

# The Hagar

*Newsletter*

January  
March  
2009



## Opening the First Grade

The preparations for opening the first grade of the Hagar school in the next academic year are going full steam ahead. At the moment, 25 children are registered for the first grade, which guarantees opening of the class in September 2009. Two important meetings with senior officials of the Beer-Sheva municipality and the Ministry of Education have been conducted in

March 2009. In these meetings, Dr. Heftzi Zohar, the Deputy Mayor of Beer-Sheva who is in charge of the education portfolio, and Ms. Yehudit Bloom, the District Education Inspector, gave their blessings to the joint initiative of creating a Jewish-Arab bilingual and multicultural school in Beer-Sheva.

An Action Committee including all the partners in the initiative and headed

by the District Inspector has been formed. The upcoming meeting of the Committee will outline a plan of action needed to achieve the ambitious common goal of opening the first grade. The task of developing the first grade's studies schedule and pedagogical model has been recently completed. The process of locating and selecting the teaching staff is close to completion.



## Community Outreach Activities in Hagar – Acquaintances, Creativity, Learning and Volunteering



Musical Encounters



Ein Ovdad



Tu bi-Shvat



The Earth Day

### Spoken Arabic Classes

This winter, between January and March, two courses of spoken Arabic at beginners' and advanced level were opened by the Hagar Association, with the average of 15 students in each group. The courses were opened in cooperation with the Beer-Sheva Forum for Coexistence. One of the reasons for the success of cooperation was that activists from both organizations took part in the courses and had a chance to develop mutual acquaintance both personally and at the level of the two partner organizations.

### Musical Encounters for the Children of Beer-Sheva

Twelve children participated in this intercultural encounter in the course of several meetings by means of song, movement, listening, playing musical instruments, and improvisation. During the course, the children were introduced to musical concepts and elements common to both languages, and developed through music such social skills as pair and group cooperation, tolerance for the "other" and openness. The positive "echoes" evoked by the program attracted some media interest, and "Radio Darom" (South Radio) had broadcast the following news item:

"Once a week there takes place a one-of-a-kind musical class for Arab and Jewish children, residents of the South. It is conducted by the Hagar Association as part of its wider activities for getting the two communities to make friends. The instructors in the program are two musicians, an Arab man and Jewish woman, who teach the children songs in Hebrew and in Arabic. This way the children learn to accept each other with love and without suspiciousness."

Radio Darom, "The Daily News Journal,"

18/02/09

<http://www.dromi.co.il/html/page.asp?PageID=10821&CatId=104>

### Intercultural Dialog Meetings for In-Depth Discussion of Burning Issues

Two workshops for in-depth dialog between Jews and Arabs took place in the recent months, guided by Dr. Er'ela Beeri Ben-Yishai and Ahmad Hajazi. All the Hagar parents were invited to the workshops in order to allow them to discuss various issues of Jewish-Arab partnership. The "safe space" created by the workshop made it possible for the parents to raise and clarify issues and questions that have to do, among the rest, with our common prejudices, as well as our expectations and dreams regarding the shared space we are creating. These workshops are definitely a most important tool for strengthening our ability to realize together our shared vision.

### The Community Initiating and Volunteering

\* At the initiative of a group of parents, on one of the first warm Saturdays this spring a group excursion went out to Ein Ovdad. About twenty families from the community participated in the excursion, hiking together in the wilderness of the common desert. The parents' initiative of starting a "hiking Jewish-Arab community" is unique and the only one of its kind in Israel.

\* Aviram Dayan and Shachar Troen-Matthias, parents of children from the school, in cooperation with several other volunteers parents and the Hagar administration, founded, designed and recently launched the website of Hagar's educational enterprise.

\* The couple Libbie and Len Traubman from San-Mateo, CA, who have worked for many years to promote online dialog for peace, have taken upon themselves to support the Hagar website project by donating \$2000 in its favor.

\* You are cordially invited to visit our website at <http://www.hajar.org.il>

## Nature and the Environment

\* Tu bi-Shvat: As part of the "green" action that the Hagar educational institution undertakes in cooperation with the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, we have initiated a series of community activities directed at the preservation of the environment and nature. To these activities are invited all the members of the Hagar community, its supporters, friends, and their children. In the framework of this year's activities, the children and the adults planted a vegetable garden together in the school's yard, and made a personal garden for every child out of recyclable materials.

\* The Earth Day: "The Hagar Association people assigned a different interpretation to the highly politically charged 'Earth Day'. Instead of dwelling on the disagreements, 50 children from the two communities went out together for an environmental activity, which included cleaning the area adjacent to the school, and some exploration of the local flora and fauna. The mutual respect and the love for the earth were at the center of the activity, as they comprise one of the shared values in which this special community grounds its partnership..." Radio Darom, "The Daily News Journal," 30/03/2009 <http://www.dromi.co.il/html/page.asp?PageID=11022&CatId=104>

## Quotes from the Little Ones' Talk:



**The kindergarten children answer the question "Why do we need earth?":**

**Hanan:** "We need earth to keep things so no one takes [them], so they stay, and so they grow. The trees will take care of the earth and the earth will take care of the trees."

**Alex:** "The earth will take care of the tree and if they are inside the earth I will take [them] out and they will grow."

**Shaked:** "Because if there won't be earth, then there won't grow any plants."

**Yael:** "We need it so that the trees and the plants will grow."

**Susan:** "Because that we don't fall."

**Roee:** "We need earth for the animals in the world, because everything is put in order in the world."

**Aseel:** "Because we plant flowers."

**Nili:** "We have at home a garden full of flowers and every day we see it."

**Adam:** "When we go out for a ride in the car, we see the bees."

## Holidays in the Hagar School

In the recent months, we have celebrated at school several holidays and festivals: Tu bi-Shvat, the Earth Day, Purim, and the Passover. In each of these holidays, an expression was given to the heritage of the two communities by placing an emphasis on the values and principles that connect and bring the children together.

Thus, for example, the traditional Jewish imperative, "Once [the month of] Adar comes in, the joy is to be increased" provided for us an inspiration to select the emotion of joy as a central pedagogical topic at school in this period. We have guided the children to notice and talk about the things that

bring us joy and happiness, and helped them recognize the different kinds of emotions and states of mind.

The Passover story has received a special attention, in accordance with the Jewish tradition. However, in talking about this holiday, universal values were foregrounded, which all the children can identify with. The narrative of the stammering child Moses who grew up and became a leader brought us to talk about heroism, growing up, leadership, honesty and courage. The concepts "slave" and "freedom" were learned not only in their specific traditional context but also within a universal perspective relevant to each one of us.



## From the Little Ones' Talk about the Holiday.



**Preschool children talk about the Passover and the spring season customs:**

**Amal:** "At home we hide a matza, me and my brother Elias."

**Yair:** "In our house there are matzot on top of the freezer. We are cleaning the house, we put burning candles everywhere in the house to find more crumbs."

**Yiftach:** "In our house there are no matzot yet, but at my grandmother's there are. And my father has in his study a big cup for the prophet Eliyahu."

**Wasim:** "We are cleaning the house, and have installed the air-conditioner."

**Arava:** "There is one thing that belongs both to Pesach and to the spring: kneidalach [matza balls] in the soup."

**Alma:** "We are preparing for Pesach, that the baby will be born, so we are preparing."

**Imri:** "That the baby girl is born."

**Ido:** "At our house there is cleaning."

**Salma:** "Cleaning the house."

**Ofek:** "We are getting the house to shine."

**Omer:** "I'm celebrating the Seder night at my grandfather's, and even if I don't find the afikoman [the piece of matza hidden for the children to find], they will still give me the biggest present."

**Topaz:** "[In spring] mama buys me clothes for the summer, and I try on the old clothes."

## Spotlight on Wisam

Wisam Maree, mother of Hanan (kindergarten), and Wisam's husband Fuad, have heard about the initiative of founding a bilingual school quite accidentally, from two different sources: a conversation with relatives, Amal and Anwar, who told them about the emerging idea, and also an accidental meeting with Catherine, mother of Ariel, in a playground. These reports aroused Wisam's curiosity, which led to action. Back then, three years ago, there was only the idea, but the road was still uncharted, the vision still unwritten. The framework existed in the most general outline, filled so far with only two words: multiculturalism and bilingualism. And there was the dream.

Wisam and Fuad came to parents meetings before the school was founded. They are among the first parents who joined the project, because "it suited our system of values." Wisam felt already at that stage that she is in a position to influence the way in which the school and its pedagogical approach would be shaped. When she was invited to sit on the committee that selected and approved the employees for the teaching staff, this feeling turned into reality which was not merely an empty title: "As a psychologist and a mother to a girl in the school, I experienced the opportunity to take part in founding a bilingual school as a huge privilege... From the first moment on we knew that we have a 'say' as parents and that I can influence things." The knowledge that the parents' voice is heard was the cornerstone of their willingness and desire to take part in planning the complex move of founding "the best place, both in educational and in ideological terms."

Hanan goes to the Hagar school for two years now. She started in pre-kindergarten group, and now she is in the kindergarten. To our question whether the dream has come true, Wisam answers without hesitation, "Yes, to be sure." In addition to the importance of "Arabs and Jews being together" from the ideological point of view, Hanan's happiness and contentment at school are crucially important for Wisam. Even when there arose difficulties, the teachers had enough professionalism, thoughtfulness and sensitivity to solve them with creativity and love, "and indeed, the difficulties are behind us." The girl shares with Wisam and Fuad new bits of knowledge, songs, experiences and unexpected sayings, "things that we can't stop marveling at."

Wisam's approach to multiculturalism is expressed also in her professional life. Out of her desire to adhere to a universalist point of view, she does not restrict her work as a psychologist to the Arab society alone, and a considerable share of her working hours is spent at a Jewish high school in Beer-Sheva. At the same time she chairs the Society of Arab Psychologists in the psychological consultancy service, because "I am an integral part of the Arab society." To conclude, Wisam emphasizes that all she wants is to give her children an education of high quality that imparts values she believes in, and that from her point of view, the exposure to, understanding and acceptance of the "other" and his culture "will allow us to realize the possibility of living together."

**Rotem Dayan:** "I feel that in the Hagar school there is an intention to invest a lot in fostering the children's individuality. I feel that my child is seen with all his needs and wishes, and a sincere effort is made to meet them."  
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**The Alocheeli Family:** "The Hagar school always provides a solution for all the problems we encounter as parents. And there is a feeling in the school of one big family." tahaneok@walla.com



## Spotlight on Olga

Olga and Simon have two children in the Hagar school: Israel ("will be six soon...") in the preschool and Alexander in the kindergarten. This is their first year in the school. The one to "blame" for their joining is Bar Yuval-Shani, mother of Arava, who first acquainted Simon and Olga with the Hagar school. They came, looked, thought and made a decision. Not exactly out of ideological reasons, which crystallized and became important only later on. The educational excellences, enveloped in multiculturalism and bilingualism, were the considerations that tipped the balance. The main spoken language at home is Russian. Because of the combination between the home and the school, the children, Israel and Alex, find themselves exposed simultaneously to Hebrew, Arabic and Russian. In spite of this challenging amount of input, the educational ways of the school do not seem to overstrain the children. Olga was brought up according to the "Russian" educational principles and never thought that things could or should be otherwise. "The Russian education puts the parents' and the teachers' authority in the center, and the children's duty to obey is not open for negotiation. The children's education at the Hagar school has changed something in my own approach to education," says Olga. "I have found out that if you 'let go' to some extent, the children's discipline is not necessarily ruined, and this openness does good to them, makes them more happy. The 'allowing' and kind atmosphere that reigns in the school gave me a new insight and an inspiration to conduct the interaction with the children at home in a similar way." The friendships that the children have started at school find expression also beyond the

school hours. The good friends of Israel and Alex (Ariel, Elinor, Roe, Hanan, Arava) spend a fair amount of time together. The atmosphere of "togetherness" creates some good mood even in the pressured mornings, and when the children ask "Where are we going?" and Olga and Shimon say "To school," they triumphantly throw their hands up.

Quite a few of the topics discussed at school find their way into home talk, including the Jewish-Arab issue: "The grandpa loves to hear Israel counting in Arabic the spoons of soup that he lifts to his mouth..." To Israel it is clear that Arab holidays are the holidays of his friends. He naturally takes the story of Abraham and Hagar as relevant to both Jews and Arabs. The education in the school is at an excellent level. Olga has no doubt that bilingualism and multiculturalism are an added value that contributes to the quality. All these features reinforce Olga's expectation for the first grade to open in the coming year, and for the school to grow into a full-fledged format: "I feel that I have found the educational solution that I had started looking for even before I actually had children."

Olga and Simon's families and friends are not exactly ecstatic about the fact that they send Alex and Israel to a Jewish-Arab school, but there haven't been any conflicts about the issue. From Olga's point of view, there is no contradiction between her political standpoint as a centrist believing that Israel's first priority is to be able to defend itself from its enemies, and her children being in an Arab-Jewish framework. In her opinion, this framework may in due time supply an answer to the complicated and pained relationship between Jews and Arabs. The connections between the children make their social life richer and more animated, and also encourage the parents to get acquainted with each other.

**The Hagar Association wishes to express its gratitude for the continued trust and support of all of its supporters and friends. Our projects are funding in part by donations, so please help us expand our support network by spreading the word as well as donating to this incredible project, which is changing the reality of Arab-Jewish relations in the Negev. We also invite you to visit our kindergarten and see a different future in the making. For more information about how to help or to coordinate a visit, please contact Orly Almi, Development Director, 972-52-4457543, [orly@hajar.org.il](mailto:orly@hajar.org.il)**