

NEWS > EDUCATION > ISRAEL

International student program taking off at Gray academy

Rebeca Kuropatwa
Western Correspondent

WINNIPEG – When Morrie and Keith Effenbein went to transfer their 8-year-old (Grade 3) daughter Talia from public school to Gray Academy of Jewish Education, they didn't yet know where this step would lead them.

At the time, the school happened to be looking for a host family to place one of its new international students, 16-year-old Noemi DeMayo from Santiago, Chile.

"This was not something we had thought about or planned on doing," said Morrie Effenbein, "but it worked out well for all of us."

DeMayo arrived in Winnipeg on Sept. 18 to stay with the Effenbein family and attend Gray Academy. She stayed until Feb. 3.

From the moment DeMayo came into their home, Effenbein said, "she has been nothing but warm, and she and Talia are like sisters."

Effenbein admitted to being hesitant at first to the idea of hosting an international student, as she had heard some horror stories of relatives who had done something similar through other programs.

But, she said, "Things couldn't have gone more smoothly and everyone really enjoyed the experience. I certainly wouldn't mind doing it again."

Although this was DeMayo's first time in Canada, she said her first cousin came to Winnipeg through the Gray Academy program and had a great time.

"This was my first experience studying at a Jewish school, and I'm getting a lot out of it," said DeMayo. "It's interesting also,



Santiago's Noemi DeMayo (left) stays with the Effenbein family – Morrie, Keith, and Talia (front).

learning about Canadian history."

Gray Academy offers Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 and places an equal value on Jewish and general academic programs. The student body that populates the corridors of Gray Academy is diverse, with students from Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Ukraine, Russia, Israel, and the US.

According to Rory Paul, head and CEO of Gray Academy, "There are no Jewish day schools with a home-stay program in Canada, but there is one

boarding school program in the States."

So, the Gray Academy program is quite unique.

"The home-stay aspect of the program is critical, because it gives the students the chance to connect with a family," said Paul.

"We started up the international student program three years ago, on an ad-hoc business basis. But, this is our first, formal year in operation."

Concerning costs to the school, Paul said, "There are many initial costs to get the pro-

gram off the ground, but the program will become self-perpetuating. After the initial costs, we will need about \$20,000 each year to operate the program. The family who sends a teenager to our Gray Academy program is responsible for fees of tuition, field trips, insurance, administration, airfare, and payment to the home-stay family."

One of the goals of the program is to get more word out about Gray Academy, said Paul.

"We want to have representatives from our school go to different countries and promote

our school at school fairs," he said. "We would need to prepare for this by factoring in flights, accommodations, fair registrations and preparing a film and print material about the school."

Right now, the program involves students from Brazil and Chile.

"The hope is that we'll soon be branching out to include Mexico and western Canada," said Paul. "West of us, there are no Jewish high schools, except for one that is struggling in Vancouver."

International students who come to Gray Academy can get full credits for their studies back in their home country school.

Ideally Paul would like to see from 5 to 10 international students attend Gray Academy through this program.

"For Gray Academy to have students in our hallways from all around the world is incredible," said Paul. "It enriches the lives of the students, linguistically, culturally and academically. The international students also get a Judaic education, exposure to different people and ways of life, and a top-class education."



Will a shelter shield me from my child?

John Syrtash

Q: My wife left home with our eight-year-old child without my knowing. She hid the child in a friend's home and didn't give me access. I reported her to the police.

Soon after she went to a woman's shelter and reported that I am a violent husband, although I have not been charged with anything and never committed any violence.

How can I deal with this? How do I find this woman's shelter and my child? Will they lie for a woman? They also introduced my wife and child to a new religion. She appears to have agreed to accept their new religion in order to get help from them. I am quite distressed and don't know what steps I can take.

A: Women's shelters were set up to assist women who were brutalized by their husbands and had no safe place to go, often with no money. Their trained workers have performed an invaluable service around the world.

I have not heard of Toronto-area shelters that try to convert a client to a religion. For obvious reasons their locations are anonymous and are protected by the police. Nonetheless, I have been acquainted with the odd case where domestic violence has been correctly disputed and later proven either not to have taken place, exaggerated or even used as a tactic. I am not referring to cases of serious verbal abuse where a woman perceives a threat of violence and goes to a shelter fearing violence. There have been rare cases where a woman might engineer a "flight" to gain easy advantage in a custody, support or even property fight- however rare such a case might be, it has happened. The sad part is such cases discredit the overwhelming number of situations where these shelters provide crucial sanctuary for women and their children who truly have no place to go.

For a father who feels he has been truly maligned such as yourself, you should retain a competent family law lawyer to claim custody on an emergency basis of your eight year old. Recite your allegation that you never committed violence and that, in your view, the entire flight was "staged." Women who run these shelters are forbidden by law to commit perjury, but some of what they have to say in court is of limited value because it is "hearsay," repeating what your wife tells them. How the courts decide cases such as yours depends entirely on your credibility and hers. If you did act violently, consider commencing anger management therapy before approaching the courts.

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Israel's fashion industry takes centre stage

TORONTO – Canadian entertainment personality and fashion icon Jeanne Beker will host a novel charity event showcasing Israeli fashion Feb. 21-22 at the historic Design Exchange.

FashionEAST will promote Israel's booming fashion industry while raising funds for the Canada-Israel Cultural Foundation – supporting Israeli performers at Canadian music festivals, film screenings and dance performances, as well as providing scholarship opportunities of Israeli cultural students – and the Leaders of Tomorrow Fund, which provides extracurricular cultural programming to more than 300 at-risk Israeli youth.

"We are proud to showcase Israel's booming fashion industry," said Cayla Spagat, co-executive director of FashionEAST.

"FashionEAST could not be happening at a better time," according to Shira Webber, the other co-executive director. "It is a chance to highlight and expose North America to the talent and creativity that shapes such a large part of Israeli culture."

The launch on Saturday night begins following the Jewish Sabbath and includes an exclusive cocktail gala and runway fashion show hosted by Fashion Television's Beker. The following day, the event will be transformed into a fashion-purchasing house, where featured items will be for sale.

Tickets are \$50 for an adult weekend ticket, \$36 for a young associate weekend ticket (40 years and under) and \$15 for a Sunday sale ticket only. If purchased at the door, all tickets are \$50. For more information, visit fashioneast.ca, email info@fashioneast.ca or call Shira Webber at 416-398-6931, ext. 5345.



On display are some of Israel's designer products from last year's show.

The communication divide

HECHT cont. from page 5.

well. My point was that decisions must arise from the mind, which responsibly weighs the situation and determines not what would be the all-good solution but, realistically, what is the best alternative given the fact that this choice would still yield some negative consequences as well. Somehow this reader had already concluded that only a decision not to enter battle is one that emerges from thoughtful consideration. Such a bias, I would maintain, is in itself dogmatic. She referred to the shift in Ariel Sharon's policies as an example of how thought can and should overcome the desire of the emotions, yet it was members of the very same party founded by Mr. Sharon that initiated this action in Gaza, shifting their policy because thought simply demanded it. Even as I was writing to exclaim that Jewishness cannot be defined by a dogmatic ideology, I was accused of being dogmatic because my weighing of the issues did not agree with, effectively, this writer's emotions.

One response, though, stood out. It was, effectively, a tirade against Zionism, declaring that true Judaism looks with disdain at Israel. I thought, at first, that this response was written by someone from Neturei Karta but there were other statements that this person offered that would also challenge the philosophical perspective of this group. It was

the tonal substance of the letter that truly struck me. It attacked me personally, declaring it shameful that I call myself a rabbi, making a point of addressing me as Mr. Hecht. At least, I knew this problem of communication was not due to my writing. Personal attacks emerge from someone who does not intend to read and respond to what is written but, rather, via a response, to simply express his/her own emotions. Zionism, as an institution, was, in fact, not at the core of my article. It simply dealt with people, with Jews, who are being attacked, and the sadness, yet necessity, of a response to save lives that would still jeopardize other lives. To dialogue demands thought. To attack, though, simply demands emotions. One focuses on the ideas; the other critiques the person. No correctness in expressing your thoughts will correct the misunderstanding of such a listener or reader.

I should not end without mentioning that some responses were still most touching, thanking me for answering their confusion regarding these protesters. It is always most heartening when your words are actually heard with the intent in which they were expressed.

Rabbi Benjamin Hecht is the founding director of Nishma, which fosters the critical investigation of contemporary issues. For further info, see www.nishma.org and nishmablog.blogspot.com.