

# Israel Advocacy

Hasbara Fellowships Israel trip gives students the hard facts about the Jewish homeland.

By Caryn Zeitlin

My junior year of high school, I was fortunate enough to participate on March of the Living, an international, educational program that brings Jewish teens from all over the world to Poland to march from Auschwitz to Birkenau, and then takes participants to Israel. One week in our homeland was not sufficient; we had a jam-packed schedule and a lot to see.

March of the Living participants are restricted from going on Taglit-Birthright Israel until age 22. I was rather impatient and could not wait that long to return. When I was networking with Jewish organizations while planning an Israel event for Hillel at Western Michigan University, I stumbled upon Hasbara Fellowships sponsored by Aish International. I completed my application and, within a few hours, I scheduled a phone interview. While preparing for Shabbat a few weeks later, I received an email confirmation of my acceptance into the program.

Hasbara Fellowships is a 16-day training program for college students interested in

expanding their knowledge of Israel advocacy. Prior to the trip, all students are required to complete an online course of 10 classes on the history and political structure of Israel. As soon as fall finals week was completed, I was on my way to Israel.

We spent a majority of our time in the Aish World Headquarters (adjacent to the Kotel) in Jerusalem. At Aish, we met with journalists, political strategists and scholars on advocacy. We also visited the Foreign Ministry, where we met with Ambassador Zion Evrony. As a political science student, I was honored to meet an Israeli public servant. Our tour of the ministry also included a visit to the situation room, equipped with red emergency phones on each desk. My trip came full circle when I had the chance to hear a lecture from advocacy expert Neil Lazarus on the correlation of social media and advocacy for Israel.

Hasbara has expanded my knowledge on Israel, and I am no longer advocating based on emotions and feelings, but rather on facts. Through this fellowship, I have been given the



Caryn Zeitlin, a WMU junior from Farmington Hills, with Israeli soldiers

tools necessary to complete my two semesters of advocacy on campus. I have established a student organization called Blue and White Forever, which encourages and teaches students to support Israel. I look forward to all the wonderful campaigns, programs and activities that will take place at WMU.

I am looking forward to my next visit, which I hope is sooner rather than later. My passport may say that I'm a U.S. citizen, but my heart tells me that Israel is my home. @

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