

# Their message of peace

*Three women from the Middle East share experiences.*

By Kristin E. Holmes  
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Three young women who have grown up amid violence in the Middle East came thousands of miles to deliver a message that didn't seem foreign to 40 high school girls from Philadelphia.

"Hatred is curable if you confront it," said Mai Fried, 21, who is Jewish and lives in Israel.

Fried and her companions — both Palestinian — have witnessed a vicious fight for land, but through a group called Creativity for Peace have found friendship with other young women they once viewed as the enemy.

The women talked with teenage girls at Parkway Northwest High School for Peace and Social Justice on Tuesday as part of a three-day tour through the region. The tour was facilitated by the Bucks County-based Interfaith Community for Middle East Peace.

Despite differences in ethnicity, culture and geography, the three young women from Israel and the Palestinian Authority territories, and the teens from Philadelphia, found common ground.

"I've learned to understand the other side, to listen to their stories, and then my voice is also heard by others," said Fairuz Abadi, 21, a Palestinian living in Israel.

Amber Yates, 16, of Germantown, said she could relate.

"I had trouble trusting people," said Yates, a sophomore at Parkway Northwest. "People who I thought were my friends, I found out I couldn't trust them, so I had my guard up. Girlz Rule helped me open up."

Yates and the other teens at the discussion are members of that girls' empowerment group, which shares some goals with Creativity for Peace. Both organizations aim to develop leadership qualities in young women.

## If You Go

The three young women from Creativity for Peace will discuss their experiences at 7 tonight during a free presentation at Yardley United Methodist Church, 300 W. Afton Ave., Lower Merion. For more information, call 215-493-3345.

Both were founded out of violence.

The Santa Fe, N.M.-based Creativity for Peace aims to foster understanding and dialogue between Jewish and Palestinian women in an effort to turn them into the peacemakers of the future.

The group brings teens ages 15 to 17 to New Mexico for a three-week camp, where they must live together and face people whom they've learned to hate through years of history and politics.

"We wanted to work with a new generation of young people who were more open," said Dottie Indyke, executive director of the group. "We chose to work with girls, because we feel girls are natural peacemakers and have a lot of influence on their families and in their communities."

In Philadelphia, mother-daughter teachers Glenda Darby and Constance Jackson started Girlz Rule after Darby witnessed a fight at Audenried High School in South Philadelphia during which a girl's face was slashed.

"I started to think about what is it that we need here," said Darby, who formerly taught at Audenried. "I found that a lot of young ladies had social and emotional problems that lead to academic problems."

Darby consulted with her mother, a teacher at Murrell Dobbins Career and Technical Education High School.

The two came up with Girlz Rule, an effort to craft leaders through discussion, activities, peer mediation, tutoring, and boosting self-esteem.

The 40-student organization is based at Parkway and Dobbins, with about 20 students participating in each school.

The teens crowded into the Parkway Northwest library Tuesday to listen to Fried, Abadi, and Amira Said, 22, a Palestinian living on the West Bank.

The young women also participated in programs at Arcadia University in Glenside on Tuesday and at Alvernia University in Reading yesterday. They are scheduled to visit Bristol High School this afternoon and Yardley United Methodist Church this evening.

Fried, Said, and Abadi are now a part of Creativity for Peace's Young Leaders program and are training to develop skills, including public speaking, conflict resolution, and project management.

The threesome displayed a breezy camaraderie like any other twentysomething girlfriends on an adventure. They nearly leaped at a chance to pose arm-in-arm for a group photo next to a life-size cutout of President Obama.

Abadi said she accepted a chance to join Creativity for Peace only so she could tell the Jewish women how much she hated them. But the program changed her.

"I discovered that the enemy is myself; it's the way I look at the outside," Abadi said.

Tiffany Rodriguez, 16, of North Philadelphia, understood.

"They found out that the stories that all Israelis are bad and all Palestinians are bad weren't true," said Rodriguez, a junior at Dobbins. "Everybody isn't the same."

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