



Radzyner School of Law

Street Law Clinic

- Prof. Sharon Rabin-Margaliot, dean

IDC Students Help Prisoners Gain a Second Chance at Life

“The idea is to take a disempowered community, whether youth, convicted prisoners or felony victims, and empower them through knowledge.”

- Adv. Ziv Lidror, head of the Street Law clinic

participants towards a mock trial or an alternative event as the highlight of the course.

“Not every group does a mock trial,” says Lidror, “But these participants from the prison were so interested and knowledgeable. They worked hand in hand with the students to choose first the case that would be tried, and secondly the different arguments that would be used for the prosecution and defense.”

This year’s pilot program with prisoners was the first time such a project has taken place in Israel. The participants, who are in the process of rehabilitation and soon to be released, chose a particularly difficult area of law for their trial – tort law. The case they chose was inspired by an event this past fall, when well - known Israeli media personality Doron Neshet suffered a massive stroke and then refused to allow the emergency responders to evacuate him to the hospital. Under Israeli law, a patient refusing treatment cannot be evacuated, but Neshet’s family went on to sue the rescue services for negligence.

Classes were all held at the prison, so the day of the trial was the first time this particular group had visited IDC Herzliya’s campus. The participants took on the roles of both the defense and the prosecution, while the panel of judges was headed by Prof. Ronen Kirtenstein, deputy dean of the Radzyner School, together with Prof. Asaf Porat, who teaches tort law at IDC Herzliya, and Adv. Inbal Dror, a senior assistant to Jerusalem’s attorney general.

According to Dr. Israel, this mock trial was a major occasion on all fronts. “IDC Herzliya put a lot of effort into the event,” says Israel. “It

On a chilly Thursday in March, a bus entered the gates of IDC Herzliya. The doors opened and 50 passengers got off. Some of those passengers were armed, and responsible for guaranteeing that the remaining 40 spent the day without incident, before returning to their residence and point of origin: Israel’s Hasharon Prison.

Twelve of these prisoners came filled with excitement and anticipation – today was the culmination of several intensive months of study and preparation. They were going to trial, only this time not as defendants. This time they had come to participate in a mock trial as the final event in “Street Law” – one of the innovative legal clinics at IDC Herzliya. The rest of the prisoners were also from the prison’s rehabilitation unit; they had come to see and support their friends.

Now in its second year, Street Law is one of 17 legal clinics sponsored by the Radzyner School of Law at IDC.

The entire legal clinic program is supervised by Adv. Sharon Tzionov, with established clinics offering services that range from aiding Holocaust Survivors to assisting child victims of crime. The Street Law clinic, headed up by Adv. Ziv Lidror and taught by Dr. Amos Israel, is based on the principle that knowledge is power. According to Lidror, “The idea is to take a disempowered community – whether youth, convicted prisoners or felony victims – and empower them through knowledge. In this, there are three groups who benefit: the participants, the law students who work with them, and the community at large.”



Lieutenant Colonel Levana Levy-Shay, head of Prisoner Education branch, Israel Prison Service, with IDC Herzliya Street Law students Meir Rosilio, Aya Tal, Daniel Bercovich, Adir Levitas, Adv. Ziv Lidror, and Orly Anckonina, Coordinator for Informal Education Israel Prison Service.

“We want to give them a chance to build a different relationship with the law, and by understanding it better, allow it to increase their power as citizens.”

- Adv. Ziv Lidror, head of the Street Law clinic

This year, the clinic’s 34 student volunteers were divided into 11 teams, each working with a different group of participants and teaching them an introductory course in Israeli Law. Participants came from juvenile detention centers, inner - city youth programs, community centers in Kfar Saba and the Hasharon Prison for convicted offenders. The students provided weekly lessons on Israeli law and coached



The Street Law mock trial in action.

began with a reception for everyone involved, which included all the prisoners of the rehabilitation unit, their staff, guards and education officers, and even the commander of the entire prison. These prisoners, as part of their rehabilitation, hold jobs in the community, and what was particularly moving was that not only did the management of the factories where they work give them the day off – they actually came to campus to see the trial and give their support.”

Israel, who has been an adjunct faculty member at IDC Herzliya for the past 11 years, teaches his clinic students theories of law with an emphasis on how that law applies to real - life situations. According to him, this ensures that students receive practical tools that will enable them to meet the challenges of dealing with the groups they lead.

“Everyone wins,” says Lidror. “The students are well prepared for life after their degrees. They get to see the law in practice and experience it outside of books and theoretical courses, while meeting a population that received a different set of opportunities in their lives. They also develop a much deeper connection to the material they are learning, by teaching it. It’s not enough to hear a lecture to deliver it to someone else – you need to make it your own. In fact, one of the truly moving things is to witness the students as they realize how deeply they now understand the material they first learned in class, after having processed it and taught it to their groups.”

The next group to benefit from the process is the program’s participants. “Wherever they come from, they have usually experienced the other

side of the law,” continues Lidror. “Whether they committed crimes or had crimes committed against them, they have often felt that the law was something foreign and unfriendly. We want to give them a chance to build a different relationship with the law, and by understanding it better, allow it to increase their power as citizens.”

That in turn benefits the third group of beneficiaries – the community. By strengthening its members from within, one of the intended byproducts of the legal clinic is to create a more aware, proactive and healthy population within the country’s more disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Adir Levitas, a second year student in the law and business track at IDC Herzliya, and one of the Street Law students responsible for the prisoners’ group, found the entire experience extremely moving and significant.

“Each of the participants in our group works daily from 5am to 6pm,” says Levitas. “And then, once a week, after a long, hard day, we would meet them at the prison for their lesson, which was a mandatory part of their recovery. At first none of them wanted to be there, but as time went on, they began to participate more and more. After 15 lessons, people who hadn’t opened their mouths at the beginning were now coming to us and asking for material they could learn before the next lesson. And when we offered them the possibility of doing a moot court, we could see how excited they were by the idea. For many of them, it was their first time receiving positive confirmation from others, and the feeling that they could truly achieve something in their lives.”

“What was particularly moving was that not only did the management of the factories where the prisoners work give them the day off – they actually came to campus to see the trial and give their support.” - Dr. Amos

Israel, academic director, Street Law clinic

The prisoners were not the only ones affected. According to Levitas, “There were several moral considerations that cropped up throughout the process. One was: do these people deserve to win such respect? They have been incarcerated for very serious crimes, including murder, and here we are giving them this great gift. Another was: by bringing them to campus, in the presence of the president of IDC Herzliya, and telling them they can do whatever they want with their lives, are we not promising them a fantasy that will blow up once they really try?”

“In the end, what I came to was the strong belief that everyone deserves a second chance. Participating in this process, and watching these men achieve so much while living in one of the darkest places that can be imagined, made me really believe in recovery. And if only one of them succeeds in changing his life after this experience, then I believe we will have achieved something truly worthwhile.” ★

- Joy Pincus