



The troupe offers high-school students a four-month after-school course that teaches the basics of improvisational acting and on-stage expression. (Courtesy)

emotions or opinions.”

The group picked a challenging environment when they teamed up with the Lod Municipality and local activists in offering high-school students a four-month after-school course that teaches the basics of improvisational acting and on-stage expression.

The Guys From Ichilov will pick 20 at-risk teens in the ninth to 11th grades at schools around Lod. The students will need to pass an audition and receive a recommendation from the school principal to participate. At the end of the course, they will stage a play showing the progress they’ve made.

“The idea here is to work from the bottom up at the grassroots level,” Tsimerman says. “The youth aren’t the only section of the population with which we work. We’ve decided to focus on a very specific, particular part of the population. Not only do we have a special love and affinity for the energy that young people exude, but also there’s belief that this is where we have the power to foment real change. In a few years, these young people are going to be in our shoes.”

LOD HAS become the focus of renewed attention in recent years among social activists who are not only looking to rehabilitate one of the country’s most crime-ridden, poverty-stricken localities, but are also eager to provide young people with an alternative to the prohibitively expensive cost of living in more attractive areas like metropolitan Tel Aviv.

Last year, the level of crime in the city compelled the Public Security Ministry to map the town according to “crime zones.” Security cameras were installed in the areas hardest hit by recidivist crime, and Lod became the first city in which the municipality deployed a community policing unit to keep the peace. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, Lod was home to 18 percent of all murders in the country in 2010.

Despite this seemingly grim reality, however, the city to which Israelis often refer as “the drug capital” is now home to a growing number of youths who want to make a difference and change perceptions nationwide.

“My husband began to volunteer and get more involved in social and community-oriented work, and he was just enchanted by this city and its multicul-

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(Ariel Zilber)

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– Arina Tsimerman

turalism, its special qualities, and the challenges it faces,” says Amit-Miller, a computer engineer who has been a fixture with The Guys from Ichilov since its inception in 2003.

“He introduced me to people from the city, and the city itself, and I fell in love with Lod just as he did,” she says. “We spent a lot of time in the city, until last April, when we both decided to take our son and move here. Since then we’ve become intimately familiar with the city from within. We’ve gotten to know a lot of people, and we really feel at home, for better or worse.”

Altering people’s perception of Lod is a gradual, painstaking process that will need to involve both public institutions and local businesses that stand to benefit from the community’s revival. Riki Mekler, a woman in her late 20s who took up residence in the city as part of the Garin Torani religious movement, is nurturing this relationship through her position as head of the Lod Foundation’s community and business forum.

“Our goal is to liaise between the business community and the residents, and also to initiate projects that are jointly supported by companies for the benefit of the communities,” she says. “I create all of these relationships and collaborations.”

The after-school initiative with The Guys from Ichilov was made possible by a donation from Makhteshim Agan, an international company based in Airport City that specializes in crop protection technologies. Mekler believes that com-

munity outreach from the corporate world is the key to setting Lod on a path toward prosperity.

“Lod is a city whose troubles are known to all, but on the other hand, there is a growing awareness of its potential,” she says. “It’s located in the center of the country, so if the city gets the appropriate push forward, it could reach greater heights than it has known in the past. There are also the local companies that have headquarters in the northern industrial zone of the city, so my department works with them by acting as a go-between and making sure that their needs are met by the municipality. I make sure that the municipality provides parking permits... shuttle service to the train station, and employee benefits.”

Tapping into the potential of the local population has become a top priority for those who are concerned for the welfare of the city. Empowering the city’s youth through innovative, interactive programs is one way to provide an alternative to the bare-knuckled realities of the neighborhood streets.

“Just by walking around the city, we’ve run into people who want to tell their story,” says Amit-Miller. “There are many stories that just aren’t heard enough. I’ve been in Playback Theater for years and I’m really aware of the efficiency and potency that this tool offers. And I’m very happy that we’ve finally found an entry point into the city, and I hope it becomes one of many.”



New York, playback has the actors on stage mimic the audience’s everyday experiences in their own satirical fashion. The technique, which came to Israel 15 years ago, finds expression in Playback Theater, a network of improv groups that perform all around the country.

“It spread pretty rapidly and insanely,” says Tsimerman, a lawyer by profession. “Since it was brought to Israel, it is something that can be integrated in any educational, developmental and organizational framework, whether it’s an organization that is undergoing a metamorphosis or a change in thinking, or whether it’s processes involving teaching groups or study groups or settling conflicts.”

She adds that “Playback Theater makes its impact felt whenever there is something challenging that it needs to tackle, like conflict between people or gaps between people, anything that requires coming together or bringing people closer together, whether it’s dealing with