

Common Ground: Raising awareness to gender stereotypes during adolescence

IsraelJerusalem, Israel



Galit Agmon



Year Founded:
2012

Organization type:

nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector

Project Stage:

Established

Budget:

\$1,000 - \$10,000

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/MexaneMeshutaf>



- [Gender equity](#)
- [Men's issues](#)
- [Girls' development](#)
- [Women's issues](#)

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

Gender stereotypes often have a detrimental role in our society: from the scarcity of women in science to the prevalence of sexual violence in men. We encourage girls and boys to develop a critical perspective on gender stereotypes, finding their own way of being a woman, a man, a human being.

WHAT IF - Inspiration: Write one sentence that describes a way that your project dares to ask, "WHAT IF?"

What if girls and boys could pursue their personal dreams and abilities without having to pay tribute to constrictive gender roles?

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Concepts of masculinity and femininity often touch at the heart of phenomena as prejudice, peer pressure, self-image and eating disorders, violence and sexual abuse. Teenage boys and girls are under a great deal of pressure to conform to gender-related norms, whether they are aware of them or not. Rigid social expectations and stereotypes have a powerful influence on personal choice, often acting as an obstacle to genuine self realization.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

Raising awareness to gender stereotypes can reduce the implicit pressure they exert on middle-school girls and boys. Our innovative approach is to bring academic research and expertise on stereotypes, unconscious biases and automatic behavior into the classroom. Drawing from knowledge in sociology, psychology, neuroscience and education and through personal examples and role-modeling, we meet separately with boys and girls and discuss the validity and origin of gender stereotypes; critically assess the messages contained in television advertisements and other forms of media; and examine how we are all affected by self- and society-imposed gender boundaries - providing boys and girls with tools to sidestep some of their limiting influence.

Impact: How does it Work

Example: *Mexane Meshutaf* is a nonprofit organization that provides a safe space for young people to explore their gender identity and expression. The organization offers a variety of programs, including group therapy, individual counseling, and support groups. *Mexane Meshutaf* also provides resources and referrals to other organizations that offer support and services to young people.

Example: walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

There are always so many touching stories that are an immediate consequence of meeting with our volunteers: 1. Girls were told about the psychological fact that girls tend to attribute success to circumstances and failure to their own lack of capability (with boys it is the reverse pattern). In the end of the workshop one of them said that the week before they got back math exams and she got a high mark. "I thought it was by chance", she said, "but now I understand that I simply knew the material". 2. Girls demanded to play football in gym class, like the boys do. The gym teacher didn't approve, but the girls insisted. With the help of a teacher that was present in our workshop, they convinced her that football is not only for boys.

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact for the coming years.

Feedback through surveys and direct observation tells us that the workshops are very engaging for participating girls and boys and arouse their interest and curiosity. Numerous responses indicate that participants often leave the workshop with new insights about the effect which gender stereotypes have on them. We believe a major contribution of our work is in the motivation it inspires in girls to consider and work toward a meaningful career in the fields of science and technology. We have also seen a direct impact of the discussion in our workshops on boys' expressed outlook on homosexuality.

Spread Strategies: Moving forward, what are the main strategies for scaling impact?

The full impact potential would be in diminishing the role which constrictive gender roles play in our society through intervention throughout the education system, from kindergarten to high school. Our long term goals include developing and implementing programs for gender education for teachers as well as pupils, and securing support for them by their eventual integration within the public education system. Over time we expect to see less rigid boundaries between the "allowed" behavior and interests of girls and boys, leading to greater tolerance and a more equal participation in society.

Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Plan: What is this solution's plan to ensure financial sustainability?

We plan to develop education programs for teachers of all ages, paid for by the Ministry of Education. We will organize seminars and talks, paid for by the inviting companies. Remaining financial needs will be met by raising funds from supporting organizations: we are currently supported by the Edmond and Lily Safra Center for Brain Science in the Hebrew University, and in the process of securing funds from additional private sector firms.

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

To our knowledge, the project is one-of-its-kind in Israel in two main ways: first, in the wide-scale approach to gender issues which it brings into the classroom, looking at the variety of ways in which gender stereotypes operate, rather than focusing on isolated aspects of their influence; second, in that it equally addresses both sexes, out of a conviction that conceptions of gender are not a "women's issue" but are a relevant and significant concern for anyone in our society. Very few other organizations deal with gender education in schools, and all others focus mainly on sexual education.

Team

Founding Story

Three years ago, I bumped into a former high school teacher and told her that I was pursuing a doctorate in neuroscience. She was very surprised, because back then I was going in a totally different direction. All my matriculation exams were in humanities subjects except for math. She asked me if I could come talk to girls at the school and explain that studying math is important and that it opens options for the future. So I came and talked with them about inequality between men and women, not only in sciences but also in politics or roles in the household. The session was a success and a real eye opener. The rumor spread, and more schools showed interest. This led to gathering some friends and together founding Common Ground.

Team

Our team is made up of graduate students (mostly in psychology, neuroscience, sociology and education), high-tech workers and educators, all working voluntarily and having a strong personal interest in the organization's goals. General management and specific tasks like contact with volunteers, administration, media, content development, etc., are led by a team of about 10, with an additional ~40 volunteers leading the workshops in schools.

About You

About You

First Name

Galit

Last Name

Agmon

Email

galit.agmon@mail.huji.ac.il

Twitter URL

Facebook URL

About Your Project

Organization Name

How long has your organization been operating?

Project

Organization Country

, Jerusalem

Country where this project is creating social impact

What awards or honors has the project received?

Funding: How is your project financial supported?

Other.

Supplemental

Sector

Opportunities for Women.

Audience: Who have you identified as your customer/recipient groups and do these groups value your solution for different reasons?

How do you engage different customer/recipient groups to deliver your solution?

The Common Ground workshops are given to middle-school pupils as they prepare to make an important decision – choosing their high-school majors. The workshops aim to expose the pupils to the existence and influence of gender stereotypes, and to give them tools to make genuine decisions informed by their own true interests and talents. Our workshops are supported by the Ministry of Education's Unit for Gender Equality and have acquired praise from teachers and pupils alike.

Scaling the solution: How would the prize money and publicity help you to achieve your objectives over the next two years?

During the past year we have met with over 1500 students in 13 schools. Our experience has shown us that despite the genuine need for gender education in schools, the actual resources available to schools in this area are very scarce. We believe that educating to gender equity should be part of the educational system, and we hope that our efforts will lead to a consolidation of a gender education program within the standard curriculum. As an intermediate goal, we hope to grow to the point where we are able to provide our workshops for pupils and teachers in schools throughout the country. As all our staff are currently volunteers, additional support is necessary to allow us to expand our activity and become a self-sustaining organization.

Experience: Please provide examples of any previous entrepreneurial initiatives you have pioneered

This is my first entrepreneurial initiative. However, I am fortunate to be able to draw from the experience, resources and expertise of several supporters: among them the Hoffman Leadership and Responsibility Fellowship program, the Israeli branch of the Ashoka organization, consultants from the Israeli branch of UBS, the Shatil organization, and numerous private supporters with expertise in law, NGO management, business administration etc..

Are you are eligible to attend the Accelerator event in Cambridge and subsequent events in London, UK in January, 2015?

yes

Will you require a visa to enter the UK?

Are you are a current Unilever employee?

Source URL: <https://www.changemakers.com/sustliving2014/entries/common-ground-gender-education>