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## College students gain insights into outreach at CRC event

August 30, 2013

## Homepage Featured



The importance of being an active advocate for Israel was brought home to area college students at the Community Relations Council of the United Jewish Federation of Tidewater's Bringing Israel Home event on August 11.

The annual event, designed by and for college students, featured guests from the national pro-Israel campus organization, The David Project, who promoted advocacy skills and shared research and insights with the 50 young adults in attendance.

“The most important thing I can tell you all is to reach out and talk to people about Israel the same way you talk to them about anything else,” Todd Young, director of campus and educational initiatives for the David Project, told the group.

“The facts can come later. Our approach is based more on winning friends than winning arguments, especially if you want to keep that long-term support of Israel going that we have in this country.”

Bringing Israel Home was a free event held at the Simon Family JCC, with interactive exercises, small group sessions, a dinner break with kosher pizza and salad from Pepe N.Y. Pizzeria in Ghent, and a chance to socialize and share experiences with other students.

New this year was a parent component toward the end of the evening. More than 15 parents had an opportunity to hear from the directors of the on-campus Jewish organization, Hillel, at two Virginia universities.

Rabbi Jake Rubin, from the University of Virginia, and Sue Kurtz, from Virginia Tech, spoke on a panel that also included the David Project's Todd Young, Jacob Levkowicz, senior campus coordinator for the David Project, and Isabel Shocket, coordinator of engagement and initiatives for Virginia Tech's Hillel.

“We're looking for ways to build relationships, not to be divisive,” says Young. “We're finding that anti-Israel movements on campus are not gaining much traction and the hostile political debate is not as prevalent as apathy and ignorance. We're trying to make Israel something that's interesting and softening negativity.”

Rubin says from his perspective at UVa, it's not so much that the students are apathetic. Rather, they are smart students who might remain silent because they feel as though they don't have all of the facts.

“We want to create a space where students are free to come in and say, ‘I don't know,’” says Rubin. “And then we can have a personal relationship and conversation, and help them gain understanding—in an informal setting.”

Both Rubin and Kurtz say that despite friendly rivalries between the two Virginia schools, they were grateful for the opportunity to speak on the Bringing Israel Home panel together, and hope it is the first of many more joint appearances.

The turnout impressed the David Project's Jacob Levkowitz, who says the students seemed interested, engaged and excited about learning how to advocate for Israel.

“A lot of the information that kids and parents get about campuses is unfounded. You hear the term, ‘burning campus,’ that refers to anti-Israeli activity, but research and experience show that it’s not that the campus is burning—it’s not openly anti-Semitic. The bigger risk is of losing future support for Israel,” he says.

“The most important thing for these students to know is that they have incredible personal stories and they have the power to connect with other students on campus,” he says. “And that’s proven to make a difference in other people’s perceptions of Israel.”

*To learn about upcoming CRC programs or resources, visit [www.JewishVa.org/CRC](http://www.JewishVa.org/CRC) or contact CRC Director, Robin Mancoll at [RMancoll@ujft.org](mailto:RMancoll@ujft.org). Like the JewishNews on facebook to see more photos from this event.*

*by Laine Rutherford*

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