

The nonprofiteer

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"I'm half Jewish, and the wrong half," says Emily Gantz McKay to explain why, for the past 20 years, she has visited Israel regularly from the US to volunteer at Shatil, the New Israel Fund's Empowerment and Training Center for Social Change.

"My values are Reform," she adds.

A simple printed notice bearing her name is affixed to the door of a room at the Shatil offices on the fourth floor of a Talpiot building that has been cleared out for her annual visit. Shatil pays for her airfare, but her time is unpaid.

"I come for two weeks and do as much training and technical assistance as I can fit in," she says.

On her most recent visit she ran three resource development forums and several training sessions with Shatil staff in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Haifa.

Until 1994 she would come two or three times a year, working an extra hour a day at her job at the Hispanic civil rights organization National Council of La Raza in Washington, DC, to earn extra vacation time.

When she set up her own company, Mosaica, McKay started coming "only" once a year.

"I mostly do domestic work at home. My international specialty is helping develop the non-profit sector in places of conflict," she says. "In times of conflict it brings out the best in people and the worst in people."

Meeting with *In Jerusalem* recently, McKay described her relationship with Shatil, Israel's nonprofit sector and how she came to spend so much time in the country, while managing only four weeks of sightseeing over the past 20 years.

"In America we rely very heavily on nonprofits to develop services for people and to solve problems," says McKay, who speaks easily and with little encouragement about her favorite topic.

As an extreme example she cites the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when nonprofit organizations had to step in and provide services the government had failed to supply.

"The nonprofits were doing a job the government should be doing. Nonprofits should not be a substitute for governments serving their citizens. They should be a supplement, a support."

Nonetheless, she explains, nonprofits are far more successful than governments in advocating for the disadvantaged.

"Governments don't pay money to criticize. If you're doing advocacy it's more comfortable not to have governments do work you are advocating," she says. "The relationship between governments and nonprofits is always tricky."

While nonprofits rely on governments for funding, "sometimes when we advocate, they cut off our funds," she says.

She adds that Israel's nonprofit sector - while significantly younger than that in the US - is also very developed, but she points to a difference in the government-nonprofit relationship.

"Israel," she says, "started with an assumption that the government was going to do things for the people... There is, in the character, a tendency [here] to say, 'we can form a group and we can make a change.'"

Pointing to such diverse initiatives as the Association of Civil Rights in Israel, Yad Sarah, the Israel Women's Network and Arab organizations, she believes Israel's nonprofit sector is one of the world's most developed.

When she first began working with Shatil, then a fledgling six- or seven-member group, the nonprofit sector here was much more elitist, something she says has changed over the years.

In the past, for example, women's groups were made up mostly of Ashkenazi Jews and thus had trouble reaching out to Mizrahi women. Now she says, more Mizrahi women are involved.

"Most of the people I work with [here] are Israeli. That has changed since 20 years ago when it was very much Ashkenazi and very much foreign-born. That's what has been so impressive about the nonprofits here," she says. "There is much more of a sense of the nonprofit sector now than there was 20 years ago."

While her work here differs in content to her activities back home, it is similar in structure.

"Nonprofits are surprisingly similar all over the world," she says. "There are certain values people have about transparency, human rights, they want to have good management and a board of directors as volunteers."

"One of the problems [in Israel] is that there has been a traditional dependence on funding from outside the country. A great deal of the money comes from Jewish family foundations."

And the sums are almost unfathomable: Between now and 2050 it has been estimated that \$41 trillion will change hands in the US and \$6 trillion will go to foundations.

"Among Israeli groups the question is how much will be coming to help Israel. The average age of the donor has gone up," says McKay.

While the process of donating money in Israel is different than in the US, according to McKay, many of the needs of a nonprofit are the same.

"A lot of the things that make a good for-profit make a good nonprofit," she says, pointing to several factors that are integral to a company's success.

Among the aspects she mentions are making sure you manage your money well; learning to be volunteers/employees; setting up good programs; evaluating programs; knowing what is needed in a given community; a strong board of directors made up of volunteers; and

funding.

"When you don't have a lot of money and you're trying to save the world it's hard to develop sustainable structures, and that's what Shatil does," says McKay of the organization that is now staffed by more than 100 people.

Training personnel is essential because "when you're small and you're always trying to serve one more person it's hard to think about structure. Nonprofits are always thinking about the immediate needs of people you serve, balanced with the long-term needs of serving more people."

As founding president and CEO of the Washington, DC-based Mosaica, McKay focuses her energy on communities of color, low-income populations and people living with HIV/AIDS; here her specialty is "strengthening non-profits."

To date, she hasn't come across an Israeli organization to which she is so ideologically opposed that she hasn't been able to work with it.

"My work is much more around the capacity-building than around the advocacy," she explains. "I often don't agree with the government of Israel and often don't agree with the government of the US, but that doesn't affect my work with nonprofits."

The only type of organization she couldn't work with is one whose "view means you can't walk in the street safely... [But] I don't think many people come to Shatil who want to advocate against civil rights," she says. "I work only through Shatil and I've never met a Shatil group I didn't want to work with."

Her relationship with Shatil came about by "finding someone who knew somebody."

In January 1987 she came to Israel with a group of Christian clergy and rabbis. It was her first time in Israel, and she "fell in love with the place."

"I thought, 'what can I do to be useful?' What I do to be useful is work with nonprofits."

A contact in the New Israel Fund put her in contact with Shatil, and the rest is history. Working with Shatil has felt natural to McKay, as its values are similar to those of La Raza and Mosaica.

While she has worked in the former Yugoslavia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Israel is the only country she gives up half her vacation time for.

"My father was a Jew. [The name] Gantz is Sephardic Jewish," she explains. Did she think the relationship would last this long?

"Probably not. [Though] I certainly thought I wanted to have a long-term relationship," she answers.

The security situation has never deterred her, though she did stop sitting outside cafes for a while.

"Given that I spent a lot of time in Bosnia during the war, I have nothing to complain about."

McKay, whose mother was an activist in the Hispanic community, grew up in Cincinnati. She earned a BA and an MA in communication from Stanford University and afterward went to live

in Pittsburgh, where her husband studied for his doctorate. In 1974, when she got the job at La Raza, they went to live in the Hispanic sector of Washington, DC. Her husband, Jack, is a retired research physicist who is now a full-time community activist fighting to preserve the multicultural nature of the neighborhood. They have a foster daughter and a nine-year-old granddaughter.

She admits her schedule has always been crazy, but insists she loves the work.

Concludes McKay, "If you're a workaholic, then you choose it."

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