



Collaborative Practice is Blooming in Israel!

By Talia L. Katz, Executive Director

Just prior to the Washington, DC Forum last October, the IACP Board of Directors held its final meeting of the year. During the meeting, the Board again discussed its commitment to making CP available to clients of modest means and IACP's imperative in assisting our community to find ways to improve access to justice through the Collaborative process.

As I walked out of that Board meeting, I was approached by **Idith Schaham**, a Collaborative attorney from Israel, who asked if she could share with me a brochure about a new program recently launched there. The new program is a publicly funded Collaborative Divorce Center, serving low income, high conflict families. City government funds are used to pay mental health professionals, who work in interdisciplinary Collaborative teams with attorneys and financial professionals who provide their services on a sliding scale or *pro bono* basis. *How exciting!* I thought, *Please tell me more--how does this work--and where is this Collaborative Divorce Center?* You might imagine how stunned I was to learn that the first publicly funded Collaborative Divorce Center is operated by the Municipality of Ramat Gan--the town in which I was born!

Shortly after my return to Phoenix, I received an invitation from the Municipality of Ramat Gan to open a conference being planned about the Collaborative Divorce Center and the use of Collaborative Practice in Israel. Happily accepting the invitation, the Collaborative community and I began planning a week long series of events which were finally referred to as the "Collaborative Festival."

Collaborative Practice emerged in Israel only a little more than three years ago and has evolved at an amazing pace. During my visit, I was privileged to participate not only in the Ramat Gan Conference (which was a tremendous success!), but in various events which brought together both experienced practitioners and a whole host of interested professionals including lawyers, judges, mediators, mental health and financial professionals, as well as academicians.

The Tel Aviv University Law School held its first ever Collaborative Practice Conference which was met with great enthusiasm, sparking interest in more learning and the establishment of practice groups in more communities around the country. There have been only a handful of academic conferences around the world on Collaborative Practice. This one proved again the power of such gatherings in igniting social change.



IACP member Idith Schaham presenting at the Tel Aviv University Law School

IACP hosted a Practice Group Development meeting for our members in Tel Aviv and the surrounding communities. Collaborative practitioners from every practice group in Israel came together for the first time. One of the outcomes of this intensive day long dialogue was the determination to form a steering committee to create a nation-wide organization which will support all Collaborative practitioners in educating the public, sharing resources and growing the movement in Israel.

I had the opportunity to meet with individual practice groups and get to know many wonderful, dedicated practitioners. I was indeed struck by the similarities among Collaborative Practice groups everywhere. Whether we live in North America, Europe, Australia or Israel, all practice groups must grapple with questions about how to organize, how to educate the public and how to do this work well. Practice groups in Israel are forming in a variety of ways, experimenting with organizational structures and investing tremendous energy in making this process option available to families throughout the country.

I was impressed and delighted to observe the deep and important work being done in Israel, where so much has been accomplished so quickly. The Ramat Gan Collaborative Divorce Center is truly inspirational as a model for access to justice. The vibrancy and excitement about the growth of CP--at the Ramat Gan Conference, at the Tel Aviv Law School, at the IACP Practice Group meeting and at each subsequent meeting with individual practice groups--was remarkable!

It was an honor for me to spend a week in Israel, teaching just a little and learning so much about the galvanizing power of this process and the professionals who step forward to make Collaborative Practice a viable option in their own communities. To our colleagues in Israel, we wish you much success as you grow and continue to bloom.