

Melissa ([00:01](#)):

You're listening to *Pull Up a Chair*, stories from 100 years of creating community in Jewish Baltimore, a podcast created by The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore.

Benjamin ([00:12](#)):

This absolutely made me a better teacher. That first year with TALMA flew me straight out of my comfort zone.

Melissa ([00:22](#)):

Welcome back to *Pull Up a Chair*, a podcast from The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore. These local stories, shine a light on your neighbors and friends, illustrating what it means to build and be a part of a strong Jewish community. I'm your host Melissa Gerr. In this episode, a cultural exchange that starts in the classroom. Benjamin Snyder, a middle school history teacher in Baltimore county has spent two summers with TALMA. TALMA summer fellowships attract educators from all over the world for three and a half weeks. They teach English to middle and elementary school-age students in Israel. The Associated, through the Baltimore-Ashkelon Partnership, provides funding for teachers who work and stay in Ashkelon - Baltimore's partner city. Here's Benjamin:

Benjamin ([01:12](#)):

After my first year teaching here in Baltimore county, I did want to get out of Baltimore county just for a little bit for that summer and do some traveling. And TALMA seemed like such a cool blend of traveling, a little bit of vacationing and also working. So when TALMA reached out to me and they told me everything about the program, the trip to Israel, all the other people who will be there, some of the cool opportunities to come along with it, it was, it all just seemed so geared into what I was looking for that summer

Melissa ([01:39](#)):

Though Benjamin is an experienced teacher in the US, running a classroom in Israel was a big change for him.

Benjamin ([01:47](#)):

The Israeli kids came in full energy, ready to go every day. I mean, they are bouncing off the walls and it's a very different dynamic, teaching it in Israeli classroom versus an American one. Much more casual and relaxed. I showed up my first day in I think a polo and khakis and was told I was overdressed. They were like, you know, you need to be ready. You're gonna be moving around. You'll be playing sports with the kids and relax a little bit, loosen up and TALMA reaches a very diverse group of students. But this past summer, just by the names I could tell my class was, was very diverse. There was a lot of Ethiopian heritage and a lot of Russian as well. A lot of them are from underprivileged communities.

Melissa ([02:27](#)):

The TALMA program is very interactive. It's a hands-on engaged learning and teaching experience.

Benjamin ([02:34](#)):

We're all about teaching what I like to call functional English to the kids. So we don't greatly stress, you know, perfect grammar and perfect syntax and all that, but it's all, all geared around English you will

actually use. So my co-teacher in Ashkelon who was named Lior this past year and Lior and I worked on lessons about, you know, you go into a restaurant, how do you order your meal? How do you ask for directions around a city? How would you describe your house and your family?

Melissa ([03:02](#)):

Benjamin embraced the cultural changes in the Israeli classrooms and incorporated what he learned into his teaching.

Benjamin ([03:08](#)):

I think some teachers don't quite realize this when you have a really, really energetic, active classroom, the cure to that, and maybe cure is not the right word, but the response to that isn't to find out how to quiet them down. It's how to use that energy productively and something the kids in Ashkelon love doing was after they got the hold of some English, to help them recall it, but really to give them some ownership of it themselves, they would teach it back to me in Hebrew, which they loved doing. So after we would finish a lesson on parts of the body, for example, I would quiz them on how to say, on what, you know, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, arms, legs, and then they would do the same for me in Hebrew. And my Hebrew is very, very minuscule. So they had a lot of fun doing that and watching them take ownership of something and really get excited about it. Even though it's just teaching one of their teachers their own native language was a lot of fun.

Melissa ([04:03](#)):

And there was one of Benjamin students who really stood out from the rest.

Benjamin ([04:07](#)):

Her name was Netta. Very, very sweet kid who was so excited to learn English there. She could not walk past an object and not ask me or my co-teacher, how to pronounce it. She was constantly running up to me to ask, you know, how do you say this? How do you say that? Like just apple or orange wasn't enough. It was, this is my apple. I am eating an apple. I mean, she really wanted the full range of the English language which was exciting to see. I mean, every teacher in any field will tell you, it's such a great feeling when the student actually loves what you are teaching. And Netta was like that. And hopefully, this podcast doesn't get back to her, but she did cry the day I left.

Melissa ([04:50](#)):

The TALMA experience, also created friends and colleagues that Benjamin will remember for life.

Benjamin ([04:57](#)):

They are such a wonderful group. We were actually all of us, very sad to leave. And we are still in touch in our WhatsApp group. We'll get the occasional happy birthday or happy new year or happy Passover. One of the Israeli advisors is a wonderful guy – a wonderful guy named Guy. He flew over to the States to do kind of an east coast road trip. And he stopped in DC and Baltimore for a day and saw a bunch of us. We were a really, really tight-knit group and I'm so glad to know them. They were just wonderful.

Melissa ([05:29](#)):

Overall TALMA has been a memorable, positive experience for Benjamin both personally and professionally.

Benjamin ([05:36](#)):

This has absolutely made me a better teacher. That first year with TALMA flew me straight out of my comfort zone. My first class in Ashkelon was so different from anything I had done in America. I had to learn how to be comfortable with noise, how to you know change our lesson plan with a moment's notice. Obviously, I had to work with a younger group of kids. And then just overcoming a language barrier is difficult as well. And we paid a lot of attention to what's called SEL - social, emotional learning, and education. Our orientation at TALMA, we spent a lot of time thinking about two years of the pandemic, however long the conflict was last year and acknowledging what our kids had been through. And also what it's like to, you know, to be a young person these days. I mean I turned 27 last month. I was in middle school, not all that long ago, but middle school has changed quite a bit. Even just the presence of technology in kids' lives. And I'll say the experience of being in middle school has changed quite a bit. And I've taken that here to Baltimore a lot as well.

Melissa ([06:42](#)):

From the travel arrangements to the food, to the lodging, Benjamin says having all those creature comforts taken care of makes their work as teachers so much easier.

Benjamin ([06:53](#)):

We are so thankful for everything The Associated does for us. And as far as why I think The Associated should continue their support of the TALMA fellowship, it is helping the Ashkelon students, the young people of Ashkelon to realize their own confidence and potential in learning a new language. And English is not an easy language to learn. It really isn't. But the work that TALMA does with the help of The Associated is raising these kids' confidence. It is helping them branch out into areas of study that they didn't think they would.

Melissa ([07:32](#)):

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