



2007-2008 Report

August 2008

The School

The *Hagar* school in Be'er-Sheva was successfully launched in September 2007 with forty-six students aged 3-5. Forty-nine students are currently enrolled: 23 in pre-school and 26 in kindergarten. Class enrollment is closely balanced between Jewish and Arab children, and the retention rate has remained 100 percent. This exceeded our expectations.

In order to ensure that both languages – Hebrew and Arabic – and both cultures are awarded equal status, the classes are co-taught by Jewish and Arab teachers, and the children learn Hebrew and Arabic concurrently. Everyone's holidays are celebrated and explained. Classes in the school are kept small. The school day is extended and includes a hot lunch.

Both the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Be'er-Sheva Municipality have recognized the *Hagar* school as a fully accredited and public educational institution and fund it in part. The school expands on a yearly basis and aims to become a full k-12 school in the future.

School Staff

Academic excellence is a central pillar of the *Hagar* school goals and only the most qualified teachers and aids are included in the staff. Our staff members are committed to providing education of the highest quality.

The kindergarten staff includes Ms. Suha Ibrahim, the Arab principal, two Jewish and two Arab kindergarten teachers, as well as three teaching assistants. Two teachers, one Jewish and the other Arab, are present in each of the classes. In this way, children are taught concurrently in both Hebrew and Arabic, learning to treasure their own culture and language while understanding the differences of others around them and learning to respect them. This also contributes to every child's sense of familiarity and the security that he/she needs from a significant adult. The Ministry of Education and the Be'er-Sheva Municipality fund close to half of the positions; the *Hagar* association funds the remaining positions.

Rada & Hanita – Kindergarten Teachers Working Hand in Hand:
Hanita Haddad holds a BEd (Bachelors in Education) with a specialization in preschool education and child development from "Seminar Hakibutzim." She is currently completing her MA in education at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Her MA thesis deals with multiculturalism among Israeli youth. ***Rada El-Ubra*** holds a BEd from Kay College in Be'er-Sheva. She has several years of experience as a preschool teacher in Rahat. For the past 2 years, she has been acting as instructor and mentor of recently graduated teachers.



Together Hanita and Rada create a tolerant environment, and give example to the ability of Jewish and Arabs, children and adults alike, to work and live in cooperation while respecting the differences and cherishing the similarities.

Pedagogy

The entire staff attended a preliminary seminar hosted by 'Hand-in-Hand' in August 2007. Since then and throughout the school year the staff received a twofold mentorship program led by a team of experienced Arab-Jewish mentors. The pedagogic mentoring is headed by Dr. Rachel Har-Zion and Nadira Younes, both with over a decade of experience in bilingual education. The psychological-moral mentoring is provided by Dr. Ariela Bairey Ben Ishay, a political psychologist with an expertise in intercultural dialogue. Both training programs are given both individually and in teams. An important aspect of the mentorship is learning how to maximize the benefits of co-teaching. Another core aspect is the adaptation of the standard curriculum to the values of *Hagar*, such as multiculturalism. *Hagar* continues to develop the training and mentoring programs in accordance with staff's needs. In addition, our educational activities are under the inspection of the Ministry of Education.



Extracurricular Activities

The children at *Hagar* enjoy a wide range of extracurricular activities that are provided throughout the week. These activities include: World music, sports and environment classes. "The Clown within Me", unique body-mind class where, through games and laughter, children learn how to show feelings is held every other week. An early childhood democratization program was introduced this year for the kindergarten children (ages 4-5). A bilingual, specially trained instructor from the Adam Institute for Democracy and Peace is responsible for a series of meetings organized around subjects, such as democracy and identity.

Parent Participation

In accordance with the objectives of *Hagar* of community involvement, parent participation in the schools activities is highly encouraged. Two parent committees were created, one for each kindergarten. Parents' involvement includes voluntary activities, such as organizing music workshops and joint holiday celebrations. Alternating Fridays are dedicated to parent led activities, chosen by the parents, often related to an area of expertise, art or hobby of the parent conducting the activity. The active involvement of the parents in the school and in the community activities attests to the success of the school in developing a sense of community in less than one year.

Community Outreach Program

The *Hagar* association also initiates various cultural activities for the larger Be'er-Sheva community. The community center initiated four cultural activities in less than six months, including an environmental workshop to celebrate the Jewish Tu Bi'shvat and Moslem Eid-AlShajara, a festive Purim happening etc. An Arabic course, which began recently and is open to the general public, offers another way of promoting *Hagar's* principles in the larger Be'er-Sheva community.

Working Together for the Future of the Environment
Tu-Bishvat/ Id Al-Shajar: Muslim and Jewish New Year for the Trees
celebrated in January served as a platform for dealing with nature, ecology, natural resources and caring for our surroundings. It was celebrated with an activity conducted by Hebrew & Arabic speaking instructors from the Society for Protection of Nature (SPNI). The activity included educational and creative activities centered on local flora, nature and agriculture.

Hagar: Bilingual Jewish-Arab Education for Equality
34/3 Yitzhak Shatal St. Be'er-Sheva 84687, Israel
Tel: 972-8-6494692, Cell: 972-52-4457543
orly@hajar.org.il



Arab and Jewish children plant saplings in the schoolyard during an outdoor Planting activity

The Application of Principles: Within and Without

The association's various bodies follow the principles of shared Arab-Jewish decision-making and mutual respect. Therefore, the board, kindergarten staff, parent committees, and steering committee are all comprised of both Arabs and Jews. These bodies also reflect the religious and gender diversity of the Be'er-Sheva region.

All of *Hagar's* activities are based on the objective of providing a space that enables Jewish and Arab children, parents, educators and the community to develop lasting relationships based on equality, tolerance and recognition of the other's uniqueness.

Physical Facilities for the Hagar School

For the next academic year, the Be'er-Sheva Municipality has allocated two buildings to the *Hagar* school: one building for the two kindergartens and another one for the school. With regards to the school, the Municipality has offered that the first-grade class will be physically located in an existing primary school. Both of the facilities are in need of renovation and new equipment and furniture. However, the present commitment shown by the Municipality to open a first-grade class next year and to provide the *Hagar* school with physical facilities for the coming school year is very encouraging. The option also brings hope that the old school "hosting" the first-grade class will become the permanent building of the *Hagar* school in due course.



Unexpected Challenges:

The Recruitment of Children:

Learning from last year's challenge of the recruiting of children, particularly Jewish children, we learnt that the best strategy is personal contact. Consequently, we have started to organize community activities for interested children and parents and intend to hold intimate house meetings. These initiatives should ease next year's family recruitment. Our monthly community center activities (e.g. performances, holiday celebrations), which offer bilingual activities for parents and children, also serve to introduce *Hagar* to the larger Be'er-Sheva community. In addition, in June 2008, we decided to add large advertisements in three central places around Be'er-Sheva in order to give final energy to the recruitment process. We are encouraged by the success of the kindergarten classes and feel that the academic excellence we have achieved in just one year will enable us to open a full first-grade class in September 2008.

The Recruitment of Educational Staff:

The main reason for this challenge seems to be a fear that *Hagar* would not be able to offer competitive salaries and conditions and the need for long-lasting commitment to the abovementioned from the part of *Hagar*. In order to address these concerns, *Hagar* is committed to offering the same conditions as the Ministry of Education offers, including pensions, a certain number of holidays, as well as special payments etc and even more, in unique cases.

Staff Continuing Education:

An important lesson for *Hagar* this year was that despite the intensive course during summer 2007 and the ongoing pedagogical and psychological instruction and mentoring process, there are still issues to continue and work on intensively. For example, the concept of co-teachers has many implications beyond the ethnic and linguistic differences. It is a challenge to education young children while sharing the teacher space. This issue and other issues that were raised during the evaluation process for the teachers will be incorporated in the 2008-2009 training plan.

Physical Facility for the School:

For the next academic year, the Municipality has offered one structure for the kindergarten and another one for the school. The school and kindergarten building are situated in different and distant neighbourhoods and both of the facilities will need to be renovated and refurbished. However, the present commitment shown by the Municipality is very encouraging. The option also



brings hope that the old school "hosting" the first-grade class will become the permanent building of the *Hagar* school in due course.

Plans for the Future

In 2008-2009 we aim to open a first-grade class, with an equal number of Arab and Jewish children (an additional 25 children) and to expand the volume of activity offered to the general public by the community center.

In addition, in order to develop and reinforce our school and turn it into a model for other schools, we set the following priorities for the coming years:

- ✓ To expand the workshops given to all staff members and to create a space for staff growth, as individuals and as a team.
- ✓ To continue developing culturally appropriate curricula that is consistent with the formal requirements of the Ministry of Education curriculum and can be incorporated into the existing 'Hand-in-Hand' programs. *Hagar* puts special emphasis on early childhood programs.
- ✓ To strengthen parent participation and encourage family members to take active roles in different kindergarten and school activities, and thus, to develop their sense of ownership.
- ✓ To increase the volume of activities offered by the community outreach program to the general public and to form new local partnerships with cultural institutes in the Negev.
- ✓ To renovate the municipality-owned buildings which the school and kindergarten presently occupy and transform them into the permanent residence of the *Hagar* school within several years.



Two kindergarten children read books in Hebrew and Arabic at the Library corner. In the background: the Arabic and Hebrew alphabet.

The activities described above were made possible thanks to the generous and on-going support of the following funds: The Mimi and Peter Hass

Hagar: Bilingual Jewish-Arab Education for Equality

34/3 Yitzhak Shatal St. Be'er-Sheva 84687, Israel

Tel: 972-8-6494692, Cell: 972-52-4457543

orly@hajar.org.il



Philanthropic Fund, FOHS Foundation, A Kibbutz in the Negev, Levi-Lassen Stichting/ Foundation, The Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, The Sobell Foundation, Bernard Van Leer Foundation and several private donors. The *Hagar* association wishes to express its gratitude for the trust and support of all of its supporters and friends.

Hagar: Bilingual Jewish-Arab Education for Equality
34/3 Yitzhak Shatal St. Be'er-Sheva 84687, Israel
Tel: 972-8-6494692, Cell: 972-52-4457543
orly@hajar.org.il