

Israel The First Time – Will Not Be the Last Time

By Elizabeth Muehlenkampe, CIF Germany

Visiting Israel for a professional, social and cultural exchange? Many of our colleagues and friends were incredulous. However, both of us, Emma from Catalonia/Spain and Elisabeth from Germany wanted absolutely to take part in Israel's professional exchange program (PEP). Happy and also excited about the letter of acceptance, we took the plane to Tel Aviv in May 2016. After a hearty welcome at the airport we met all the members of CIF Israel in the first meeting the next day.

On the one hand CIF Israel presented the program to us for the next 2,5 weeks, on the other hand we introduced our work. Emma works in basic social service, Elisabeth works in a probation service. Furthermore, we recognized that having a meal together is very common for Israeli people and it is a benefit for the relationship to each other. We had hummus, tahini, pita bread, falafel and also a variety of fruits very often during the next days.

Most important were the professional meetings, of course. These were mainly focused on children and youth at high risk and service for people with special needs and rehabilitation. After we had an introduction to the Israel social system in the Welfare Ministry in Jerusalem, we visited amongst others: a child protection center, a child and youth village, two women's shelters, a school for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, an immigration center in a Kibbutz and a drug rehabilitation center. In every place we were cordially hosted, we gained insight into the daily work routine and had the possibility to exchange experiences with the social workers. It was amazing for us, that social workers in Israel provide therapy while social workers in Spain and Germany are not even educated for this.

At the end of partly very exhausting days we were accommodated warm-heartedly by our host families in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and near Haifa, and took part in their families' life. We did not only learn about the Israeli way of life, but we also participated several times in the Shabbat dinners on Fridays and visited the celebration for the Memorial Day and the Independence Day together with CIF members. Furthermore we attended the Holocaust Memorial Yad Vashem, which gave us an intense historical overview on the one side and touched us emotionally on the other side.

Besides all the professional and cultural aspects, we didn't leave out sightseeing. City tours to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa, a tour to Akko and to the Rosh Hanikra grottos. Another highlight was our tour to the Dead Sea, the river Jordan and the fortress Masada, accompanied by a CIF member and her partner. Our host families showed us lots of wonderful places in their country, so that we are sure: Israel for the first time will not be the last time. We will come back!