

Promoting Self-Worth and Happiness

Interview with
Shalom Iskowicz M.Ed,
Director of Mentoring and Educational Services
and
Malky Myers M.Ed,
Girls Mentoring Supervisor, Hakshiva

For 12 years the Ramat Beit Shemesh community has had the privilege of benefiting from the great work of Hakshiva. Hakshiva has created a unique model with a wide range of services blended into a comprehensive continuum of care to meet the diverse needs of parents and their children. They give families access to tools they need to succeed, all under one roof. These services include mentoring, individual and family therapy, professional referrals, parenting workshops, social skills groups, educational guidance and evaluations, and a youth center which is a safe haven for many different groups of children.

The past few years have seen the development of many new and engaging programs making the range and variety of Hakshiva's services quite different than just a few years ago. The new Homework Center worked with 70 girls from almost every local school this year. Hakshiva's two-year-old Beit Yaakov Seminar Program is providing an extra-curricular experience that encourages girls to grow as they discuss topics relevant to their everyday lives.

I understand that in addition to the many programs Hakshiva offers the Ramat Beit Shemesh community, you are offering mentoring for girls. Can you give us some more information?

Mentoring is the process of matching mentors with young people who would benefit from a caring, consistent, and healthy relationship. Understanding the individual needs of the child is the first and most crucial step to facilitate a meaningful relationship. Our intake and matching process were carefully developed with that goal in mind. The program is professionally supervised by a well-trained, sensitive, and committed program manager.

Hakshiva's mentoring model may differ slightly depending on the age of the child. Younger girls typically meet with their mentors bi-weekly according to schedules set up in coordination with parents and mentors. As the girls become more independent, they become more active in forming and personalizing their mentorship.

By far the most important role of a mentor is to support and encourage young people, particularly as they struggle to overcome obstacles and solve problems. The mentor listens first and speaks last, enabling children to talk about anything, and reminding the child of her innate value.

Are certain types of girls more suitable for mentoring than others?

Every girl can benefit from mentoring.

Preadolescence and adolescence can be a confusing and often lonely time for girls. Biological changes, social shifts, individuation from parents, and academic demands are all part of the complexities and challenges girls experience.

A caring and supportive mentor can make normal life struggles more manageable and hopeful. Through belief in herself, coupled with encouragement and guidance by an adult mentor, a young girl can flourish academically, socially, and within her family. Often additional challenges such as aliya, learning disabilities, illness, or family instability may further compound their struggles.

No child has to navigate this path alone.

How long does the relationship between a mentor and mentee usually last?

Successful mentoring is defined on a continuum and is dependent on many variables. Close, healthy, supportive relationships between mentors and mentees that last for a significant amount of time (i.e. more than one year) are central to success. Regular, consistent contact between a child and a significant adult that is structured and geared toward the child's interests and personality fosters trust, stability, and increased self-confidence.

How is mentoring different than therapy?

Some of the differences between mentoring and therapy depend on the nature of the issue for which a child is in need of help.

Therapy is for issues and problems that might be more serious or complex and require a trained professional eye to assess and determine the best course of treatment. If a child is suffering from symptoms that are interfering with daily functioning, the therapy option could be explored. Hakshiva's experienced therapists are available to explore both these options with parents and help guide the process.

Who are the mentors?

Our mentoring staff are handpicked young adults and women from a broad spectrum of the Ramat Beit Shemesh community who provide perspective to their mentees from their additional years of life experience and act as role models providing dedication, caring, and support. Hakshiva mentors are closely supervised and guided by the program's management to help foster success.

Children and teens can tell when an adult is authentically interested in them as individuals, when their ideas are valued and feelings are honored. Good mentors don't judge young people or impose their own beliefs on them. Instead they remind them who they are and help them believe that they have the insights to make good choices. Knowing they are not being judged helps young people think through decisions critically, sifting through the deeper values that will shape the adults they become. Our mentors work hard to ensure that each mentee experiences this unique relationship.

What's the goal of the mentoring experience?

The mentoring experience should promote strong feelings of self-worth, happiness, and an all-around positive outlook on the part of the mentee. We strive to help each girl develop tools for a successful life in which she can reach her full potential.