

Sharing Expertise and Innovation in Israel

By Libbie Hough

Actively engaging with colleagues from around the world benefits the global community and makes positive impacts here at home, as well. Within the last year, two faculty members have collaborated with social workers and other professionals in Israel around a number of issues.

Michal Grinstein-Weiss, assistant professor, has been working with Israel's Ministry of Social Affairs around the concept of asset building as an intervention for social and economic development. Grinstein-Weiss has devoted much of her career to the research of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), matched savings programs designed to help low income households save and accumulate important assets, such as homeownership and education, that promote financial independence.

In March 2007, Grinstein-Weiss was invited to give opening remarks at the Senior Staff of Social Policy in Israel Podium, New Programs to Alleviate Poverty: The Role of the Ministry of Social Affairs. "Today, the international discussion on social and economic development includes the need to find ways for the poor to save and build assets, and many see asset accumulation as a main component," Grinstein-Weiss shares.

Policy makers and academics in Israel have expressed interest in testing IDAs in tandem with the country's new negative income tax policy. If IDAs are implemented in Israel, this would give Grinstein-Weiss the opportunity to conduct comparative research about the program in two settings. The results could impact future program development in both countries.



Michal Grinstein-Weiss

Sharing with colleagues is an expected part of the Israeli professional social work culture. Every year, social workers from around the small country are invited to convene and present to one another new strategies and innovative practices. "It's truly amazing," says professor **Dennis Orthner**, who attended the event this year. "Close to 2,000 people, over two-thirds of the social workers in the country, gather and are actively learning from one another."

The Learning Fair, as it is called, has occurred annually for the past five years. This past year, Orthner was invited to present his work in developing Learning Cultures, specifically in public school settings. "The culture in Israel allows, in fact, it expects that people will share ideas to aid in developing best practice," says Orthner. "It's a very mature process, one that we can learn a lot from. It's inspiring to see professionals from the smallest villages to the city of Jerusalem, Arabs and Israelis, come together, promote innovation across communities and develop best practice strategies to deal with a variety of issues."



Dennis Orthner

