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Welcome to ic.news – pages written by, for, and about Cleveland’s Jewish teens!

In ic.news, israel.cleveland.next Fellowship graduates reflect on the confidence they achieved through their participation in

the program. Inspired by knowledge gained from the icnext Fellowship, they write about Jewish identity, social and cultural perspectives of Israel, realities of the Israeli conflict and more. icnext is a two-year Fellowship that prepares Cleveland’s Jewish high school students for anti-Israel and antisemitic

challenges they may face in high school and college. icnext is a project of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, administered through @akiva.

For information about or to apply for icnext, Cohort 10, contact Tina Keller at tkeller@akivacleveland.org.



GIVE YOUR KIDS THE GIFT OF CONFIDENCE

The landscape of political discussion is constantly changing. Not everyone is prepared to confront these topics critically and with reason. This is where icnext comes in.

icnext connects Jewish teens in Cleveland to Israel and the ever-evolving discourse around it in an appropriate way that prepares them for important conversations amongst their communities and beyond their bubble. Through classroom learning, guest speakers, group activities, and an eventual trip to Israel, icnext teens develop their critical thinking and analysis skills. I interviewed icnext alumni to understand the impact of the Fellowship on their post-high school experience, and they shared inspiring stories. The world may not be ready for this rising generation, but these kids are ready for the world.

- Nora Igelnik, Cohort 8

icnext gave me the confidence to have conversations with people who may not be educated in the subject matters of Judaism. This leads to things being said that may not be true or even entirely false. I have been given the confidence to give my perspective and what it means for me to be Jewish. This is applied in many different aspects of my life including college. icnext gave me the confidence to articulate my thoughts and pride in being Jewish.

- Noam Paz, Cohort 7

ISRAEL ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS - A CONVERSATION WITH ADAM HIRSH DIRECTOR, KENT STATE UNIVERSITY HILLEL

Adam Hirsh, head of Hillel at Kent State University, presented icnext with a look into a college experience that we may encounter as we step onto campus for the first time - the conflict and challenge of finding one’s identity, being Jewish on a college campus. When students first arrive at college, they need to figure out where they fit in. Thousands of people coming together on campus brings numerous different opinions and perspectives. Not everyone is going to agree, people are going to say things in ways you may have never heard before, and it may make you uncomfortable. Because there are so many different political beliefs circulating through campuses, there may be times that you encounter groups that are anti-Israel or anti-Zionism. The challenge that one has to face when coming across this discourse is that oftentimes, in order to have any conversation with these groups, a student might want to turn their backs on their own feelings about Zionism. When in this circumstance, one needs to have a firm grasp of their own identity in order to really have meaningful conversation. The challenge of being Jewish and a minority on college campuses means that students must be educated, develop their own identity, and ultimately be ready to respond, ask questions, and to open the door for important discussion.

- Abbe Newman, Cohort 8

WHAT IS THE BDS MOVEMENT? A NATIONAL AND LOCAL ISSUE.

Speakers from Stand With Us, an organization that specializes in educating people about Israel and prevents the spread of misinformation, discussed the growing BDS movement in the United States. BDS stands for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, and is Palestinian-led. BDS includes boycotting Israeli products and avoiding investments in Israeli companies and technologies. The BDS has goals with varying impacts: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. Through these steps, BDS turns public opinion against Israel, damages Israel economically, politically, and culturally, and, as the final goal, attempts to eliminate Israel as a Jewish state. When looking at the typical American college campus, members of the BDS movement

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A \$1,000 completion stipend will be provided only for this program by the Jewish Federation of Cleveland.

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are trying to influence student leaders and join student government. Through this influence, divestment resolutions and referendums are proposed and passed, potentially harming Israeli businesses and people.

- Nora Igelnik, Cohort 8

TACKLING ANTISEMITISM ON CAMPUS WITH ICNEXT

Where the icnext experience really translates is on college campuses across America. With the growing BDS movement, alumni find that the education they received from icnext has helped them tackle on-campus antisemitism. When Leah Marek encountered a swastika drawn in the snow outside her dorm at OSU, she knew she could feel comfortable talking with the Hillel board and her fellow Jewish friends about why people commit acts of antisemitism and how they get away with it.

“It was terrifying, but having a community of other Jews available enabled me to stay strong and proud of my Jewish identity,” said Leah. “My experience with icnext taught me how integral community is in maintaining my Jewish pride.”

- Nora Igelnik, Cohort 8 interviews Leah Marek, Cohort 4 and David Mack, Cohort 5

BEGINNING AN EDUCATION ON THE ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

“It [icnext] gave me the background to start learning and having proper conversations about the I-P conflict. icnext didn’t positively or nega-

tively impact my view, it just expanded it a lot,” Jonah Rubanenko said. icnext allows teens to form their own, individual opinions. Nowadays, it is easy to be influenced by technology and social media, so the opportunity to have original stances gives icnext teens an advantage.

“icnext is really impactful and will bring out your ability to have mature conversations while also learning and experiencing the history of Israel and the Jewish people. It’s something I think every Jewish high schooler should have the opportunity to do before they get to college and break the ‘Jewish bubble’ we have in Cleveland.”

- Jonah Rubanenko, Cohort 4

UNDERSTANDING ALL SIDES OF THE STORY

Although ic.next emphasises how vital learning about Israel and the Jewish people is, the program does not push a one-sided story. The understanding that the conflict in Israel is extremely complicated is something that an icnext learner comes to understand. It is a human conflict, where Israelis and Palestinians are both affected.



icnext gave me the confidence to be proud of being Jewish. Which made me feel comfortable getting involved with Hillel. Also, when confronted with antisemitism on campus, icnext gave me the skill to stand up for myself and engage in dialogue with non-Jewish people.

- Leah Marek, Cohort 4

“icnext was the first time in my life that I heard the Palestinian side of the conflict, their history and what happened to them. It spurred my continued interest in learning more, which led me to be a StandWithUs intern my senior year of high school,” alum Shira Ophir said.

Being a young person today can be strenuous. The overwhelming weight of political and social issues is difficult for many people to grasp. icnext helps students gain connections to individuals who are like them, allowing growing scholars to learn from each other and develop their confidence.

- Nora Igelnik, Cohort 8 Talks with Shira Ophir, Cohort 4



THE HISTORY OF THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP - IMPORTANT EDUCATION

The U.S.-Israel relationship- a new era? A question many people are asking as a new leader steps into office in the United States. During a recent icnext Seminar, Israel educator, Benji Davis, gave an overview of the relationship between the United States and Israel. He discussed its beginning, how it has progressed, and if it is changing. Benji explained that the U.S. showed their support for Israel right from the country’s modern origin, exactly eleven minutes after Israel declared independence. From then on, these two countries have been considered very close allies. He described that although the leaders change, and they may not always agree on how to approach situations and policies, the end goal that the leaders have in mind is the same. This is why the relationship has stayed stable for decades.

- Abbe Newman, Cohort 8

CLOSING REFLECTION ON ICNEXT

I am an environmentalist. A supporter of Black Lives Matter. A chocolate lover. A Jew. A Zionist. A woman. An artist. All of these characteristics separate me from the rest and create my own identity. During our icnext virtual seminar in the summer of 2020, I learned more about who I am and what I am passionate about.

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Before the icnext seminars I thought I knew the values of Israel and Jews in the homeland. I thought that a Jewish value is to let the stranger come into our home for food and shelter, as it is said in the Torah. In the seminar I learned that refugees who were seeking asylum in Israel were not always welcomed with open arms. Yet, Jews, half-Jews, or anyone who is somewhat related to a Jew, are automatically granted citizenship in Israel. Even if they aren’t being persecuted.

As a kid I saw Israel as a safe haven and a place of political justice, where all people are being treated equally. It tore me apart when Elliot Glassenberg spoke of how the LGBTQ marriages are not recognized by the rabbinate. They are people too! People who just want to be married in a place of unity and their fellow community of Jews. Elinoy Kisslove was another one of our speakers, a graffiti artist who demonstrates her opinions through art. She told us how a female Israeli soldier was spit on because she sat at the front of the bus instead of the back of the bus. Elinoy’s actions with her art pushed me

to start creating stencils to make graffiti art of my own. People can become united through graffiti.

During our Seminars I learned about the politics of Israel. There are religious and ancestral connections for the Muslims, Jews, Christians, Israelis, and Palestinians - such an array of cultures! For Israel to remain a Jewish state, how is this diversity integrated? This perplexing situation made me question what a Jewish state really is. Is it a place only for Jews or for Jewish values? Israel is a self-starting country, and Israelis will continue to build themselves up. As Jews living outside the country of Israel we have the duty to support Israel and be aware of the changes that are occurring in our sisterland. We may all have a different identity, but we are part of the same community. We are Jews.

- Sydney Moss, Cohort 8

Kids should participate in icnext to push themselves to find a new community that isn’t afraid to both look critically at Israel, but also unapologetically celebrate her uniqueness and traditions.

- Shira Ophir, Cohort 4



From Israel Advocacy, Leadership Training and College Prep for Jewish Students, to original Jewish Theater, @akiva offers Hebrew and so much more! @akiva is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland and a partner agency of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland. For more info visit www.akivacleveland.org.

