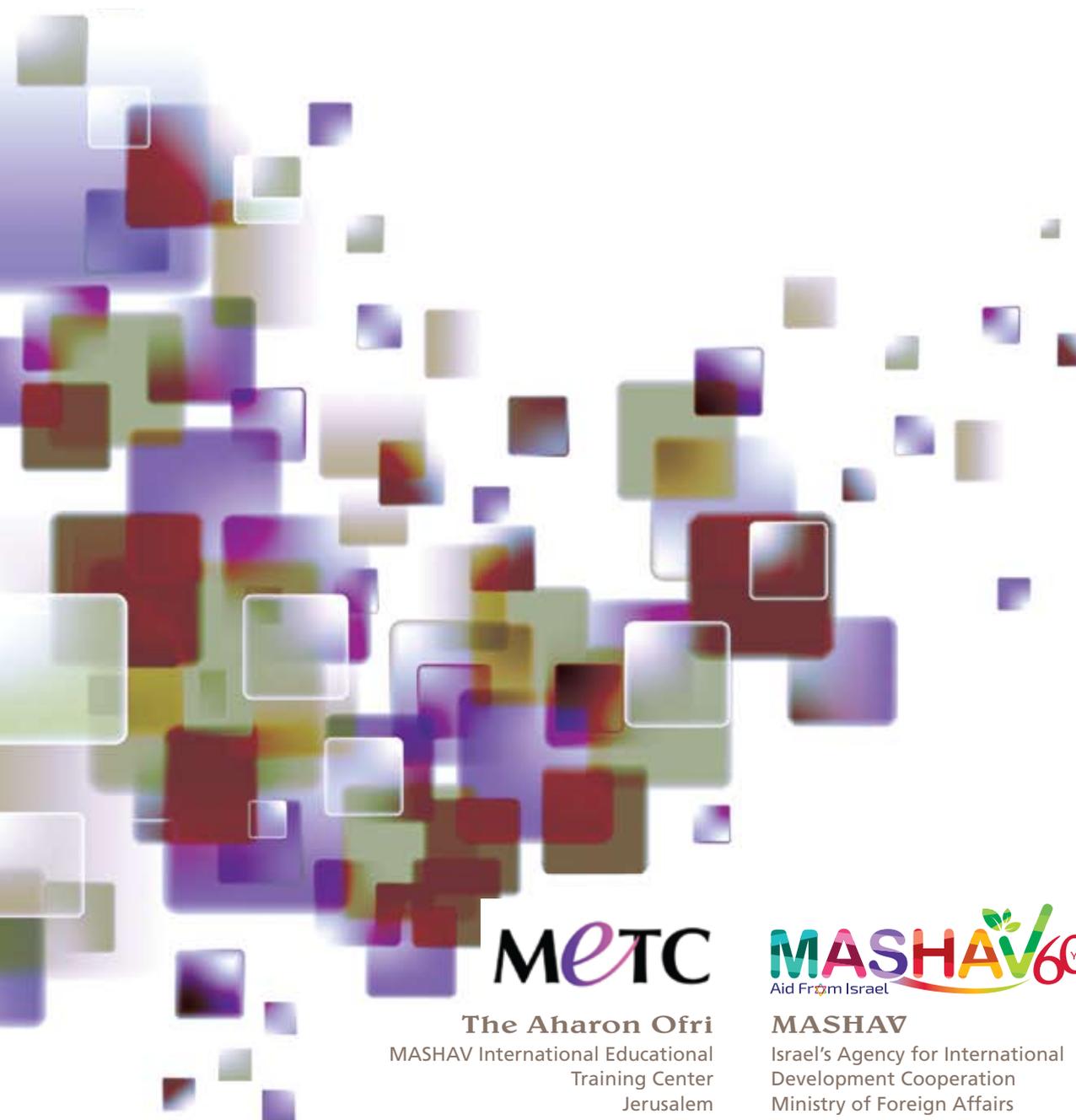




State of Israel

YOUTH AT RISK: Preventing Student Dropouts and Facilitating Reintegrations



MeTC

The Aharon Ofri
MASHAV International Educational
Training Center
Jerusalem

MASHAV 60 Years
Aid From Israel

MASHAV
Israel's Agency for International
Development Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Foreword

The MASHAV Educational Training Center, A. Ofri –METC established in 1989 as a professional educational training affiliated with MASHAV-Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation, a department within the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since its establishment, METC has trained thousands of education professionals from all over the developing world, equipping them with the knowledge, expertise and experience cultivated over the course of the state of Israel's own development process, and shared by top experts in the fields of education and social development. Through the sharing of Israeli knowhow and expertise in these fields, METC invests in human resource enrichment and capacity building in order to contribute to global efforts to achieve social, economic, and environmental sustainable development.

Within the framework of the 2030 education agenda, many stakeholders are advocating for the introduction of a learning-related goal as the most appropriate way to monitor educational progress and the prevention of early dropout rates and reducing inequality. A range of interventions aimed at expanding access and improving quality have helped to reduce dropout. Accessibility initiatives have been created in terms of improving quality, as well as initiatives to improve teacher training and support, provide relevant and modern learning materials and integrate technology and gender-sensitive practices. Yet school dropout remains a persistent concern.

Every nation today is involved in the challenging process of providing quality education to meet the new demands of the 21st century. Educational systems have to develop innovative outreach programs for these school dropouts, focusing all efforts on creating positive conditions and individual skills that will foster resiliency and offset risk factors. This goal presents a great challenge that must be met with creativity, resourcefulness and hard work.

However, "access" is complex and multifaceted. For those young people, the educational system takes on a special significance. Therefore, it is especially crucial to create educational opportunities to widen access to education, the professional educators who constantly mediate between students and the world around them must be supportive and caring when working with this special-needs group. Educators must create opportunities and impart skills, multiple opportunities for meaningful learning experiences, competencies and attitudes that will enable these adolescents to be productive and resourceful members of society.

Relaying on the educational and pedagogical philosophy of Janusz Korczak that "Children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today. They are entitled to be taken seriously. They have a right to be treated by adults with tenderness and respect, as equals", we share this booklet to fulfill MASHAV and METC's overall mission to share with the educational systems in the developing world tools to overcome development challenges, and elicit sustainable transformation within each of their countries' own societies according to their own needs.

As we believe that inspiring by success experiences we chose to display six different educational approaches and models that developed by Israeli experts from the public and private sectors, civil society/NGOs and academia in Israel. Each of the following articles offers a different perspective on policy for the prevention of student dropout and the development of innovative approaches to this challenge.

The 'Personalized Services Approach': A central component to work with youth at risk

Chaim Lahav, PhD*



This position paper presents the "Personalized Services Approach" (P.S.A), which was originally developed for the management and marketing arena and was later adapted for use at the social services. This document studies the possible implementation of the method as part of the educational-therapeutic services given to young people and youth at risk in Israel. These services aim at providing an individually tailored treatment for each person, as a central principle. This approach enables the managers of such services to provide a holistic-integrative service that can tackle the various and complex issues typical to youth at risk. This document details the approach components and their practical manifestation in a working model for youth at risk.

Background and rationale:

One of the major challenges at the core of developing social services for complex and multi-problematic populations is the issue of adjusting the service for the individual patient (also referred to as "the tailor-made treatment"). In order to meet this challenge, we observe a growing use of the P.S.A approach, originally developed for the marketing area of management sciences to manufacture and market services and products with an optimal fit for the client's profile and his specific needs (Stuart & Gharabaghi, 2010).

Complex dilemmas are created when one moves the P.S.A approach from the business marketing management world into social marketing management (for welfare/health/education services etc.), as well as numerous advantages to which this position paper relates. According to this approach, P.S.A is a social policies response, which is better suited to the "customer" needs, enabling efficiency and flexibility of making services accessible in the fields of health, education or social welfare.

Carr (2008) claims that this approach has the best potential for planning and organizing intervention plans for complex and multi-problematic populations, including youth and teenagers at risk. This approach, currently being implemented in 150 municipalities (cities, local and regional councils) in Israel, provides services for the teenagers and youth risk, enabling

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response to a wide range of needs and in areas required by young people and youth at risk on their way towards independent adult life.

P.S.A in the professional literature

The P.S.A approach was introduced by production and marketing organizations in the early 1980's. Various definitions were given for the term "personalization" in the literature. Hanson (2000) defined "personalization" as a unique form of product differentiation, which allows personalizing the solution for a given individual. Imhoff, Lofits & Geiger (2001) defined "personalization" as "the society ability to identify and treat its customers as individuals." Coner (2003) defined "personalization" as society performance based on adaptation of content for an individual customer at the end of the production and marketing chain. The use of this approach has broadened with time, taking different forms (Michelsson, 2005), and adopted for use by social organizations providing human resources to different populations in the fields of education, welfare and health.

During the shift of using this approach from the business world to the social world, the term has changed into "providing personalized services to customers". This terminology is especially directed at developing and making welfare, health and education services accessible to unique, multi-problematic and complex populations as a solution for their specific and unique needs and distress. Included among these groups are young people groups and their families, such as disabled youth and youth with special needs, youth at risk or disconnected. These services operate based on the same principles as in the business world, including personalized planning, with the final goal to meet and respond to each client's unique and complex needs, to be able to receive services from different experts and by different providers. The effort to operate customer-personalized services is currently a broad, aiming at truly meeting the customer needs (Evans 2012).

Implementation of the P.S.A model approach:

The P.S.A approach has developed globally as part of organizational and institutional practice in two major routes: first – the organization (public or voluntary) produces the product/service, and then the customer arrives and defines his needs in relation to the pre-existing product/service. At this stage, the organization allows the customer to choose among existing products only, and

defines what he chooses, and when and how he requests to receive his needs. With this operation model, the organization is the active component throughout, and it is the organization itself the one that plans and makes the service accessible to the relevant customers while the customer himself has only one role – to choose among the products on the organization "shelf".

In the second route, the customer defines to the organization, upfront, what his needs are and what is the purpose of the product/service, and how the product/service should be made accessible to him. This is done prior to when the organization starts the design and manufacture of the product/service. In this operation model, both the customer and the organization are active, planning together the required product/service from day one, followed by making the product/service accessible, as defined by the customer himself. In terms of production and operation, the organization is "profiling" the product or service after the personalization has been done.

Hatton & Waters (2011) claim that the P.S.A approach in social services guarantees that the individuals who need treatment and support will also be recognized as people with strengths and preferences, hence they should control the way they live their lives. As part of the "personalized" approach of social services, customers become partners in planning or choosing services. This approach, in the field of educational social services for young people and youth at risk should meet the need to adapt a personalized response for every customer, defined by his unique needs (short and long term), taking into consideration his life environment (family/friends/community). As a result, not only the customer is empowered, the response itself is adapted to environmental components such as culture/society/family etc., which also influence the customer's empowerment.

Principles for managing and operating the P.S.A approach in social services:

Five major assumptions underlie the P.S.A approach management in services and social organizations:

1. The customers know what they need.
2. The customers have abilities, qualities, desires and various wishes for the future.
3. The customers are usually part of broader support networks inside the family, with friends and in communities.
4. The customers can often define better how the treatment can be suited for their needs.
5. The customers need a feeling of personal control over decisions related to social services they receive (Morgan, 2010).

As an outcome of these assumptions, there are several basic operation principles, which affect the rate of success, including:

- Listening to the customer voice (in our case, youth at risk) as early as the identification and characterization of the urgent needs he requires.
- Taking into account that each client has connections and interactions with additional elements around him (in relation to youth at risk: family, friends, school, work place etc.), which influence his life. Therefore, these elements should be considered when the product/service is being designed.
- Remember that customers live in different cultural environments (in relation to youth at risk: immigrants, religion/beliefs etc.), which often produce conflicts and difficulties, which might significantly influence the service outcomes.
- Take into account that the answers related to different professions and organizations already exist in the community, and a coordinating system for collaboration and cooperation should be established.

“Tools” for management and operation of the model, in the services for youth at risk:

Three different operation models are implemented in Israel to manage programs for young people and youth at risk following the P.S.A approach: 1. **Assignment of a “Case Manager” for each customer.** This function should oversee the whole system, accompany and provide multi-aspect treatment to each customer. Practically, it includes the coordination of all the activities done with an individual customer by a reliable professional function who takes care for all customer needs. 2. **Establishment of a holistic and integrative treatment system** (“umbrella” organization). This platform ensures that all community service organizations for young people and youth at risk report – to a single managerial function, in order to enable mobility and making these services accessible to each customer, according to his needs. 3. **Pooling resources among inter-organizational and extra-organizational services** (“wraparound model”). This model has been developed in the US, in order to generate programs to prevent placing youth at risk in external institutions. In fact, the “wraparound model” tries to find answers in the community for young people who are at the severe end of risk. This program relies on collaboration among all the bodies that treat youth at risk in the community, and the youth’s families.

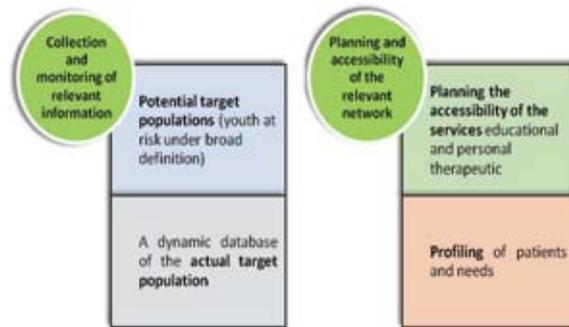


Diagram of the implementation process for the P.S.A in the organization/service:

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Technology, Entrepreneurship and Contributing to the Community

“Machshava Tova”* – Eco-Teck Project

Reducing social gaps by making technology accessible

Today, in Israel, which is considered a start-up nation, a significant digital gap still exists. Children and young people who grow up in the social and geographical periphery are not exposed to technology to the same extent as children and youth in the center of the country are. The technological gap translates later on into socio-economical gaps, hence preserving the digital gap, and more.

The “Machshava Tova” organization started in 2003, with the goal to narrow the social gaps by making technology accessible. The organization operates a large variety of technological training as well as establishes and operates community technological centers all over the country, where technological training of underprivileged populations take place. The organization works with children, youth at risk, people with disabilities, employment seekers and the third age.

Working with youth at risk

One of the target populations of “Machshava Tova” is youth at risk. There are several varied definitions for this term, and a broad range of characteristics. In ‘Machshava Tova’, we work with the whole range of youth, starting with a normative behavior teenager who was raised in a neighborhood or town where he cannot fulfill his potential, and up to a girl expelled from all educational institutions, who acts in a way that endangers her life, and lives in a closed hostel. Several organizations work to change the realities of youth at risk with various tools; we have chosen the technological tool.

Our objective is to expose the boys and girls to the technological world and the endless opportunities in it, and give them the tools and skills to control and change their futures.

Ecoteck project

The Ecoteck project was established in 2011 together with the Social Security’s Fund for children and youth at risk. The project started operating in Jerusalem, followed by several other places around the country: Lod, Kiryat Yam, Petah Tikva, Ashkelon, Kaucab abu el Hija, Zfat and more.

The project has three components:

1. Technological training – the major part of the project, where the boys and girls learn and professionalize a specific technological field. Currently, there are three technological programs: PC technician (a program where the participants are certified as PC technicians by Cisco’s academy); marketing in the digital era (where the participants learn how to build websites using Wix platform marketing on social networks); and application development (where the participants learn JAVA programming and development of Android apps).
2. NFTE program for business entrepreneurship – an international program operated in Israel by Joint “Ashalim”. In this program, the participants study the business entrepreneurship world, getting to know various terms such as market survey, SWOT model, marketing and more. The students build a business plan for an idea they initiate, and join a countrywide competition against other groups. This year, a “Machshava Tova” team, won the national competition and will be representing Israel in the international competition in New York.
3. Practical training and giving back to the community – during the summer break, at the end of the year, the different groups participate in practical training, where they use the various tools learned in order to contribute to their communities. In the technicians program, the

*“Machshava Tova”- The Hebrew meaning is Good Thought but it is a kind of words game due to the fact that the word computer in Hebrew is “Machashev” and the word thought is “Machshava” so the fusion “Machshava Tova”



participants fix computers which are donated to the community; in the digital marketing program, the participants build websites for social organization and local businesses, and in the application development program the participants develop a local app for community activities. In the framework of the training, various employment-related workshops are combined, such as writing a resume and preparation for job interviews.

In addition to these components, and in order to generate the desire to join the entrepreneurship and high tech worlds, we combine the courses with visits to high tech companies, and with meetings with entrepreneurs and key figures acting at the field learned at the course.

Impact of the project on the participants

Acquisition of technological tools and development in the technological world – during the project, the boys and girls learn and professionalize the use of technological tools, which will help them in their first steps in the field, and encourage additional professional development. In the results of the evaluation-questionnaires at the year-end, most of the graduates express their desire to continue developing and learning additional technological tools. In addition, during the training period the participants acquire practical experience in the field, which simulates working in the real employment world.

Development of soft skills – during the year, the participants experience presentation of their products in front of an audience, teamwork, facing challenges and failures, research and self-learning. These experiences support the development of social, learning and employment related skills.

Empowerment of the self-efficacy confidence of the participants – many of the project participants have experienced during their lives several failures, and, as a result, their self-efficacy is very low. They are easily despaired, and therefore when a girl succeeds in repairing a computer that was broken a moment ago, or a boy builds a website on his own, they earn a great feeling of value and confidence. In the evaluation questionnaires at the beginning and end of the course, a major improvement in the participants' self-efficacy and confidence is observed.

Transition from being a beneficiary to being a donor and strengthen the commitment for community contribution – during the year, the boys and girls acquire tools and skills, free of charge (or very low cost). During the training period, a revolution occurs where the youth become donors and contributors. They use the tools they have acquired in order

to give back to the community. This process empowers the youth, and introduces them to the value of commitment to society and community.

Significant elements in the success of the project

The success of the project is connected to few important elements:

Adaptation of the content to the population – there is a great importance to adaptation of the learned contents to the learners' population and its capabilities. For example, the application development course requires stronger concentration abilities than the computer technicians' course, in which a lot of "hands on" learning is performed; therefore, the first course would fit young people who can concentrate for a long time. A course, which is not adapted to the population, might generate more harm than benefit, and therefore we put a lot of thought in adapting the contents to the population.

Small groups and a personal attitude – we work with small groups of about 15 boys and girls, which enable providing personal approach for each participant, help him overcome the obstacles on the way, and give him the best environment for success. Each group has a professional instructor and a social guide, and most of the times an additional assistant, in order to increase the coaching ratio.

Partners – we are great believers in collaborations and partnerships. We are aware of our capabilities and our limitations, and therefore we always prefer to work with organizations, institutions and businesses that can provide the added value to the courses, where we are limited. Our partners come both from the social field and from the professional field. We work with youth villages, hostels, units for youth advancement who bring their experiences into the work with youth at risk, and with businesses and high tech companies who enrich the professional knowledge. Together, through cross-sectorial collaboration, we succeed in generating a broader influence.

Integrating graduates in "Machshava Tova" – we encourage our program graduates to continue taking part in the organization activities, either as students or as volunteers. Many of our graduates integrate in the organization's laboratories project where they volunteer fixing computers, which are contributed by business companies, and donate them to families in need and to social organizations. Some of our graduates have even continued their national service in "Machshava Tova".



Outreach Vans-Street work with Youth

“ELEM” – Organization for Youth in Distress in Israel

Founded in 1982, ELEM/Youth in Distress in Israel is the country's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to treating and transforming the lives of troubled youth. ELEM's 280 professionals and more than 1,700 volunteers do not wait for referrals to treat these youth, but seek them out on their turf – on the streets, in schools, on the Internet and at bars and nightclubs. The 25,000 young people we serve annually and the additional 100,000 youth who reach out to ELEM online each year face tremendous challenges, such as: domestic violence, substance abuse, neglect, bullying, homelessness and prostitution. ELEM works with secular and religious Jews; Christian and Muslim Arabs including Bedouins; immigrants, including those from the Former Soviet Union and Ethiopia; and the LGBT community. Many live on the streets and most of them will not seek help from traditional social service groups. Our 78 programs in 43 cities provide counseling, mentoring, vocational training and a safe space for Israeli youth to envision a positive future for themselves and become productive members of Israeli society.

Street work field

Tonight, as in any other night of the week, several youth and teenagers will go out and gather in gardens, parking lots, squares and parks. In some places around the country of Israel, tonight will be slightly different. In addition to these teenagers and youth, teams of volunteers will go out, led by a professional. They will usually come in a designated van, which was modified to allow seating and talking inside it, with food, blankets, warm and cold drinks, chairs and mats that create a special, unique space, for the team and the youth. Each evening, 4-6 team members will participate. They will come to this space and spend around 2 hours in it, and later they will leave for the location activity.

The space is different and unique by being a joint space. Its location is decided jointly by the youth and the teams,

to enable safe discussion, sufficient light but not too much light. So are the borders of the space, physical and emotional, its rules of behavior and conversation topics. All of these are designed, step by step, built alongside with the contacts developing among the team members and the youth and teenagers.

The main goal of meeting in the street is to generate a mutual relationship between the youth and the team members. The team members have the goal to become significant adults in the youth's lives. The significance of the contact with the “significant adult” is to provide a positive significance to the life of the young person, without expecting any return.

As we mentioned, the fact that most of the team is composed of volunteers is a significant element in the process. The young people meet adults who participate out of their own choice, without expecting any return, and, moreover, go out and come to meet the young people in their own area, in the garden or in the park. This dedication, the willingness to do it, is a facilitating factor in the building of the contact and trust.

This contact will, in the future, help the young person initiate a process of positive change in his life. The subject where the change should take place, and the process design, will be performed by the teenager and the volunteer, together. The knowledge does not reside with anyone of them; it exists and develops in the space of the mutual conversation between the adult and the teenager. The fact that most of the contact exists in the space they both created together, strengthens the contact and commitment to the process.

The range of difficulties and distress encountered by the street work teams is wide. Since the activity is carried out in the public space rather than in a club or center to reduce damage, the teams are prepared to handle and assist any event they meet during their stay on the street. The field of street work deals with a very wide range of

ages, from 12 to 26; the teams will help anyone who they meet on the street and needs assistance, although youth and young people are at the center of the activity.

Alongside the activities of the area, the team also conducts location activities. This activity takes place at the end of the activities in the “space”, in the late hours of the night. At this stage, the team will disperse in areas where there may be youth and young people who are unaware of the mobile activity or might not have the strength to reach out for the space. Often, the combination of the late hour and the locations in which the activity is carried out lead the teams to meet cases that require intervention in times of crisis such as emergency overnight hosting, calling a social worker related to the youth law, and, sometimes, involving police forces.

In general, the fact that the encounters take place in the teenagers’ natural environment enables the staff to observe some of the troubles and difficulties in real time. These include issues of physical, sexual and verbal violence, consumption of consciousness altering compounds, drugs and alcohol alongside dropouts and vandalism. This complex reality leads to the fact that more than once the team will meet both the victim and the victimizer in the same place, both of whom are part of the target population of the team. The staff will try to connect with both of them, with the thought that only working with both sides can lead to long-term change. In other cases, there might be criminal elements at the margins of the space. In such cases, the staff will strive to work alongside them in order not to generate objections, and to allow continued work with the youth.

The work on the street leads the teams to position themselves as community elements, and in addition to providing individual assistance to youth and young people, the teams work on the macro level to help the communities from which the youth come. For example, inform the authorities that street lighting in the area should be improved, address alarms that interfere with neighbors’ rest, and request to install speed bumpers on relevant roads. In addition, the team often brings services that are relevant to the youth and make them accessible to the youth within the space, such as social workers, representatives of the education system, the IDF and others, to join the mobile team and interact with their target populations in the area, and sometimes even provide solutions at the same time.

The work of the professional leading the team does not end with the completion of the street work. During

the rest of the week, he will continue to contact the youth with whom he has a relationship in the area. He will personally accompany them to relevant community professionals and during different procedures, will assist in obtaining legal representation and at the welfare offices, meet the educational field officer in charge (based on the Compulsory Education Law) and if needed, will drive them to a boarding school which may be appropriate for them.

The professionals also make sure to hold round table meetings once a quarter with relevant professional partners and interested parties, in order to present the situation of youth and young people in the community in which they operate, as well as to act for change, to engage partners with their actions and to formulate future work plans. The social and public action in these cases is no less important than the individual assistance to a single young person.

The work of the professionals takes place on an ongoing basis and does not stop at street work. Nevertheless, the encounter on the street is at the core, the driving force, the anchor. Our actions are derived by the commitment for the youth, the commitment that the team chooses to undertake, this is what leads the team out to the streets time after time, and it does not evade the eyes of the youth. The determination to listen, to observe, not to ignore, the acceptance, the lack of judgment and the determination to set a border, the openness and the embrace, these are the factors that create the feeling that everything is possible, that there is a real chance, a place to dream, a place for change.





The real Meaning of Unconditional Love

Children and Youth Village "Ahava"

The beginning of "Ahava" was in Berlin, Germany, in the early 1920's, as a home that provides an educational solution for Jewish children who were forced to live outside their homes. With the rise of the Nazis, Beate Berger, who was the local director, acted for moving the school to a safer place; courageously and determinedly, she acquired lands in Israel, and saved about 300 children from certain death in World War II. Beate Berger believed that the basis for educating children should be love, a belief that accompanies the association to this day. Beate (1886-1940) never had children of her own, but she accompanied, raised and loved many children who needed her.

Removing a child out of his home into a residential care institution is a complex situation that constitutes the extreme action in therapeutic work with the family. The students of the Ahava residential care institution are taken from complex and problematic homes (low socioeconomic status, negligence, various types of violence, sexual abuse), having emotional, educational and behavioral issues. Some children suffer mental issues, most children had been born with normal cognitive potential, but because of the circumstances of their development, they deal with complex educational issues and emotionally delayed development. and placement into the special education system, due to learning difficulties alongside with the behavior that results from frustration and distress.

Since 1935 and until today, Ahava is located in Kfar Bialik and works for the advancement, treatment and awareness of children and youth who cannot live in their homes, through a wide variety of activities. The center has undergone many changes over the years, and in the past 25 years, it has been working in a unique format of therapeutic care homes, following a holistic vision, a comprehensive educational and therapeutic system, and an accompanying training system. Therapeutic residential care institution, post-hospitalization treatment, day care centers, a special education school for children with severe behavioral disorders, "warm homes" – interim

apartments for young people without a family home and an emergency center.

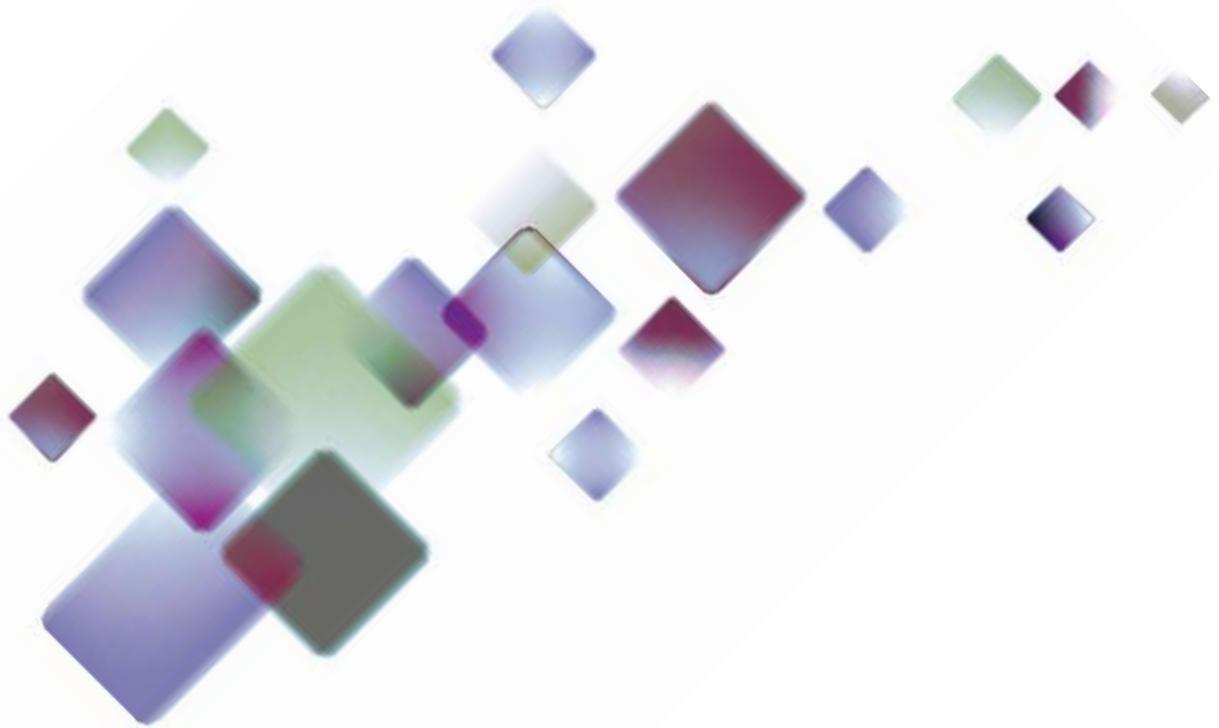
The "warm homes" care unit relates to each group in the residential care institution as a family and an alternative home. Each "family" includes a married couple who work and live in the residential care institution with their own children, and raise 13 children, boys and girls together, ranging in age from 6 to 18. The couple's family life is standard life; meals are shared around a dining table in the center of the house, and the couple brings their values and beliefs into their "family". It works around the clock without shifts. The unit tries to serve as a home model in all its physical and emotional aspects - preparation of meals, laundry, personal space, humor and family rituals, sharing responsibility and partnership of all members of the household. As in any home, children are exposed that has many challenges, disagreements and love.

The family home provides a safer opportunity to communicate. The house is full of activity, and the children experience the development of a "normative" home and family in many natural stages - giving birth to a new baby, happiness and sadness. Donald Winnicott spoke of "holding" which contains a component of physical and mental contact, providing security and enabling a psychophysical connection in terms of physical structure and emotional responses, to address the human need of holding in all of us. The "family" model presents to the observer many complexities, prices and gains, moreover, staff members are selected for work not based on their abilities as educators but based on their parental abilities and openness to learning and training.

The home care unit does not attempt to be a substitute for the biological parents of the children; the connection and partnership with the families of the children is one of the bases of work. Therefore, a lot of effort is invested to strengthen, rehabilitate and stabilize the connection of the children with their own families, as therapeutic groups for the emotional support of mothers, support for the parenting process and assistance in coping with their children.

The focus is to create personal contact with each child, through which we can rebuild trust in the adult world, and hence trust in self-abilities. Different children will connect to different characters, and only by seeing the entire system as an educational therapeutic space will allow the child a suitable and inclusive development space, and a significant adult figure to connect to. Ahava focuses on connections and bonds between different systems - schools, family, welfare, parents, instructors and others. There is encouragement to debate and to experiment, to consult and to wonder, to share and to develop.

The ideal place for children is in a good home. Ahava provides the children with a safe and loving space and supporting conditions for development and life in society. We believe in the famous sentence that "raising a child requires a village". The model operates out of the belief that a central part of the treatment is based on the attachment theory, according to which creating contact with a character that is consistently beneficial over time will rehabilitate the systems that were damaged prior to removal from the home (Yosef, 2011).



One Act of Giving at a Time

S.A.H.I – Transforming the lives of at-risk youth

S.A.H.I. – Game-changing approach to at-risk youth

S.A.H.I. was founded in 2009 based on a game-changing approach to rehabilitating youth at-risk. Rather than offering help, we ask them to help others. And it works! 'Street kids' join and form Youth Giving Units in their neighborhoods and become agents of positive change, engaging acts of giving and assisting thousands of families and individuals in need. All the while, the youth positively turn their own lives around, refraining from criminal activity, continuing to graduate school, enlist in the IDF and became productive, caring and involved members of society.

It all started with lighting a bonfire in a 'bad neighborhood' in Kiryat Gat and a few 'street kids' approaching and talking about their tough lives. It then developed into establishing the first Youth Giving Unit, as a full partnership with, by and for youth at-risk. The youth began preparing and distributing food packages to needy families and became an active force of change in Kiryat Gat.

Today, S.A.H.I. is considered one of Israel's promising social enterprises, operating 25 Youth Giving Units that engage over 750 youth at-risk in weekly sessions of gathering, developing and engaging in acts of giving. The youth form, initiate and lead local Youth Giving Units that engage in community voluntarism, providing weekly assistance to over 2,000 families and individuals in-need throughout Israel's periphery.

■ **Need – Effective approaches to risk behaviors among youth**

In Israel today there are approximately 400,000 at risk and vulnerable youth, who face a wide scope of risk-taking behaviors, social, economic and familial challenges on a daily basis. Census data indicates high rates and percentages of alcohol and substance abuse, high numbers of youth that experience and confront violence on a daily basis and increasing numbers of criminal records against juvenile delinquents. Most of the children and youth are registered and 'handled' by social services, with over 49,000 cases of alleged violence and/or neglect of children and youth "in the system." Recently, the Ministry of Social Services published findings that indicated that about 60,000 youth in-distress and risk lack enrichment and empowerment frameworks and programs.

■ Target Population – Creating a sequence of giving-back from youth to adulthood

S.A.H.I engages street kids, youth aged 13 to 18, with an emphasis on youth from Israel's socio-geographic periphery and those who are overlooked or considered especially tough cases by schools, social services departments, and various programs, such as – rehab institutes, community centers, youth villages, hostels and boarding schools for youth at-risk. SAHI works with diverse groups that include Ethiopian, ultra-orthodox, at-risk adolescent girls and youth with special needs that are successfully integrated into our Youth Giving Units and engage in 'good-doing' while advancing as leaders within and outside the organization. Once our youth graduate S.A.H.I. at the age of 18, they join our life-long alumni program that ensures a continuum of giving and community involvement in their young adult and adult life cycles.

■ What we do – Youth serving as a positive force in the community

S.A.H.I. works with over 750 at-risk youth in 25 Youth Giving Units, where they meet, learn concepts of giving and social impact, and engage in weekly acts of 'good-doing' to others. S.A.H.I. youth provide food to families' in-need, renovate homes of elderly Holocaust survivors, engage in social awareness ethnic activities, living with people with special needs and overall giving activities as social drivers for cohesion, reciprocal help and compassion.

S.A.H.I.'s model is increasingly recognized for effectively transforming the lives of youth while strengthening underprivileged communities based on the following principles:

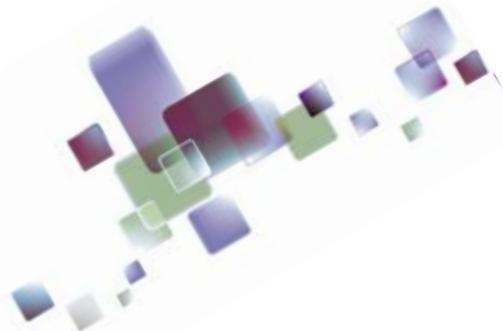
- *A strength-based approach* that considers youth at-risk as full partners who are capable of helping others and turning their own lives around. We shift the youth at-risk perception from the ones who need help to those who have the power to help others and control their own lives, from mere program beneficiaries to active and responsible agents of change in their communities.
- *A non-formal structure* for reaching youth at-risk: Most street kids are apprehensive about entering established centers or structured programs, based on their experience with normative frameworks. In order to build trust and to ensure the long-term commitment of youth at-risk to the program, we developed a unique and carefully planned recruitment method that takes place literally 'on the street', and

later activities that take place in their neighborhood in a non-formal setting.

- *A two-pronged benefit:* The work of our Youth Giving Units in underprivileged neighborhoods results in transforming the lives of youth at-risk while they transform their communities and become a force of 'good-doing' that impacts their families, peers and entire community. Our clear ripple effect ensures the betterment of the youth's peripheral and underprivileged neighborhoods.
- *Leadership development of youth from within underprivileged communities:* We develop leadership skills, capacity and commitment of youth who come and remain within their own communities, rather than introduce young leaders from outside that eventually leave. The majority of our graduates return/remain in their neighborhood and become effective community leaders, young role models and positive change-agents in Israel's peripheral communities.

■ Our youth inspire us – How giving affects all of us

J. is an elderly Holocaust survivor living alone in an underprivileged neighborhood in Israel's southern region. J. struggles with serious health, physical and psychological issues and is often bullied and ridiculed by the neighborhood kids. Not anymore! Last year we opened a S.A.H.I. group in the neighborhood, successfully engaging the most challenging youth. This week the same group renovated J.'s apartment, which was in a dire state. The youth cleared all the garbage, scrubbed the apartment clean and in the process understood the true meaning of *Tikun olam – Repairing the world!* J. is ecstatic and feels he finally has someone who truly cares and sees him. The S.A.H.I. members now know the true feeling of doing the greatest thing in someone's world, as emphasized by one member saying "In the past I've mistreated Aaron and now I'm so happy that I got the opportunity to make amends".



Kick the Ball, Hit the Books, Reach the Heart

The Equalizer – Education in another League

How does the “The Equalizer” program promote education, sports, improving learning abilities and life skills, values and equality of opportunity in hundreds of schools in Israel? With the help of the most popular sport: soccer.

“They all love to play football,” says Liran, founder and director of The Equalizer, about the children and youth participating in the program. “They all dream of being Messi or Ronaldo, and they would rather spend their whole day on the field than at school. They don’t like studies, and they are driven crazy by talking about behavior and discipline.” There is another common factor, connecting the kids that the program addresses, and for whom it was established: “Although their dream is to play football, and they would be willing to invest a lot for it, they can’t afford it,” says Liran, referring mainly to the economic situation of many families in the region.

It all started nine years ago, at a community center in Jerusalem. Liran and his friends volunteered to teach Hebrew to new immigrants from various countries, mainly from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union. When they would leave the center after volunteering, they would see the kids of the neighborhood, some of them the children of those older immigrants, sitting in the park or on the roadside, looking for trouble, smoking and drinking alcohol.

The young volunteers decided to set up a framework that would also engage the children in the afternoon, preventing them from wandering the streets and being exposed to negative influences. When the volunteers asked the children what they liked to do, they all answered “soccer”. So, they decided to create a framework for them that would focus on football. Since none of them was a coach or a professional player, they decided that football would be just an excuse, and that most of the goals of the framework would be related to scholastic assistance, instilling values, solving social difficulties and behavior issues, strengthening self-confidence and a sense of belonging.

After writing a program, Liran went to elementary schools in Jerusalem to convince them to include it

into the system. “It’s not an easy task – to implement a completely new educational program when you do not yet have images to show, success stories or statistics for its effectiveness,” says Liran. Nevertheless, to his great surprise, seven schools actually agreed to implement the program, and some even offered to help finance its small expenses – purchasing equipment and jerseys for children, group transportation and more.

The program gained momentum among the schools in Jerusalem and among students at the university where Liran studied. At the end of its first three years, 24 groups were participating in the program and dozens of volunteers from different frameworks took part in it. The activists decided that the program was good and ready enough to work also outside of Jerusalem, and then began to turn to municipalities and community centers in various communities, and later to receive requests from various places where they heard about the program. The activity has expanded over the past eight years and today the program operates in hundreds of schools in Israel and has thousands of participants.

So what is actually The Equalizer?

The program is based on the assumption that children and youth in areas of scanty means in Israel and in general, love football very much. The second assumption is that these children find it hard to join soccer teams after school – whether they are not good enough in football to play in the professional teams or they cannot afford to pay the fees to participate in existing classes in schools or in the community center of the neighborhood where they live. Another possibility, which is relatively common in Israel, is the lack of frameworks in various localities. In other words, there are no frameworks at all or there are not enough frames for the afternoon hours, in order to provide a solution for children and youth so that they will not walk around the streets or in particularly difficult situations so that they will not return home to a dysfunctional, violent or abusive home.

The Equalizer comes to these places and tells the children – now you have the opportunity to participate in

the professional group you have always dreamed of. With a professional and qualified coach, professional football equipment and uniform for each child, and tournaments in which you'll represent your school in front of other schools in the area. It is free of charge – in order not to discriminate children who cannot afford it. However, the conditions for participation in the program are strict. For example, each group meets four times a week – twice for soccer training and twice as a learning center. A child or youth who wants to take part in the training must also attend the learning center, where the volunteer tutors help him with his homework, prepare for upcoming exams, and even conduct social and educational activities with the group to instill values and team building. "There is no such thing as a child coming and saying – I am the best player in the team, scoring all the goals, the team can't do without me, so I don't go to the learning centers. Such a child will simply not be part of the team". Despite the professional atmosphere around the teams, the program's goal is not developing professional soccer players.

The main goal of the program, which also connects to the entire story of its establishment, is to provide a positive framework for the after-school hours for children who do not have one. From this framework, additional goals are derived – instilling values, building self-confidence and self-image among children and youth, strengthening their sense of belonging to the community and the mission to engage in society, preventing violence and racism in sport in general, and beyond.

The subjects mentioned above and others are achieved by the program's activists mainly through routine activities. The learning centers, but also the soccer training, serve as an excellent platform for instilling values such as friendship, teamwork, fairness and more.

However, the big event to which the program leads, and the participants expect, takes place every month and a half. The large regional tournament, where all the district groups meet, serves as a great incentive for the program's activists, an educational platform but also a tool for educational punishment. While the team players train hard for their regional tournament, in order to play in the team and together beat the other schools, they know they also have to prove themselves. In order for the "Equality Goal" student to go out with the team to the long-awaited tournament, he must persevere in the learning center of the program and show good behavior, discipline and investment in the school's morning hours. As an example, it may occur that the teacher of one of the players forbids him to go out with the team to the tournament or practice the next training. On the other

hand, the teacher can also recommend a particular student, who has significantly improved his performance to be named as team captain or even to play a certain amount of time in the next match.

During the tournament, which is attended by children from different regions and communities, fascinating encounters take place between populations that would not have otherwise met – Jews and Arabs, religious and secular, immigrants and veteran residents. The young players from the various teams greet each other at the opening ceremony, shake hands at the beginning and end of each game, and realize that despite the prejudices they had when they reached the court, the "strange" child is just like them – he wants to win, just like them, and he sometimes cries when he loses.

This understanding is very significant for the development of the child, especially in the periphery and socio-economic distress, where there is usually a hatred of the other and blame of the other for the situation.

Another educational tool used in The Equalizer tournaments is the Green Card and the Fair Play Cup. In contrast to other football frameworks, The Equalizer does not use the yellow or red cards, for warning or exclusion in response to a negative act, but only a green card in response to a positive act the child or the team did. Handshakes after a loss, encouragement from the bench, help a fallen opponent and other fair play positive acts will reward the player or his team with a green card. The green cards are accumulated and counted, and in the grand ceremony where the trophies are awarded, in addition to trophies for first and second place, a Trophy of Fairness – the most important – is awarded.

The Equalizer has been adopted and is supported by various government ministries in Israel – the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Public Security as well as national bodies such as the National Lottery of Israel and the Football Association.

Liran himself was invited to talk about The Equalizer at conferences in Europe, and as a result, various countries were interested in implementing the program. The Serbian government was the first and has already begun to implement the program in schools around the country with the assistance and support of Liran and the Israeli Embassy in Belgrade. Additional countries are already waiting to implement the program in their educational systems and it seems that it is possible that the program will soon become international and will operate on several continents.



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