a friend, and while her school did not participate, she was very excited by the idea. She felt it would be a good fit for me. I am a biologist by training and spent many years



researching and teaching at the university level. During the last ten years of my career, I was a research teacher in a High School. I instructed students on how to conduct research in the STEM fields, a complicated and precise undertaking. My student is a delightful and devoted student.

I have found her company very interesting. Her grandfather was from Morocco, just like my husband's family. We share some similar customs and commonality which we discussed. She is so animated and interested in hearing and learning new things. Although, at times it can be frustrating learning a new language. I can completely relate to her frustration. During the pandemic I signed up for Hebrew classes, to brush up on my language skills. It can be difficult to express the ideas in your head properly in another language. The biggest struggle is to find someone who is willing to speak with you, I know from my experience that this practice is worth gold.

## A Message from the director, Sarah Gordon



Something struck me while speaking to a student this year. School had just re-opened after a long closure and we were trying to re-arrange their session to meet their new schedule. The student was being very non-committal and felt very guilty about it. "You have to understand", they told me, "It's not that I don't want to, it's just that this is the only consistent thing about my schooling

this year. I am going back to school, but I do not know my schedule, I do not know if all my teachers are going back, there is just so much uncertainty."

This really hit home, prior to founding the Israel Connect program, I spent 7 years in the classroom as a teacher. If there is one thing we know for certain about students and education it is that students thrive on consistency. It was very scary to think that students missed out on such an important factor at such a crucial time in their lives. Our students are in their final years of primary education and are starting to make the transition to the second part of their lives. At the same time, I feel so privileged to be able to be part of the "one consistent thing". To be able to provide some consistency despite everything else that is going on. To be part of an incredible team of hundreds of individuals who have added a little balance during a difficult time. Sometimes all it takes one small anchor to help you weather a storm. Thank you to our entire family of mentors who were there for our students day in and day out. A special thanks to our incredible staff who managed to pivot on a dime, and despite all the changes, managed to service hundreds of mentors and students with a smile.

## A message from a student, Na'ama Biton



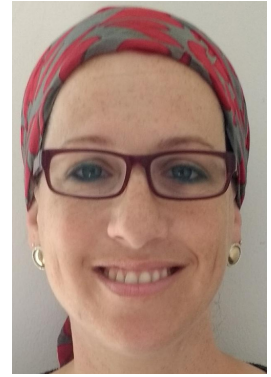
I have always wanted to improve my English. I know that in order to fulfil my dreams and pursue any kind of post-secondary study, I will have to feel comfortable with this important international language. When I heard about the Israel Connect program, I felt it was right for me. There is no better way than to speak with someone for whom it is their mother tongue.

Although at first, I had my doubts. Would I be able to have the confidence to open my mouth? Will I

be able to have a conversation with an unfamiliar mentor? I have never really spoken English, maybe just a few minutes during class time. I started the program full of concerns, but I was really surprised. My mentor, Phyllis, is charming with a wonderful personality. She is patient with me, encouraging is honest and caring. When I do not understand something, I do not feel shy at all. I know I can tell Phyllis and she will be patient with me. She does not mind or get annoyed when she has to repeat something over and over again. She always believes that I will manage and succeed on my own. Today I come to the meetings differently. I speak fluently and have confidence in speaking English.

I am so proud of my decision to join this program. I feel it has really accelerated my English development. I even surprise myself sometimes. I caught myself speaking English at home without noticing it, something that has never happened before! Thank you to Israel Connect that has really allowed me to discover my English abilities.

## **A message from a teacher, Adina Livni**



Our school was one of the first schools to join the program. When the idea was brought to me by the principal, Mrs. Anat Cohen, I could not help but get excited. It was my first year as a teacher, and I have been heavily involved for the last six years.

Since then, Israel Connect has been one of our flagship programs. Our excitement for the program has only grown. Our students are very interested in advancing their English. Through the program, they get exposed to an authentic English experience. They also get exposed to the incredible mentors who give of their time, skills, and experience and focus all their attention on our student's success. The special connections that are formed, are a wonderful bonus.

On the other hand, thanks to the curriculum that travels Israel, our students can not only speak about our homeland but can discuss their personal point of view and experience there should they have visited. This way the students also feel like they are giving something as well during the exchange. This is how a wonderful connection happens, between Jews in Israel and abroad, a wonderful multi-generational connection, and a meeting of the hearts that expands the horizons of our students about different countries, cultures, different weather, and gain new values.

As the coordinator, I can attest that the students who participate experience a significant leap forward in everything related to their English language skills, particularly their oral skills. Many students started the program hesitantly, fearing that they would not be able to express themselves or make mistakes. Thank you to the warm and nurturing feedback from the mentors, the students have blossomed and gained the confidence to speak English without fear.

During frontal teaching, we are very focused on transferring material. There is really no space for the students to take their knowledge and apply it within the classroom setting. The Israel Connect program fixes this program wonderfully. The program fills the gap and gives students a safe space to practice and practice what they learn. I cannot recommend this program enough. Especially today, when these skills have become more relevant than ever.

Thank you to Israel Connect, for the opportunity to be part of this empowering program. Truly an English experience that will not be forgotten!