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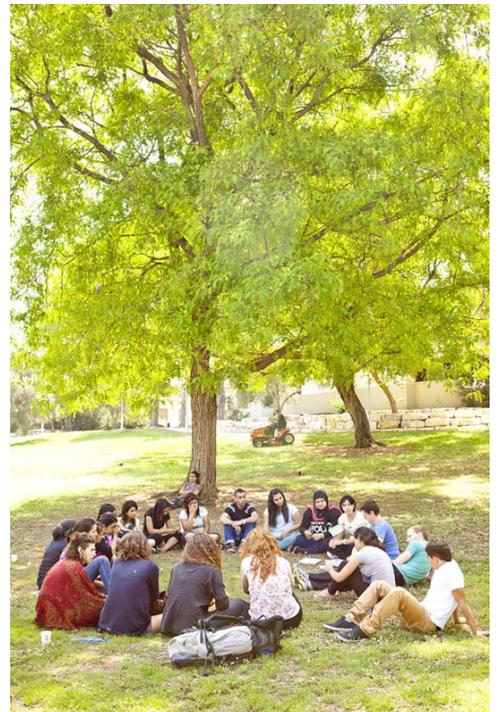
Young adults of all sectors of Israeli society come together in shared encounters to think about "what kind of society they want?" - Summary of the Shared Encounters seminar, Giva'at Haviva, May 19-20 2013.

"When I was little I used to escape the difficult reality into an imaginary world; During the volunteer-year in Ma'ase I realized that if reality is difficult I need to change it instead of inventing an imaginary one" (A participant in the Afak Program during the seminar).

The Shared Encounters seminar series constitutes a rare – yet necessary – opportunity for young adults from the various groups composing Israeli society to engage in conversation, and it is one of the ways of Ma'ase Center to advance a tolerant, pluralistic democratic and egalitarian civil society.

The seminar was attended by hundreds of young men and women ages 18-19 of all groups of Israeli society and particularly from Israel's socio-economic periphery: Jews and Arabs, Druze, new immigrants and native born, religious and secular (from all Ma'ase Center's volunteer-year programs).

In the seminars, the young participants deal with different issues; social disparities in Israeli society, communication, group and particularized identity and more. In the first seminar, participants are divided into mixed groups that continue to work together for the duration of the year. Groups are led by 2 facilitators – a Hebrew-speaker and Arabic-speaker – so that every participant is able to express himself in his mother tongue. These mixed groups engaging in fertile and cross-cultural discussions reflect, in practice, the diversity of Ma'ase programs' participants and the organization's vision – a shared society/society that belongs to all the citizens .



The seminar series is composed of 3 2-days seminars a year. The third and final seminar for the current activity year was held on May 19-20 in Giva'at Haviva .

The topic of the seminar was "what kind of a society do we want?" A unique feature of this seminar was that it was designed together by the young participants and the organization's staff – thus allowing the former an opportunity to influence the content of the discussions and the methodologies of the groups' work. The goals for the final seminar as determined by staff and young participants were: to enable discussions about current affairs, to narrow gaps that are the result of lack of knowledge and stigma, to talk about daily life and living side by side in Israel, to simply get to know one another and through that acquaintance to better know oneself, and to talk about the future.



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As a result of the joint work, the content of the seminar was more relevant to the young participants' world and more open and varied. Many issues were addressed – from personal acquaintances through positions and attitudes about complex, emotional issues. The year-long acquaintance of the members of the groups allowed them to engage in open discussions with little hostility.



Such a meaningful encounter between the rivaling sectors of Israeli society as took place in the last "Shared Encounters" seminar proves that there is a wide, social-based, common denominator and hope connecting us all.

In the participants' words: "This year is the beginning of a much bigger and much longer process for us as individuals and as a society... if each of us leaves the seminar with a small, positive message to our own personal surroundings, we have already accomplished a great thing and ignited the change... We came to merge all of our hands together into one large, proud and strong hand that will be able to make a change and sound one strong clear voice asking for a better shared society for all; a peaceful, calm existence for each and every one".

