

National Council of Jewish Women
Bergen County Section
75 South Washington Avenue
Bergenfield, NJ 07621



Contact:

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NCJW CO-PRESIDENT VISITS UNIQUE CHILDREN'S PROGRAM IN ISRAEL

At a recent "Timely Topics and Tasty Treats" meeting, National Council of Jewish Women Bergen County Section screened a poignant and thought-provoking film, *Dancing in Jaffa*, about an exceptional children's dance program in Israel that brings Jewish and Israeli Arab children together. Elizabeth Halverstam, Co-President of National Council of Jewish Women Bergen County Section, paid the program a personal visit shortly afterwards during a vacation in Israel.

The film showed how, after decades of bloodshed, a school ballroom dancing program could bridge the divide between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Pierre Dulaine, four-time ballroom dancing world champion, fulfilled a life-long dream when he took his program, *Dancing Classrooms*, back to Jaffa, the city of his birth. (*Dancing Classrooms*, founded in Harlem in 1994, cultivates essential life skills in 5th-9th grade children through the practice of ballroom dance. It now operates in hundreds of classrooms across the United States and was featured in the film *Mad Hot Ballroom*.) For generations, Jaffa has been a city divided by two communities that continue to grow increasingly apart. Over a ten-week period, Mr. Dulaine taught Jewish and Palestinian Israeli children to dance and compete together. The film explored the complex stories of three children, all of whom were forced to confront issues of identity, segregation, and racial prejudice as they danced with their enemy. The film chronicles how Mr. Dulaine transformed their lives, confirming his belief that dance can overcome hatred and provide the first steps towards real change.

The NCJW showing of the movie featured a talk-back by Moshe Golomb, a Tenafly resident who co-founded *Dancing Classrooms Israel* with his sister, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Miri Shahaf Levi.

The program is now in over 85 schools throughout Israel. Ms. Halverstam visited a school in Bat Yam outside Tel Aviv where she met Ms. Shahaf Levi and watched Adi Fux, Artistic Director of *Dancing Classrooms Israel*, teach a class of fifth graders the rumba and the tango. "I was enchanted with the way the children not only learned formal ballroom dancing, but also learned English by counting the steps as they danced and being addressed as 'Ladies and Gentlemen'. I was particularly impressed to see the importance the program places on improving the children's self-esteem and respect for each other."

NCJW Bergen County Section provides educational and stimulating programs and speakers throughout the year, including six general meetings and a myriad of speakers, book groups and trips. For more information on NCJW BCS, please visit www.ncjwbcs.org.

The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms.

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Dancing Classrooms is an in-school social and emotional learning program that cultivates essential life skills in 5th - 9th grade children through the practice of ballroom dance. The *Dancing Classrooms* program transforms girls and boys into mature, self-reliant, and elegant young ladies and gentlemen during its 10-week artist-in-residence programs. **Dancing Classrooms Israel** was brought to Israel in 2011 by Miri Shahaf Levy. With the help of talented American and Israeli dance teachers, the program operates in many schools throughout the Israel. Almost 43,000 children have taken part in that dance journey.

Photo captions:

1. Elizabeth Halverstam, Co-President of NCJW Bergen County Section (center) with Miri Shahaf Levi, Founder and Executive Director of *Dancing Classrooms Israel* (L) and Ronit Levi Cohen, Principal of the David Elazar Elementary School in Bat Yam, Israel.
2. Children from the David Elazar Elementary School in Bat Yam, Israel, learning ballroom dancing from *Dancing Classrooms Israel's* Artistic Director, *Adi Fux*.
3. Board Members of NCJW Bergen County Section with Moshe Golomb of Tenafly, Co-Founder and brother of *Dancing Classrooms Israel's* Executive Director, Miri Shahaf Levi. L-R. Joan Cooper, Carole Benson, Bari-Lynne Schwartz, Moshe Golomb and Barbara Tilliss)