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ENGELBERG CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Needs of and Services for Children and Youth in Galilee and Gaza Border Communities

Findings of a Survey of Parents in the Evaluation of the Initiative of the Jewish Federations of North America following the Second Lebanon War

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RESEARCH REPORT

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of a Parents Survey that was part of the evaluation study on the implementation of the Israel Emergency Campaign Initiative for Children and Youth in the Galilee and Gaza border areas after the Second Lebanon War (hereafter: the Initiative). The study was funded by the Jewish Federations of North America. The survey was conducted at two points in time: a few months after the Initiative began (April-August 2007) and a year later (January-July 2008).

The Initiative for children and youth in the Galilee and Gaza border areas aimed to deal with the direct impact on northern youngsters of the war in Galilee (in the summer of 2006) and of the intensive missile fire (from 2006) on southern youngsters in Gaza border areas. Beyond coping with the impact of war, the Initiative strove to significantly enhance educational activity and outputs. Compared with the center of the country, many northern and southern communities suffer from a low socioeconomic level, a dearth of – and often, inferior – services. More specifically, the following goals were defined (Michaeli & Dolev, 2006) for the Initiative:

- 1. To deal with the impact of the war on the children's emotional state and performance
- 2. To improve scholastic achievement, help weaker pupils and narrow gaps
- 3. To expand the use of enrichment and recreational programs

The target population were youngsters aged 3-17, their parents, and the educational staff in each locality. The Initiative extended over two years from January 2007 and was based on a partnership between the Ministry of Education, the Jewish Federations of North America and Israeli volunteer organizations. It produced more than 200 programs that were implemented in some 60 communities with the participation of tens of thousands of youngsters, Three organizations were in charge of implementation: JDC-Israel/Ashalim (hereafter: JDC), the Jewish Agency Enrichment Fund for Children and Youth (hereafter: the Jewish Agency) and the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC). The programs were implemented according to priorities set by the Ministry of Education and the Prime Minister's Office. The division of responsibility between the organizations was as follows:

Jewish Agency:

- 1. Enrichment and informal activities
- 2. Enhancing matriculation achievements (summer of 2007 only)
- 3. Activities teaching social values (May and June 2007 only)

• JDC:

- 4. Post-traumatic therapy
- 5. Interventions in schools and preschools
- 6. Training programs for educational staff

• ITC

7. Post-traumatic therapy

The Initiative was monitored by an evaluation study in 12 communities, conducted in two stages – a few months after the Initiative began and a year later. The information was collected through interviews with key community and school personnel, with implementing and donor organizations, and through telephone interviews of parents. A report was published summarizing the findings of the overall evaluation of the Initiative (Kahan-Strawczynski and Levi, 2009). The Parents Survey sought to learn of and evaluate the programs offered children aged 6-17 in 2006/07 and in 2007/08. Parents were asked about various aspects of the Initiative's four chief areas – school enrichment, after-school enrichment, scholastic assistance and emotional help. They were asked about the children's needs in each area, the programs offered, and their own assessment of the programs to the children's needs. They were also asked about their sense of belonging to the region (north or Gaza border areas) and to their specific locality.

One of the main criteria for including a community in the Initiative was the appraisal by various agents (the Jewish Federations of North America, the Ministry of Education, the Prime Minister's Office, the implementing organizations etc.) of a need to strengthen that community's formal and informal services: to both enhance existing services and offer responses of a higher standard and wider scope. Note that in the survey, parents were questioned about all the services and responses received by their children in the four main areas of the Initiative. Some of the programs were offered as part of the Initiative; others had been available beforehand and continued alongside the Initiative. Programs were provided by a variety of agents – public, private or volunteer. Parents were unable to distinguish between the different agencies providing services. The information from the parents survey thus makes it possible to construct a full picture of all the services offered children during the Initiative's implementation, without any indication of the source.

This report deals with three main topics:

- The amount of children participating in programs offered by the Initiative and by other agencies in the community
- The extent that services were expanded because of the Initiative: in the first year, compared with the programs available before the Second Lebanon War; and in the second year, compared with programs offered in the first year
- Parents' assessment of the programs offered both in the community and via the Initiative

2. Findings

The extent of participation reported here relates to the full range of services on which parents reported.

2.1 Extent of Participation in Various Activities

• School or after-school enrichment activity drew the highest percentage (and largest number) of elementary-school participants – 67% in the first year and 77% in the second. Scholastic assistance and emotional help were of a smaller scale: about a quarter of all the pupils received

scholastic assistance each year; about a fifth (19%) received emotional help in the first year and 6%, in the second.

- In the Arab/Druze sector, participation in school enrichment in the Initiative's two years, and in the responses to emotional difficulties in the first year, showed higher rates than in the Jewish sector; students receiving scholastic assistance showed lower rates than in the Jewish sector in both years.
- In Sderot, the rate of participation in school enrichment increased in the second year while the rate of recipients of scholastic assistance and emotional help decreased.
- At both stages of the survey, three quarters of the elementary school pupils in Initiative communities did not participate in any activity. More than a third participated in at least two activities.

2.2 Enrichment

- The range of enrichment activities was relatively broad.
- Parents were asked about the full range of enrichment activities in which their children participated, as part of the Initiative and elsewhere.
- Every pupil in elementary school participated on an average in 1.7 enrichment activities in school in the first year and 2.1, in the second. In after-school activities every pupil participated on an average in 1.5 enrichment activities each year.
- As a rule, parents of children in enrichment classes expressed great satisfaction with the range of activities at both stages of the survey. At the same time, parental satisfaction in the Arab/Druze sector decreased somewhat in the second year.

One of the Initiative goals was to promote the utilization of enrichment and recreational programs. Various indicators showed that this goal was largely achieved, especially in the Arab/Druze sector:

- The large majority of parents (87%) in the Arab/Druze sector and two-thirds of parents in the Jewish sector said that, today, they attach great importance to their children's participation in enrichment activity.
- According to the parents, many of the participating children would like to continue with enrichment activities.
- About a third of the parents sought information on enrichment activities or registered their children for other/additional enrichment activities following their participation. In the Arab/Druze sector about half of the parents did so.

Another goal of the Initiative was to strengthen the children's community of residence. The Jewish Agency implemented enrichment activities to this end, particularly in the second year:

- The overwhelming majority of parents considered it important that enrichment activities enable their children to contribute to their life settings in school and in the community.
- Two-thirds of the parents believed in the importance of joint parent-children activities. This rate was especially higher (80%) in the Arab-Druze sector (in the second year).

2.3 Scholastic Help

a. Extent of Scholastic Difficulties

- More high school pupils than elementary pupils had difficulty with at least one subject in both years.
- In the first year, 66% of all pupils in Sderot reported difficulty with at least one subject versus 50% of all pupils in the Jewish sector in the north, and 37% of all pupils in the Arab/Druze sector.
- In the second year, 2007/08, the rate of pupils with scholastic difficulty decreased: in elementary school, from 40% in the first year to 30% in the second; in high school from 58% to 40% respectively. The decrease was apparently affected by the scholastic assistance provided by the Initiative and other agents, which began functioning in the south as the missile fire grew protracted, and in the north, immediately after the Second Lebanon War. In the north, there was also a time factor the passage of time since the war. In the first year, which was only a few months after the war, many difficulties emerged, including scholastically. In the second year, some 12 to 24 months after the war, the difficulties appeared less severe.
- While the rate of pupils with scholastic difficulty decreased, the differences between the sectors were maintained.

b. Assistance to Pupils with Scholastic Difficulty

- About half the pupils with difficulty in at least one subject received some sort of assistance via the Initiative and/or other frameworks (in both years and at both levels of education: elementary and high school).
- About half the children in the Jewish sector (Sderot and the north) with difficulty in the first year received assistance versus a third of the pupils in the Arab/Druze sector. These trends were maintained in the second year.
- About half the children received assistance in school during the school day; about a quarter after the school day, either in school or at a learning center; and an additional quarter at the full expense of their parents.
- Significant differences were found between the sectors regarding the receipt of scholastic assistance: 58% of Sderot pupils received assistance during the school day versus 47% of the pupils in the Jewish sector in the north, and only 33% of the pupils in the Arab/Druze sector. About a third of the northern pupils (in both the Jewish and Arab/Druze sectors) received scholastic assistance fully financed by their parents versus 11% of the pupils in Sderot.

c. Evaluating Scholastic Assistance

- Most of the parents of recipients of scholastic assistance said that it had helped the children to a great extent.
- In the opinion of some 60%, the assistance was sufficient and helped the children's progress to a great or very great extent.

 Parents from the Arab/Druze sector were less satisfied with their share of the cost for scholastic assistance. In this sector, there was less public assistance and more parents fully financed the assistance received.

2.4 Emotional Help

the Jewish Federations of North America adopted a strategic decision to train and instruct the children's caregivers rather than provide direct (individual or group) emotional help to the children themselves. From the parents' responses, it appears that the emotional help offered to children did not meet the needs of the children and parents.

a. Extent of Emotional Difficulties and the Help Provided

- In all population groups at both stages of the survey, high rates of children faced emotional difficulty: Sderot children 78% in the first year and 70% in the second; the Jewish sector in the north about half of the children each year, and the Arab/Druze sector about half of the children in the first year and a fifth, in the second. No explanation was found for the decrease in extent of emotional difficulties in the Arab/Druze sector.
- The rates of children with emotional difficulty receiving any sort of help public, private or volunteer was low: 19% in the first year and 11% in the second.
- The extent of emotional help provided in Sderot was greater than in the north.
- Of the help given, 45% was offered at school, 18% was of a different type of public help, and 37% was fully financed by the parents. In Sderot, the extent of help fully financed by the parents was relatively low 28% versus the Jewish sector in the north 38% and the Arab/Druze sector 58%.

b. Assessing the Emotional Help:

- In the second year, in general, parental satisfaction with the emotional help was lower than with enrichment activity and scholastic assistance. For example: 67% were satisfied to a great or very great extent with the standard of help and 49%, with the range of responses.
- In Sderot, in the second year, the parents' sense that the help provided had been sufficient and their children's situation had improved was greatly reinforced; in the Arab/Druze sector, on the other hand, it grew weaker.

c. Guiding Parents to Cope with Children's Emotional Difficulty

- Parents were asked if they participated in any of the guidance given by the implementing organizations or other agents to help them help their children cope with emotional difficulties.
- Few parents received guidance: in each year, about 20% of the parents in Sderot and 10% of the parents in the northern Jewish sector received guidance. In the Arab/Druze sector, there was a considerable increase in the second year up from 11% in the first year to 43%. Note that the data were gathered in select communities where the Initiative concentrated most of its activities; this is not a representative sample of the Arab/Druze population in the north.

- The parents' assessments that the guidance had helped them increased from 56% in the first year to 74% in the second.
- In Sderot, though the scope of guidance did not change, the percentage of parents feeling that the guidance had helped them rose (from 53% to 75%).
- The rate of parents in the Arab/Druze sector who felt that the guidance had helped them was higher than in the Jewish sector (78% in the first year and 88% in the second).
- Most of the parents noted that they wished to continue receiving guidance: 85% in the Arab/Druze sector; 63% in Sderot and 55%, in the Jewish sector in the north.

2.5. Parental Sense of Amount of Community Activity for Children and Youth

- As mentioned above, one of the goals of the Initiative was to expand and strengthen the services for children and youth provided in the community. In the first year, the extent of services was compared with that available in the year preceding the Second Lebanon War; in the second year, the comparison was with services provided by the Initiative and other agents in the first year of implementation.
- In general, a relatively low proportion of parents (about a fifth) felt that in the two years that the Jewish Federations of North America Initiative was implemented, the activities for children in the community had increased.
- Parents with children in elementary school gave higher assessments of the amount of activities available in the community than did parents with children in high school alone.

2.6. Sense of Community and Regional Belonging

- Many parents in Sderot (80%) felt a sense of community belonging, more so than parents in the Jewish sector in the north (68%) and less so than parents in the Arab/Druze sector (94%); (in the first year).
- Sderot parents: in the second year, less parents wished to leave the region (a decrease from 73% to 43%). Moreover, among those who did wish to leave, the rate of parents that had taken practical steps to do so dropped (from 40% to 26%).
- For purposes of comparison, note that only 10% of parents the Jewish sector and only 2% in the Arab/Druze sector in the north had considered leaving the region in the first year.

3. Programmatic Directions

The findings of this report point to a number of challenges and issues regarding comparable initiatives in the event of emergency situations in the future:

- 1. Parental satisfaction with the standard of the responses offered was relatively high. Nevertheless, the hope is to broaden the scope of responses.
- 2. Residents of Gaza border communities and of the north faced different emergency situations. The former coped with a protracted emergency situation; the latter, with a relatively brief emergency situation. In the light of this, the type and scope of responses should continue to be adapted to different emergency situations.

- 3. Enrichment activities: As said, various measures indicated that both the parents and children today attribute greater importance to enrichment activities. Ways should be examined to sustain this achievement and encourage the children to pursue enrichment activities.
- 4. Emotional help: Parental reports indicated a need to expand the identification of children having emotional difficulty and the range of direct responses to the children requiring them. It also emerged that that most parents would like to continue receiving guidance to acquire tools to help their children in this regard. The help given to a third of the children, out of all those who received it, was, according to the parents, financed by them (58% in the Arab/Druze sector). As the Initiative population included financially-strapped families, the expansion of publicly-funded emotional help deservers consideration.
- 5. Scholastic assistance: As was true of the emotional help, about a third of the northern pupils (Jews and Arabs/Druze) received scholastic assistance fully financed by their parents. In this sphere, too, public assistance should be expanded.
- 6. As part of the Jewish Federations of North America Initiative, work in the Arab/Druze sector was greatly expanded. In view of the many needs, it is highly important that this continue and, indeed, intensify, in all areas of the Initiative (enrichment, scholastic assistance, emotional help), as well as in additional spheres as needed.
- 7. Future initiatives following emergency situations should explore which facets are important to helping children: the unique contribution of enrichment activities and scholastic help versus similar responses existing in the communities and their relevance to the situation of children and youth following an emergency situation.
- 8. It was not possible to ascertain from the Jewish Federations of North America Initiative which type of response each child received since the implementing organizations did not keep uniform, coordinated records. To ensure maximal coverage of the children and youth population, and optimal matching between needs and responses, a record system should be constructed, by child, and placed at the disposal of all the organizations partner to the Initiative.

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