**Statement of Contribution to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

**Ira Wolfson**

**For the first part of my life, I lived in the beautiful, albeit sheltered and largely homogenous kibbutz of `Degania B’ in Israel. When I was twelve, we relocated to a small town in Southern Galilee. One of the most significant advantages of this move was the high school I attended, the “Kadoori Agricultural School”, which served the surrounding population. This institution accommodated three religious groups: Jews, Christians, and Muslims, with diverse cultural identities such as Circassians, Arabs, and Russian immigrants. By the end of our first year of high school, we were no longer strangers but had become friends.**

**As a teenager, I participated in an excellence program promoting love of the environment. In this capacity, I would provide guided tours and lectures across Israel’s nature reserves with student groups. Out of respect for the “insider’s view,” I made it a point to include a local guide who could contribute their unique perspective on the region-specific history and culture. I came to believe that diversity is a blessing with the potential to broaden horizons and promote mutual respect and understanding. In a conflict-stricken reality, I also undertook intensive Arabic courses, hoping to bridge harsh language and cultural barriers.**

**Physics as a Driver for Change**

**As I progressed in my academic studies, I realized I could help introduce students to the sciences, who may not otherwise have the same opportunities I did. While studying towards my M.Sc. and Ph.D., I first participated in and later led the “Physics for a Future” program in Yeruham. At the time, Yeruham was still a struggling peripheral town. Only a third of the local population had obtained a high school diploma or a more advanced education, whereas the national high school completion rate was over 70%. A contributing factor to the educational crisis was the physical isolation of Yeruham. Thus, with low levels of education and local factories shutting down, 33% of the population was below the poverty line. Combining these factors, the average adolescent lacked opportunities for positive engagement and was unlikely to break the poverty cycle. Physics for the Future aimed to tip these scales and provide more favourable outcomes.**

**The program targeted high school students who would not initially be driven to pursue such a demanding subject area. We wanted to provide them with the experience of success and encourage self-efficacy, while formally being recognized and receiving valuable accreditation. In turn, these youths would gain social mobility, serve as role models, and initiate a `cascade of success’. Yeruham placed a special emphasis on getting talented girls into physics and made sure to include female role models as part of the scientific staff.**

**I was the academic manager of the “Physics for a Future” program for two years, taking responsibility for the successful matriculation of over 80 students. With a high grade in physics, they would be able to pursue a college degree in STEM. I knew this was a critical milestone as all of these students were to be first-generation academic degree holders.**

**These students were going to be exposed to academia and international scientific collaborations, and it was my task to prepare them. For this reason, I led the entire class of 2018 on a scientific trip to CERN. To facilitate this process, I created a unique curriculum for a group of high school students to study particle physics at an introductory level. By just seeing the monumental work at CERN, I believed it would broaden their horizons and change their self-perception.**

**I am glad to report that the project was a huge success. An overwhelming majority of the students received their high school diplomas with notably high grades in physics. This allowed them to later pursue an academic degree, usually in STEM or related fields.**

**For instance, these beautiful and exciting projects included work studying sand dune formation by simulating sand in desert conditions using an aquarium and vibration plate. A selection of my students won national prizes for their projects. Ultimately, Yeruham’s reputation has been changing, thanks to these brilliant, hard-working, determined, and inspiring students.**

**Science Communication as a Mission**

**Throughout my period as a graduate student, I was and remain engaged in various aspects of science communication. I strongly believe in the equalizing force of education, specifically scientific literacy. It has been my experience that many of the scientists in Israel are members of a similar socio-economic and ethnic background. However, I believe that no one group holds a mandate over the truth or the privilege of higher education, and firmly believe we should encourage this slowly changing state of affairs. My primary contribution to this is by supporting the culture of science literacy. In the past, I created a blog dedicated to explaining complex physics concepts in laypeople’s terms. It recently resulted in my becoming a member of the `Mada Gadol BaKtana’ (Little Big Science) – a volunteer-based organization dedicated to promoting scientific literacy.**