**Biography-** **District 5300 Global Grants, Scholarship Committee**

Chantay BenShimon, Las Vegas, Nevada

Graduate Degree Program in Conflict Resolution and Mediation, Tel Aviv, Israel

I graduated in 2008 amidst the Great Recession, during which my family lost our home and my father lost his job. That same year, my father received an unexpected call from our family in Israel. My cousin, a border officer stationed in the old city of Jerusalem, had been fatally wounded. His untimely death due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict prompted me to better understand why long-term violent conflict persists and how we can collectively prevent it. I was unsure of where exactly to begin in addressing these questions and spent the following years working towards an Associate of Arts degree through the College of Southern Nevada. While completing my degree and for several years after, I worked full-time to financially support my family. This has made my academic career less linear than most, yet I look forward to reaching my academic goals with the opportunity to do so now.

           I first directly began to examine how violence impacts communities through challenging but fulfilling volunteer work as a mentor for marginalized youth in a Las Vegas program called *Broadway in the H.O.O.D. (Helping Others Open Doors)*. This program rehabilitates at-risk youth by involving them in theatre productions put on for the community. Many participants had experienced domestic abuse, gang violence, and other forms of brutality, and Broadway in the H.O.O.D.’s safe and encouraging environment provided them a reprieve. My work with these youth taught me how familial, interpersonal, and societal factors contribute to trauma as well as healing. Serving youth who have experienced trauma gave me an invaluable perspective on the core causes and lasting impacts of interpersonal conflict.

I wanted to extend my knowledge of conflict from the interpersonal level to the international arena. This drove me to work three jobs and organize a fundraiser to afford participation in an internship program in Israel. As part of this internship, I volunteered at the Israel Family Planning Association where I learned about how public health policies affect vulnerable women. I also volunteered at the Terem Public Health Clinic serving African asylum seekers, which motivated me to better understand how foreign policy can be used as a tool to mitigate the impact of violent conflict on marginalized individuals. These internship experiences were pivotal in solidifying my career interests in policy-level solutions to conflict at the international level.

Upon my arrival back to the United States, I started researching the trajectory I must take to develop a successful career in international peacebuilding. My first step was to choose a relevant major and complete my bachelor’s degree in the field of conflict resolution. I am currently in the process of obtaining my Bachelor of Arts degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from University of North Carolina at Greensboro where I am expected to graduate in August 2020.

I realized that in conjunction with my studies I needed more practical experience to apply academic concepts to the field. Therefore, I am interning with Dr. Barbara Strahl, a faculty member in my program, and co-developed the design, training, and facilitation of a restorative justice program called *The Circle* through the Clark County Neighborhood Justice Center (NJC). This court diversion program for youth cited for school fights builds trust, empathy, and accountability through dialogue. I will also be co-facilitating a course in the Spring at the NJC based on Nonviolent Communication. Collaborating with Dr. Strahl has helped me gain confidence in my ability to develop and implement programs in the field.

           My personal, academic, and volunteer experiences have prepared me to succeed in the International Program in Conflict Resolution and Mediation (MA in Public Policy) at Tel Aviv University. These experiences have played an integral role in my sustained commitment to pursuing a career in foreign policy. The Rotary Global Grant Scholarship would allow me to obtain a master’s degree which will provide me with the essential academic background to pursue a PH.D. This will ultimately prepare me for a successful career in foreign policy dedicated to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Middle East.