

# Global Connections

**PJ Library helps Israeli volunteers share Jewish resources around the world – thanks to an incredible partnership.**

**BY RACHEL KOZUPSKY, DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS**

Last March, Rotem and Agam arrived in Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic. The two Israeli young adults were on a mission to engage with the local Jewish community, share Jewish resources and PJ Library books, and build connections to Israel. The Jewish community in the Dominican Republic is passionate yet small, with a synagogue and Chabad house to serve some 200 people and a Jewish kindergarten for about 13 children. The visit from these two Jewish emissaries helped them feel part of the larger Jewish world.

Rotem and Agam were volunteering as ShinShinim, specially trained Israeli high-school graduates who embark on a year of service in Jewish communities around the world prior to their mandatory Israeli military service. Organized by The Jewish Agency for Israel, the ShinShinim program encourages these young ambassadors to volunteer in summer camps, youth movements, community centers, and schools, bringing Israeli and Jewish culture to life across the global Jewish diaspora.

Rotem and Agam were among the first ShinShinim to incorporate PJ Library into their work. With a little extra training, they learned how to use PJ Library books and educational resources to enhance the communal connections they create and help foster a stronger Jewish identity in children.

The Jewish Agency's partnership with PJ Library was a natural fit, according to Amira Ahronoviz, The Jewish Agency's CEO and director general. PJ Library distributes books in seven languages and in over 35 countries, yet PJ Library doesn't have teams on the ground in every location. Meanwhile, the Agency serves Jewish communities in 66 countries and has trained educators all over the world.

"As a global organization, The Jewish Agency works to secure a vibrant Jewish future by strengthening Jewish identity and connecting Jews to one another and to Israel," Ahronoviz says. "As part of our work in communities, we



**Visiting ShinShinim led Purim activities for Jewish children in the Dominican Republic.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE JEWISH AGENCY FOR ISRAEL

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KARIN ZINGEREVITZ

recognized PJ Library as a unique educational initiative and partner for accomplishing these goals. Together we are truly able to multiply our impact within local communities."

Adds Karin Zingerevitz, PJ Library's regional director for Latin America, Spain, and Portugal, "The PJ Library–Jewish Agency partnership is so successful because we complement each other. The Jewish Agency has a vast global footprint and trained educators; PJ Library has books and educational materials to be enjoyed by local communities for years to come. The Agency not only reaches populations that PJ Library currently doesn't serve, but its teams enhance our existing programs by bringing the books to life through local events. We can make a meaningful difference together."

PJ Library began training ShinShinim in July 2021. Before they depart on their global missions, these volunteers visit the headquarters of Sifriyat Pijama, PJ Library's sister program in Israel. There they select books that spark their interest and that have been translated into the language spoken in their assigned country. They then create

programming based on those books, teaching Jewish values and imparting the joy of Jewish holidays and Israeli culture.

Rotem and Agam started their mission in Mexico City, engaging with some 1,300 Jewish students across eight schools and a local JCC. They next visited smaller Jewish communities throughout Mexico before traveling to Colombia and the Dominican Republic. In Santo Domingo one weekend, the ShinShinim led Friday night Shabbat services and a Saturday morning Shabbat lunch. Later, families gathered as they hosted educational storytime sessions for Purim and Tu B'Shevat based on the PJ Library books *A Queen in Jerusalem* and *The Abba Tree*.

"Some of the families [in the Dominican Republic] didn't know about PJ Library and that it existed," says Sharon Kusner, The Jewish Agency's liaison to PJ Library in the Americas. "We explained about it and why it's meaningful for the families and the kids. We opened a new channel of communication with a new community that most of the world doesn't even look to."

One of the ShinShinim's favorite activities was based on the Sifriyat Pijama book *Saba Sabich*, which was translated into Spanish (*El Abuelo Sabij*) and delivered to PJ Library families in Latin America. The book tells the story of an Israeli grandfather who shares his name, Sabich, with a popular Jewish Iraqi pita sandwich.

The two ShinShinim designed a program around the book, exploring students' family roots, holiday foods that are special to them, and where their own names may have originated. This meaningful activity helped illustrate the beautiful cultural diversity among Jewish people worldwide.

PJ Library's global reach impacts families profoundly. About 97 percent of Latin American families say they feel supported in having conversations about Jewish topics because of PJ Library books. An overwhelming majority of families say they read the books often and feel the content is appropriate for their families.

The partnership with The Jewish Agency has also sparked new opportunities. After the ShinShinim visited the Jewish community in Paraguay, PJ Library launched a new program in the South American country, thanks to generous funding partners who support this joint initiative. Now PJ Library reaches 130 children there each month.

Currently, there are PJ Library-trained ShinShinim placed in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay and upcoming plans to visit Jewish communities in Guatemala and Peru.

"By connecting as many Jewish children as possible to the wider network of PJ Library and Jewish heritage," says Ahronoviz, "we defy physical borders and continents and impart upon the next generation the true importance of *arvut hadadit* (the mutual responsibility of Jews to one another)." ■

## PJ LIBRARY INTERNATIONAL FUND

**From apartment buildings in bustling cities** to houses in remote villages, more than 650,000 children take part each month (without realizing it!) in one of the world's largest shared Jewish experiences. A PJ Library storybook is much more than a special moment in a family's bedtime routine. These treasured monthly gifts connect Jewish communities around the world and help families develop their Jewish identities.

PJ Library's ability to deliver stories in over 35 countries is only possible with crucial support. In 2021, PJ Library launched the International Fund with the mission to bring families the gift of storybooks regardless of local resources.

"In the US, it's easier to feel connected to a Jewish community, especially in larger metropolitan cities. The need to connect Jewishly outside the US is great. For children to be able to read a book and know there are other kids around the world who share the same traditions, holidays, and religion is everything. Even more powerful is when kids see themselves in the stories they receive and realize they are connected to other children in all corners of the world," says Shiva Beck, a PJ Library parent, Jewish Agency board member, and supporter of the PJ Library-Jewish Agency partnership.

"My family left Iran when I was a little girl. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the PJ Library book *A Persian Princess*. I saw my family's story being shared around the world, connecting my children and me to kids across the globe. This is why the PJ Library-Jewish Agency partnership is so important to me: Together we can do much more, globally."

Join Shiva and supporters around the world with a gift to the PJ Library International Fund. Visit [pjlibrary.org/donate](https://pjlibrary.org/donate).