

תכנית נשים חונכות לזכויות והקליניקה לפמיניזם משפטי
لنساء مرشدات للحقوق - النسوية والقانون
Women Legal Leaders & The Legal Feminism Clinic

Women Legal Leaders & The Legal Feminism Clinic
Manual of Principles¹
With Participants' Perspectives

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The Women Legal Leaders & the Legal Feminism Clinic² model is unique in the academic world, the legal world and civil society. In 2009, the program was awarded third place in the McJannet Prize for Global Citizenship³ -- which is given to programs from all over the world that integrate academy, community and human rights activism.

The model was conceived of within the legal realm, but can be implemented in other academic disciplines and used to initiate social change in various populations, especially disadvantaged ones.

¹This document was written in 2009 and revised in 2012 in anticipation of the article "The Ties That Bind" by Dana Myrtenbaum and Noor Falah, which is due to be published in an Academy-Community Partnership book describing the program's feminist moderation model.

² The program was established in accordance with the vision of the late Professor Daphna Izreeli and has been supported from the start by the Daphna Izreeli Foundation, the Academy-Community Partnership, the Avraham Foundation, the Surgir Foundation, the National Council of Jewish Women, the New Israel Fund, and others.

³ <http://www.macjannetprize.org>

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The uniqueness of the program is manifest in three dimensions:

- A. the intersection between the academy and various disadvantaged communities
- B. providing access to the law to disadvantaged populations by developing internal leadership rather than by means of legal professionals
- C. the feminist tools and principles that it employs:
 - 1) mentoring
 - 2) interdisciplinarity
 - 3) integration of academic and field work
 - 4) multi-culturalism and identity politics
 - 5) feminism and a critical perspective on power relations in society (gender, class, hierarchy of authority, etc.)
 - 6) feminizing the mainstream – introducing a feminist agenda into mainstream activism and perception.

These six principles are implemented both in the structure of the academic program and in the fieldwork.

Advantages of the program

The program is a vehicle for women from disadvantaged communities to self-advocate. Because these women have no access to the public domain, mainstream Israeli society is unaware of their plight and unable to perceive or understand their disempowerment.

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The program is based on providing these women with access to the academy, civil society and the establishment, and set up advocacy projects that speak to their personal stories and reflect their visions for social change.

The program makes the community an integral part of the academy, thus breaching the latter's accepted boundaries. The students participate in fieldwork within the community and the "legal leaders" gain access to training and activities within the university. Thus, the academy is transformed into an agency for social change.

The program presents an innovative model for the initiation of social change. This is a multi-directional model of social change affecting both disadvantaged communities and mainstream Israeli society.

Multi-culturalism – raising awareness of diversity and examining similarities and differences that exist within it. The program is bi-national (Arab and Jewish), multi-religious, multi-class, multi-generational, and more. In light of this, the group, team, and personal work addresses, among other things, the interactions between various subgroups, the multicultural interactions and various conflicts – international, interreligious, and intercultural – that arise from the encounter. As a result, the group constitutes an open space in which the participants can become familiar with different communities within Israeli society, address the various conflicts that arise from the encounter, and develop a critical perspective on power relations within Israeli society.

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Effecting change in academic legal discourse. The program has impact on issues that arise from the academic agenda, thus creating a new field of interest. It brings current social issues to the discussion table, leaving behind the formal analytic framework of the law and theory and examines them in realistic terms, from the point of view of their sociological, cultural, and economic effects, etc. In addition, the program involves the writing of academic papers presenting the insights gained from delving into law and theory by means of social advocacy fieldwork.

Changing internal discourse among the feminist organizations in civil society. In order to realize their objectives, the various seed projects within the program cooperate with advocacy organizations in civil society. This facilitates mutual influence and fruition among the projects and the organizations with which they cooperate. Some of the seed projects became part of various organizational coalitions, and some were even adopted by the organizations.

Structure of the project

The project is a collaboration between Itach-Ma'aki-Women Lawyers for Social Justice and the Faculty of Law at Haifa University. Participating in the program are "legal leaders" – women from disadvantaged communities (Jewish, non-Jewish and Arab-Israeli) – who receive instruction in various aspects of legal and civil activism – and law students from Haifa University Faculty of Law. The program constitutes a greenhouse for personal development, development of leadership and activism among the participants, and social advocacy seed projects.

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In the years since the program's inception, the participants have set up **15 seed projects** designed to address the needs of disadvantaged women who ordinarily have no access to legal resources.

Moreover, the project embodies a **new model of community law** that expands the existing aspects of legal activity and legal-clinical education in Israel, among other things by means of cooperation with many different functions of civil society and the Israeli establishment.

Stages of the program

During the summer, the women from the disadvantaged communities participate in the Legal Leaders program, a training process that includes empowerment and leadership development workshops. In the course of this they acquire legal and feminist materials and social advocacy tools.

At the beginning of the first semester the law students join the program and together with the legal leaders, undergo a learning process during which they formulate a vision for a project or the continuation of a project for social change.

The rest of the year is spent working towards realizing the objectives of the seed projects. Most of the projects remain operational beyond the academic year, thanks to organizational support for the initiatives.

Clinic seminar

Parallel to their field work with the legal leaders, the students participate in a clinic seminar, in which they conduct critical, in-depth discussion of various feminist theories, examine current feminist issues and consider the connection between theory and activism, with emphasis on the main problems pertinent to the empowerment and disempowerment of women. The papers submitted in the clinic seminar focus on the projects conducted in the field.

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Program staff

Like the program itself, the staff is interdisciplinary and intercultural. There are two moderators, one Jewish one Arab, one a lawyer and one a group facilitator, along with an academic lecturer (Haifa University faculty member) and the director of the legal clinic at Haifa University's Faculty of Law. The team works collaboratively, with the staff thus modeling interdisciplinary and multicultural cooperation for the group.⁴ The seminar is run by the lecturer.⁵

Projects and participants

Among the projects that have emerged from, grown out of, and been supported by the program are:

SHENHAV – Rehabilitation of prostitutes from the Former Soviet Union

BET HA'EDA for Ethiopian women

MAFTEAH LEZCHUYOT – Divorce rights for Druze women

IMAADAMA – An ecofeminist project

Higher education for Druze women over 30

Struggle against underage marriage in Tamra and Akko

Struggle against the murder of Arab women

Making family courts accessible to Arab women – Haifa and Nazereth

PNINA – Access to gynecological clinics for disabled women

⁴ Since 2011, the program staff has included attorneys Samer Kudha-Tenus and Revital Kishinevsky, with the group process moderated by Noor Falah.

⁵ Over the years the seminar has been taught by Dr. Yifat Biton, Dr. Noya Rimalt, Dr. Sagit Mor and Dr. Arianne Renan-Barzilai.

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ZEH HAKOL BISHVILECH – Advancing women from various population groups to the Haifa municipality

GAM LACH MAGIA KOL – Establishment of a women's council in Tirat Hacarmel

Making the voices of young Arab women at risk heard

Intersex rights in Israel project

Research into minors who commit sexual crimes

Participants Speak:⁶

SHENHAV – Rehabilitation of prostitutes from the Former Soviet Union

Lydia, Olga, Svetlana, Tanya and Xenia are immigrants from the Former Soviet Union. They joined the legal leaders program because they felt compelled to participate in the struggle against local prostitution (as distinguished from the issue of trafficking in women). It is well known that many of the women who become prostitutes are immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, who are often poverty stricken and/or single parents.

Lydia: **“I learned that 9 of every 10 prostitutes are citizens of the country and it troubled me that there was no assistance for them. In fact the opposite is true – I saw the humiliation these women face on a daily basis within society. Our analysis of the situation showed that the problems originate in violations of human rights. The program gave me the opportunity to realize a personal dream through studying and developing my potential to help multiple women who have been neglected by state and society.”**

⁶ Some of the legal leaders and students asked to be identified by first name only.

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PNINA – Gynecological Care for Disabled Women Project

Daniela, who is wheelchair bound, Osnat, a paraplegic in a wheelchair, and Varda, a physically disabled Arab woman approached us in order to advocate for women living with disabilities in Israel. The project works toward implementation of the equal rights law for disabled people and to empower disabled women. From a gender perspective, the aim is to realize the rights of disabled women to receive health care by promoting the physical accessibility of gynecology clinics.

Osnat: **“As a woman in a wheelchair, the high gynecologist’s table is an insurmountable obstacle for me. For me, this inaccessible object symbolizes the inability of disabled women to be an integral part of general society and demonstrates controversial opinions, some of them latent, regarding women with disabilities and their femininity, sexuality and right to motherhood. Participating in the legal leaders program enabled me to channel my disability into a position of power in order to change the lives of disabled women in Israel, particularly with regard to healthcare.”**

MAFTEACH LEZCHUYOT – Divorce Rights for Druze Women

Samiha, Hikam, and Amira, [all] of them divorced Druze women who have had their social and economic rights violated in the course of getting divorced, approached us in order to address the issue.

Hikam: **“I went through many difficulties when I got divorced. I had to fight for everything.... Because I was in a violent/abusive relationship, I wanted to do everything as quickly as possible and I was not aware of my rights. As a result I lost a lot of what I had coming to me... It is important to me that Druze women who want to get divorced know their rights ahead of time, so that they can do what they need to get what they deserve.”**

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Druze women who initiate divorce are generally stripped of all property rights, lose custody of their children, subjected to unacceptable custody terms and usually socially ostracized. This project aims to address this situation by raising awareness among Druze women and Druze religious leaders regarding the women's rights in divorce, according to both Druze religious law and state civil law.

Intersex Rights

Intersex individuals are those with both male and female sexual characteristics. Susan, Miriam, Or and Liora gathered medical information on the subject of the intersexed, both in Israel and abroad. For example, mistreatment, ministry of health policies, and civil rights. Beginning in the very first year of the project, they initiated a social-medical-political discussion about the intersexed community that addressed life-saving surgeries, cosmetic surgeries, and other treatments given to members of this community. The project continues to operate within the human rights legal clinic in Haifa University's Faculty of Law. It has been adopted by the Center for Health and Ethics and joined by other organizations such as Physicians for Human Rights, the endocrinology unit at Haemek Hospital, and the Ministry of Health.

Susan: "The program has had great impact on my personal life. I made my personal story public for a project that challenged all social conventions, shook up social perceptions regarding the very existence of this community and puts a big question mark after that. It is no longer black and white, women man, and male-female – there are other options. And it goes beyond sex and gender. It also affected other areas of my personal life, work, family and society in general. The program reshaped me; it strengthened my sense of self which, with time and traditional education had gradually disappeared. It brought out things I did not think I would ever allow myself to express. It strengthened me and enabled me to speak up in Arabic (my first language) in places where I had been afraid to raise my head, shout out, look everyone in the eye and feel

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equal, strong, and proud of myself as an Arab Muslim woman who could be instrumental in social change, especially with regard to such a fraught taboo. I am proud to be part of this program and I wish every woman would be, because it enables women to acknowledge their own power.”

Continuation and Replication of the Program

Partners in the program are working to disseminate this model, its vision and principles as described briefly in this document, both in the academic world and in civil society, by means of organizations and associations. Though the program originated in and operates within the legal realm, the model can be implemented in other disciplines, in its entirety or in part. We will be glad to support any initiative that arises with regard to implementing this model.