

“Shalom Rollberg”

Background

The **MORUS 14** community center is located in the **Rollberg Quarter** in the **Neukölln** district of Berlin. The district is considered to be a hot-spot of problems including lack of education and unemployment. The area’s approximately 5700 residents stem from **30 different ethnic backgrounds**. The center’s aim is to integrate the area’s culturally diverse population through social and cultural projects. The long-term **vision** is to cultivate an atmosphere of tolerance, improve education, and open the prospects of the residents beyond the neighborhood’s borders.

In order to promote the integration of the quarter’s youth in Germany and in the European society, MORUS 14 is using different methods to daily confront the community with themes, like equality between men and women, religion’s role in the society, integrating people with special needs in the society, social tolerance (toward the homosexual community, for example) and more. The center decided in 2012 to also confront the issue of **Anti-Semitism**, that the discussion surrounding it, as the subjects above, is controlled by prejudices and stereotypes. Most of the families in the quarter are Muslim and they come from Turkey and different Arab countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Palestinians etc. The hostility against Jews and against Israel is deeply rooted in the population.

The center’s team is convinced that theoretical lectures will not be the solution, but rather using concrete daily examples. The center operates a network of workers and volunteers from different social groups (based on nationality, religion, political affiliation, economic background, sexual preference, people with special needs etc.). **Direct daily encounters allow a positive getting-to-know-each-other process**, and build personal contacts outside of the neighborhood populations. Through these means, the center tries to promote values of **acceptance, pluralism and tolerance**.

How it all started

Within a German-Israeli exchange volunteer year program, the center integrated **Hagar Levin** into its team in September 2012. Hagar graduated from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem where she studied „Islamic & Middle Eastern studies“ and in addition to Hebrew, she speaks German, English and some Arabic. Her daily presence as a Jewish Israeli, and her **mutual work** within the center’s different projects, was aimed to provide a chance to the neighborhood’s population to get to know and **understand better the Israeli and Jewish culture**, and through that to **reduce the stereotypes and prejudice and develop tolerance and intercultural communication**. Throughout 2012-2013 Hagar was involved in different projects with the population such as: the Weekly Women breakfast, English learning group, school workshops, weekly lunch at the center & Jewish Holiday celebrations.

The projects were an opportunity to meet and develop communication. Hagar’s presence was for most of the residents the **first chance** to directly meet a Jewish woman from Israel. Through the conversations and the discussions, **the ice started to melt**. This change was being shown through simple things allegedly, like questions about the weather, holidays and women in Israel, but they actually showed interest and acknowledged Israel’s existence, and that has a great importance. The students and parents got to know Hagar directly, and felt

more comfortable hearing stories about her and asking questions about Israel, Judaism and life in the Middle East.

Toward the end of the volunteer year, Hagar and the team had the feeling that after the ice broke and more knowledge and experience was accumulated, the project could deepen and extend with the Jewish and Muslim network-communities in Berlin. The Idea of the **“Shalom Rollberg”** project was developed.

Concept

“Shalom Rollberg”'s goal is to create opportunities for regular intercultural meetings for people that don't otherwise meet in their everyday life, in order to fight prejudice and Anti-Semitism. “Shalom Rollberg” brings volunteers from the diverse Jewish community in Berlin to work regularly with children and youth in Neukölln, either through one-to-one mentoring (helping with homework, language-learning etc.), or by leading weekly activity groups such as English learning, art, theater, sport and more. We also work in cooperation with the elementary school in Rollberg quarter, where we participate in weekly workshops with the students about interreligious tolerance and organize tours at Synagogues for students and their parents.

Through all of those methods, we are providing a chance for the neighborhood's population to get to know and understand better the Jewish culture, and through that to reduce stereotypes and prejudice and develop tolerance and intercultural communication. The main method is to regularly meet and share a mutual interest on a social base, in order to build long-term, trust based connections. We are creating an atmosphere of intercultural normality, by having Jewish presence in the neighborhood, becoming a part of everyday life and breaking barriers of parallel societies.

At its fourth year, “Shalom Rollberg” has a fair base of experience and participants. We are now looking towards the future, wanting to expand and deepen our activities (reaching more participants, possibly in other areas in Berlin, raising the awareness for our work etc.). We recently received funding from Lotto Stiftung Berlin that will support part of our activity in the next years.

We have lots of plans in the works, and are always looking for new cooperations, people who want to join (doing mentor-work with the children in the center, have talent they could share and teach at the center, have an idea for an event, etc.) and financial support of course!

For more details please contact Hagar Levin at: info@shalom-rollberg.de

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Hope to see you soon in Rollberg!