



Overcoming Barriers: The Challenges in Creation of Educational Framework for Stateless Children In Israel

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Abstract

There are approximately 4,500 children ages 0-3 of migrant workers, refugees, and asylum seekers living in Israel whose non-resident status does not permit them to receive social and medical rights. Non-status parents are not eligible for subsidized day care and can hardly afford private settings. The solution for these children has been placement in neglectful early childhood settings (called "children's warehouses" or "pirate nurseries"). The children in these settings are exposed to extreme conditions of risk and neglect, as well as emotional, physical, and motor functioning harm due to spending long hours in playpens and not receiving enough attention to their basic needs. Furthermore, children after the age of 3 are only in school for part of the day, and are then bussed to the pirate day care centers for after school care, where they too are neglected.

UNITAF holds unique pedagogical model that was established in response to these neglectful frameworks. At the model, former pirate caregivers are given training and supervision, and then moved, with their charges, into properly coded and furnished day care centers. The Unitaf model was developed by a group of educators and social workers, with the aim of empowering the community. The model would establish independent small business that could provide employment to women from the community and quality day care solutions for the children.

The caregivers are women from West Africa and asylum seekers from Eritrea, who fled war, famine, and dictatorships, seeking a better future. They receive ongoing support and training from Unitaf's pedagogical instructors and social workers.

The caregivers from the foreign community together with social workers and educators form a staff working under close educational supervision: The teachers have an operating contract, obligating them to adhere to appropriate standards for child care. The environment is pleasant and learning-conducive. Care is given to create a pluralistic atmosphere where children from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds can spend long hours together and flourish. The trained nannies run the business independently, creating for themselves opportunities for economic independent and professional growth.

Keywords: Early ages Child care, Migrants, refugees, educational frameworks

Introduction

In the last two decades, Israel has experienced a rapid influx of foreign residents. A significant number of these are refugees from Eritrea, who fled armed conflict and persecution in their native country, arrived at the Israel-Egypt border on foot, and sought asylum from IDF soldiers.

Today, it is estimated that some 60,000 refugees reside in Israel², primarily in the Greater Tel Aviv area. This influx of refugees posed a serious challenge for the City of Tel Aviv, which became home to a vulnerable and needy population that was not eligible for the national educational, healthcare and welfare benefits normally allotted to Israeli citizens.

Due to governmental policy, thousands of children have no legal status and therefore no access to basic social rights such as health, welfare and preschool education.

The Israeli state allows the asylum seekers from to stay in Israel, as obligated by the International convention of the UN but is not interested in their permanent staying in Israel. The country offers them a temporary shelter, but will not offer them status or social rights, as a part of the aspiration to remain a Jewish state with a Jewish majority. Presently the state will not take any social responsibility for this community, only in case of extreme and immediate danger. This policy leaves thousands of children exposed to daily neglect and abuse.

In lack of other solutions, foreign parents must provide livelihood to their families and put their children in pirate kindergartens that were established by women from the foreign community. Due to lack of awareness and resources of the community, the children spend long hours in overcrowded and

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² Israel Population and Migration bureau website, April 2017



endangering frames, with no proper infrastructure or equipment. The children are exposed to extreme situations of desolation and negligence, with one nanny taking care of 20-30 babies and toddlers for 10-14 hours daily. The children are often “caged” in cribs and playpens, the hygiene is poor, and the children are exposed to many safety hazards. Needless to say there is no educational work that is being done with these children. Because of lack of attention, these children tend to be indifferent, and we witness many children that are not crying nor laughing, as a result of an indifferent environment, that is not reacting to their physical or emotional needs.

Today, over 4800 children suffer from the poor reality that the pirate kindergarten creates. These children are considered as children in high risk situation, because of the poor environment. They suffer from many developmental setbacks and emotional deprivation. These gaps continue to influence the children on their way to the Israeli schools, and a lot of them are being directed to special schools because of their difficulties.

The Unitaf model: bottom- up solution for lack of civil rights

At 2005 UNITAF initiation of educational and social workers started: Nongovernmental Organization that empowers care givers from the community. With ongoing pedagogic guiding and system of social services we succeed creating well-functioning and decent preschool frames for children with no Israeli status. Today UNITAF provides home for more than 430 babies and toddlers in 13 different frames: Day care centers, Nurseries and Afterschool programs.

At the UNITAF centers, children are cared for by women from the foreign community, who have been especially trained by Israeli educators to run the daycare facilities in a professional and compassionate manner, while still preserving the cultural heritage of the children. The environment is pleasant and learning-conducive. Each child receives three nutritious meals a day, individual attention, mental stimulation and emotional support. Experts are on hand to diagnose potential developmental problems and to arrange treatment if necessary, and give special attention to the children that arrived recently from Sinai. Care is given to create a pluralistic atmosphere where children from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds can spend long hours together and flourish. The trained nannies run the business independently, but are obliged to meet up with Israeli standards and criteria.

By involving the participation of women in the business model, UNITAF provides a unique professional-economic opportunity: to work and act under the umbrella provided by the activities of the Social Involvement Foundation. The foundation provides a whole package of subsidies, professional training and follow-up. On their part, these women commit to act in accordance with Israeli standards of children and infant care. Moreover, they accept the Foundation's close supervision as respect to the quality of care given to the children (for example, prohibition of any sort of violence against the children, the staff-children ratio in the classroom, appropriate working hours according to the needs of the community, etc.).

Kindergarten teachers and aides from the foreign community are joined by many volunteers who provide support. They work under close educational supervision and guidance, constituting professional on-the-job training. The work model in the child care centers includes reinforcing the single mothers and gives rise to female leadership that affects the whole community.

Overcoming policy buriens:

On March 2015 turning point showed with the tragic death of five children at the pirate kindergartens. Unitaf was presented as dissent and community creation model for solving the impact of pirate kindergarten on foreigners children. Governmental decision dedicated 14 million to the establishment of new facilities. At January 2017 the first governmental funded day-care of Unitaf opened, signing a new brighter era for the foreign community in Israel.