



Israeli teens get small taste of S.F. Latino life

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Writer Franklin Foer may have answered a lot of questions regarding international trade with his book “How Soccer Explains the World,” but the America-Israel Friendship League answered a lot of questions about international camaraderie with a simple soccer match.

The local branch of the 30-year-old organization brought 15 Israeli teens to San Francisco last month for a weeklong whirlwind tour. And as soon as the Israelis and a group of Latino youths from the Mission Language and Vocational School got outside for a little partido de f•tbol, a successful meeting was assured.

“The goal of this trip was to have the Israeli kids have a San Francisco experience, get to know the community, the school system and us,” said Wendy Kenin, the regional executive director of the America-Israel Friendship League.

“And the meeting with the Latino kids was really a highlight, because it exposed them to a particular subculture in the United States. And that really opened their eyes to the similarities and challenges youth share around the world.”

The Israeli and San Franciscan teens both shared similar ambitions to become doctors, computer CEOs and firefighters. Yet the Israelis’ talk of their coming military hitches was an eye-opener for the California kids.

But not all the Israelis saw was roses, soccer games and pizza parties. The Latino youth were more than sympathetic to Israelis’ worries about terrorism, because they, too, live in neighborhoods stricken by random violence. Kenin noted that many of the Latino teens made sure to pick up a pipe or bottle before walking home in twilight.

Even with the constant specter of terrorism, however, the Israeli teens told Kenin they still feel safe

walking the streets.

Prior to meeting with the Latino youths in the Mission, the Israelis went to school with the children of their host families. The 16-year-olds grabbed a knapsack and went off to classes at Lowell, Gateway, the School of the Arts, City Arts and Tech high schools.

Many simply went through an ordinary American school day, but some social studies or history teachers gave the floor to their guests and turned the class period into a Q-&-A session.

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