



סיקוי סיקוי Sikkuy

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העמותה לקידום שוויון אזרחי الجمعية لدعم المساواة المدنية
The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel

Newsletter No. 1/13



A Message from the Co-Executive Directors

Dear Sikkuy Friends,

There's a lot of news to report about our activities to promote equality between the Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel, but before we get to that, we want to let you know that after nine very intensive and fruitful years as co-executive director of Sikkuy, Ali will leave his position at Sikkuy in September 2013. He is not leaving for another organization but is considering a number of options including an academic career. We expect that even after he leaves, he will remain in close touch with us.

Ron has already been with Sikkuy for more than four years(!!!) so the transition should be a smooth one. The Sikkuy board of directors met last month and charted the search process and we are already beginning to hear from potential candidates. We expect to hire Ali's replacement in the spring, allowing for an adequate overlap.

■ Elections

While the new government hasn't yet been formed in Israel, we can report that all of Sikkuy's advocacy work for equality vis-a-vis government ministries and agencies continues uninterrupted. This is because our actions are based on long-term working relationships with high-level government personnel (directors-general, regional heads, senior professional staff etc.) who remain in their positions even when the government changes. Our very good working relations with the Prime Minister's Office and its sub-units will also continue.

■ Public Transportation Conference

You may find this hard to believe, but most Arab towns in Israel are only marginally served by government subsidized local or inter-city public transportation. This situation is a key factor in the economic and social isolation of the Arab citizens, for whom there is little accessible public transportation for work, studies, health care, shopping etc. outside of their communities. Suffice it to say that all Jewish towns are served by an extensive and subsidized public transportation system.

A year and a half ago Sikkuy began a concerted effort to change this situation by facilitating cooperation between the Arab municipalities and the Ministry of Transport for planning and implementing public transportation (in cooperation with the NGO Transport Today and Tomorrow). We recently published a path breaking policy paper mapping the barriers to equal access to public transportation for Arab citizens and suggesting strategies for change. This is the fifth policy paper published by Sikkuy in the series, "From Barriers to Opportunities" demonstrating once again how effective our model is for understanding the background to unequal resource allocation by the government for the Arab citizens.

The paper (in Hebrew) is titled: "[From Barriers to Opportunities - Public Transportation in the Arab communities](#)" - written by Hagit Naali Joseph and Tobi Cohen and edited by Ron Gerlitz.

The paper was presented at a major Sikkuy conference on public transportation in the Arab communities, with the participation of the director-general and senior staff of the Ministry of Transport, Arab mayors, senior civil servants, the public and the media.

At the conference the Ministry representatives promised to develop transportation planning guides for the Arab municipalities and to create a new position in the ministry - a person responsible for public transportation in the Arab communities.

In places where Sikkuy is active, such as Kafr Qassem, new public bus lines are now running for the first time connecting the city to Petah Tikva and the nearest train station.

The conference received considerable media coverage in Hebrew, Arabic and English (see: Haaretz - "[Jewish towns get up to 14 times more buses than Arab counterparts, report finds](#)"). We are now seeking additional funding to expand this project to at least 10 additional Arab towns.

■Sikkuy staff and board retreat

Sikkuy's staff and board recently held a weekend "retreat" on the shores of Lake Kinneret. The time

spent together allowed new staff members to get acquainted with the veteran staff and board members and afforded time for in-depth discussions about the future direction of Sikkuy. The topics discussed included:

- Violence within Arab society - It was decided that Sikkuy should get involved in this issue and develop strategies and programs to deal with this pressing problem.
- The new Shared Public Space (SPS) project - A detailed look was presented at this new project working to advance the presence of Arab language, culture, symbols and narrative in the public space shared by Jewish and Arab citizens.
- An open discussion was held to allow both board and staff members to suggest new directions for projects and strategies for Sikkuy in the coming years.

And if you think we are all work and no play, we were treated to an evening of traditional Arabic music provided by the family members of one our staff and also had time to appreciate the beauty of the lake whose level is rapidly rising after many years of drought. You can see the full album on Facebook: <http://on.fb.me/15q9Pde>.

■ Fundraising in Israel

Our decision, made more than two years ago, to begin fundraising in Israel, and our hiring of a talented and dedicated staff member to reach out to the business community in Israel (both Arabs and Jews), has borne fruit. In addition to our growing roster of individual philanthropists in Israel, we are very pleased to report that both a major financial institution and the Dov Lautman Foundation have awarded generous grants to advance our work. These successes are, of course, very important for our financial stability but just as important, support from the business community in Israel sends a powerful message to Israel's political and business leaders that equality for all citizens is a vital interest shared by the state and all of its citizens, Jews and Arabs alike.

Ali and I hope you'll agree after reading this that your support for Sikkuy over the years, and at present, is a good investment. We look forward to your comments and questions and to seeing you here or in your communities during 2013.

Sincerely,

Ron Gerlitz and Ali Haider

Co-Executive Directors

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