On February 5 and 6, Kids4Peace’s 7th-10th graders from Jerusalem met for the Winter Seminar at Neve Shalom/ Wahat Al Salam. The focus was centered around storytelling: Where do our family’s come from? How did we get to be who we are today? How do we share our stories with others in a way that is engaging and true? How do we listen to others’ stories?

***Below are some excerpts of stories that were told at the seminar. Each person’s story is unique, and shares the important role Kids 4 Peace has had in forming their incredible life stories.***

**George**:

*“Growing up, I always heard stories from family members, especially my mom and dad, that the Jews, the Israelis, the other side are always bad and they are the bad people and they stole our land and we should hate them. Since I ever could imagine, I always hated the Jews and the Israelis. But then I heard from my brother that there is an organization called Kids4Peace and I found out that you can actually talk to Jews and Israelis. I joined Kids4Peace so I can prove to myself that Jews and Israelis are bad. But when I went there and we had activities and workshops I realized that we are all humans here and they are not as bad as the stereotypes that I hear. One of my closest friends is a Jewish camper that was with me from the beginning and it is truly amazing the experience I have had and it gives me great hope and truly changed me. The more I go to Kids4Peace, the bigger my hopes.”*

**Adan***:*

*“I grew up in a family that was not right wing but it was not left wing either, it was just neutral. My parents worked with both Israelis and Arabs and we never really had any hard feelings toward the other side. We were just Arabs who didn’t hate them or love them, we just lived with them. I went to a school with all Arabs, and I didn’t really know a lot of Israelis growing up. In 6th grade, I was sitting with my classmates during break and they were telling me about this Kids4Peace organization that they’re joining and they made it sound so interesting that I wanted to join too. I asked them how I can register and they told me and so I registered and I got accepted. But there was this first step which was the interviews and I remember it was really stressful because I really wanted to get in and I even remember practicing possible questions that they might ask me, and then I remember going to the interview and they asked me, “What are the five pillars of Islam?” but I didn’t know them, and I thought they wouldn’t accept me and I was going to fail, but I ended up getting accepted and it was really fun.*

*Two years ago we went to the leadership camp and it was the final, the graduation kind of moment for Kids4Peace. We went in the summer during the Gaza War, in the middle of the most extreme situation possible. And every night in the camp they would sit us down and go, “Today, 150 died in Gaza and 12 were shot in Jerusalem” and we would go to sleep with anger inside of us. The next day we would let our anger out in our dialogues.*

*At first, we did not know how to express our feelings respectfully. We were friends when it didn’t involve dialogues but when it came to dialogues we would just be so angry. We would just bash each other with facts and information and we didn’t know how to express what we thought in a way that could let someone who might not know in a way that helped them understand what we meant.*

*But one day during the dialogues in the middle of the camp, I started talking about how I feel like the Palestinian lives aren’t being valued and we just feel like a number. Every day you hear these numbers and it just became this repetitive routine and no one really cares about it and I started crying. And then I realized that my friend who happens to be Jewish went and got some tissues for me. It stopped being about whether he is an Israeli, or he is a Palestinian…they were listening to me because I was talking about my feelings. And I realized that we reached a place where we started knowing how to express ourselves that could let the other side understand us. It was such a beautiful improvement, noticing how we was amazing.*

*By the end of the camp we would sit down in dialogues and it literally improved in such an amazing way. We started listening to each other and feeling like we understand what someone who might be our enemy goes through. We have been doing that in Kids4Peace for a long time, but at that moment I realized if we can do this with a group of people who are undergoing this conflict and who felt so angry about this conflict and get them to start talking about it in a respectful way then we can do it with anyone. And I think that is one of the reasons I keep coming to Kids4Peace.*

**Miral**:

*If Kids4Peace weren’t in my life, I wouldn’t be the same. Also the people here, we are attached. We don’t want to leave, and our relationship is unique and we have a strong bond between us and we don’t want to leave these people. We might meet by coincidence in life, but here we meet for the same purpose, so we make sure the bond gets stronger.*

**Emanuel***:*

*We went to Leadership camp, and it was the best camp ever. We went through this whole mind shift of how to listen to each other and express ourselves and I remember there was one specific activity in which we had to imagine the perfect Jerusalem. So we divided up into groups of three and we were supposed to write down specifically what the government will be, who is going to run Jerusalem, will it be Israel and Palestine or just Israel or just Palestine, what the economy will be like, the houses the community, everything. It took two weeks, and we had a daily hour that we worked on it, and I remember feeling on one of the last days, and we had this idea of a perfect Jerusalem, and it was amazing, we had it all figured out.*

*But then I remembered back home in Jerusalem, the real Jerusalem that I have lived in for 14 years, and it looks so different. Jerusalem was segregated and had a crappy government, and the streets were filthy just because the neighborhoods were Arab, and Jews and Arabs hated each other, and there were conflicts on the streets daily. I thought, “how can we even get to that point of the perfect Jerusalem we had thought of, how can we change the Jerusalem we know and make it into this perfect Jerusalem?”.*

*It took me a few days to understand that activity and what it created inside of me. The activity has showed me what I actually want* to do*. The entirety of Kids4Peace we talk about peace, and coexistence, and learning about each other, and culture and religion, but we don’t actually talk about what exactly can I do in my own communities. What do I actually want to do in the world? What physical or mental change do I want to implement? That activity kind of let me take all these vague and unclear values and to actually decide how I am going to express them through actual changes. How exactly can I express my values and how can I make my community better?*