



# KEHILLAH PARTNERSHIP EXPANDS THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

**Township of Washington, NJ. December 8, 2008** — What does it take to keep 200 sixth graders occupied, engaged, even captivated, without the assistance of a laptop or screen of any kind?

Jewish communal educators of northern New Jersey may have hit on an answer.

This past Saturday night, sixth graders from eight different synagogues - four Reform and four Conservative - met for a learning-and-fun retreat at the Parsippany Hilton as part of an ongoing experiment in Jewish communal restructuring. The retreat was the third meeting this year for the group, which will continue to get together through the spring to engage in a range of cultural arts programs on the theme of Israel @ 60. The program will culminate in a community-wide showcase of the children's work in March.

## Learning while Building Community

"In addition to creating a young Jewish community across synagogue lines, com-

plete with song, dance, sports, and religious expression, this retreat continued the process of learning about Israel through an engaging cultural arts curriculum," explained Rabbi Noam Marans, a program organizer. Rabbi Marans is the Community Relations consultant for the Kehillah Partnership, an innovative new community-wide effort to build a stronger and more engaged Jewish community across institutional and denominational lines. Now in its second pilot year, the Kehillah Partnership (*kehillah* is Hebrew for community) aims to reinvigorate

"It was so cool making a map of Israel out of ice cream!"

— Cloe

community through the sharing of resources, the enhancement and integration of informal and formal Jewish education for all ages, and the creation of new opportunities for the unengaged to connect and identify.

The retreat began with Havdalah at the Bergen County YJCC and continued with roller-skating fun en route to the hotel. "After a good night's sleep - hardly!! - the day began with prayer led



Kehillah Partnership sixth graders end Shabbat with Havdalah before beginning the evening's activities.

by our rabbinical student staffers," says Dr. Evie Rotstein, program consultant to the Kehillah Partnership. "We then continued with two cultural arts sessions, one elective session, and leisure time that included many of the options we'd presented at the Saturday evening session."

## Making Choices Adds Interest

Both Rabbi Marans and Dr. Rotstein were struck by the children's enthusiasm for spending time with peers from other synagogue communities, and by the level of their engagement in the cultural arts activity and group learning. "Clearly the opportunities that the children were given to make choices in both the topics and the specific cultural arts they would work on played an important part in the high level of engagement we experienced," Dr. Rotstein notes.

This concept of enabling each of the children to choose his/her learning modality is one that was embraced by the team of Jewish educators from all eight synagogue commu-

nies, who worked as one group with the guidance of Rabbi Marans and Dr. Rotstein to develop the pilot program curriculum. This same team has also worked on a seventh-grade program, now underway as a follow-up to last year's first pilot with the then-sixth-graders.

"We could not be more pleased with the process and the outcomes thus far," says Rabbi Marans. "Eight synagogues - rabbis, educational directors, teachers, lay leaders - have worked together with the Bergen County YJCC to create a valuable communal education experience

"I loved doing the skits in videography with new friends."

— Alison

that no single synagogue or institution could have accomplished on its own. The pilot program demonstrates the power of the Kehillah Partnership to create community and share resources across institutional lines. There is a buzz of excitement that has touched our community, particularly where it matters most, among our parents and children."

For more information on the Kehillah Partnership, see [www.kehillahpartnership.org](http://www.kehillahpartnership.org).



Israeli food was the "cultural art;" happy students was the result