

Research Report

# The “Parents as Partners” Project

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This study was commissioned by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, Netherlands. The project is also supported by the JDC-Ashalim, the Israel National Insurance Institute – Foundation for Special Projects, the Israel Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor – Department for Daycare Centers, the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco. Additional support to the project was provided by the Steinhardt Family Foundation, the Kathryn Ames Foundation, Matan and the Israeli Legacy Fund.

Publication of this report in English was made possible by the generous support JDC – Ashalim

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the suitability and implementation of the objectives of the “Parents as Partners” project. It also examines the actual impact of the program on the various circles of the community, including the counselors who were recruited and trained, the mothers who participated in the preparatory stages of the program, their children, who attended the "House of the Mother and the Child" frameworks, their husbands, and their wider social circles, such as community members who had no direct involvement with the project but were nonetheless influenced by it to a certain degree. This report makes use of two interrelated research methods: in-depth interviews and focus groups. The two villages that serve as case studies are Um Batin and Awajan.

At first, the project encountered resistance from within the community. This resulted from the belief that the home is the most suitable environment for the child; the fact that women were leaving the confines of their homes; and from internal social-tribal pressures. The methods adopted for dealing with this resistance were culturally appropriate for the community: the counselors used the power of rumor in traditional Bedouin society as a tool of persuasion; the fact a better alternative was offered to the children; and the use of men to persuade other men.

The findings are presented in three main categories: the first, behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the "House of the Mother and the Child" frameworks; the second, regarding the provision of knowledge; and the third, change of attitudes, that is, the manner in which the attitudes of the mothers, the counselors, the children and the environment changed as a result of the knowledge that they acquired. The findings are also divided into the following subjects: prevention of violence, personal development, and a changing sense of self, as well as issues related to child development, such as toys, nutrition, language, life skills, order and tidiness, and communication skills.

Analysis of the findings shows that the establishment of the frameworks has led to significant change within the community, affecting the counselors, the mothers, the children, and the immediate environment (husbands, siblings, and others). The

counselors went through a process of personal development and empowerment that enabled them to expand their influence over the mothers and their children. The mothers underwent a significant process of internalizing their parental roles and extending their influence over the education of their children. The children also went through a meaningful process in which they acquired important knowledge that they pass on to their immediate environment: siblings, grandmothers, and others.

The most important part of the community empowerment process is played by the mothers. Indeed, as soon as they are empowered, they become agents for change in their communities. With the knowledge they have acquired, the children become mediators between the public educational framework and the tribal family system and widen the project's influence by disseminating their newly gained knowledge to their immediate environment: siblings, friends, grandparents, and their fathers.

## **Introduction**

### **The Arab Bedouin Population of the Negev**

Around 170,000 Arab Bedouin live in the Negev,<sup>3</sup> comprising approximately 25% of its population.<sup>4</sup> About one half of the Arab Bedouin in the Negev – some 85,000 people – live in seven permanent townships set up by the state between the late 1960s and the early 1990s:<sup>5</sup> Tel-Sheva, Rahat, Hura, Ksseife, Arara, Lakiyya, and Segev Shalom. The infrastructure in these permanent settlements is substandard. Rahat, the only Arab Bedouin city, with a population of over 35,000, has only one bank, one post office, and one community center and no public transportation. These are the poorest settlements in the country.<sup>6</sup>

The other half of the Arab Bedouin population of the Negev – about 85,000 people – lives in approximately 45 villages that are unrecognized by the Israeli authorities. Because they are unrecognized, they are not provided with municipal services such as running water, connection to the central electricity grid, sewage system and garbage collection. Health, education and welfare services are very poor or non-existent. The unrecognized villages do not appear on official State of Israel maps, and their residents are for all intents and purposes invisible citizens.<sup>7</sup>

A practical consequence of being unrecognized is that these villages are not part of the area's master plan, and so permits to build in them are not awarded. As a result, any building is defined as illegal and is a candidate for destruction, including homes, public buildings and infrastructure.

### **The Arab Bedouin Women – Employment and Education**

The Arab Bedouin population of the Negev has undergone significant changes in the last few decades that have especially impacted on the status of Arab Bedouin women. In the past, Arab Bedouin women's role was primarily productive. Women had an

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<sup>3</sup> Ariel Dloomy, Orly Almi and Faisal Sawalha.2006. *The Arab-Bedouins of the Nagab-Negev Desert in Israel*, Negev Co-existence Forum for Civil Equality.

<sup>4</sup> Swirski, Shlomo and Hasson, Yael. 2006. *Invisible Citizens: Israeli Government Policy towards the Negev Bedouin*. Adva Center, Center for Bedouin Studies & Development Research Unit, and Negev Center for Regional Development, issue 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.:1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.:1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.:1.

important role in childrearing as well as in helping the men attend to the herd and in supporting the family. Today, however, their role has been narrowed down: only a few women enter the labor market, and most of them fulfill traditional roles. Women's status is still heavily influenced by social customs and social and religious tradition. In general, the process of change undergone by Arab Bedouin society in the Negev, including a shift from desert to urban life, has not improved women's lives or made them more independent. However, there are women who have overcome the obstacles of patriarchy and have acquired an education while insisting on their rights. The trend, therefore, is not a uniform one.

Job opportunities for Arab women in the Negev are extremely limited. Women who succeed in finding a job face double discrimination, based on their gender and their ethnicity, which can be seen in every aspect of their labor conditions. A shortage of job opportunities and their difficult financial situation forces women to compromise and accept low-paid work with no social security.

Data from 2005 from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor show that only 11% of Arab women in the Negev participate in the labor market, while the figure for Jewish women in the south of Israel is 61%.<sup>8</sup>

Women in Arab Bedouin society are unable to realize their natural right to education. The Arab Bedouin education system is extremely weak, especially in the unrecognized villages, where schools are built to meet immediate needs, without taking into account long-term future requirements.

According to a survey conducted by the Council of Unrecognized Villages, dropout rates among Bedouin youth from unrecognized villages stand at 60%, and among girls are even higher. One of the more serious consequences of this is that the percentage of Bedouin students with a matriculation certificate is the lowest in the country.<sup>9</sup> Regarding higher education, while the rate of Bedouin women with a B.A. is

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.:2.

<sup>9</sup> Sarab Abu Rabiya-Quidar. 2004. *Female dropouts from Bedouin education in the Negev: exclusion, discrimination and otherness*. The Center for the Study of Israeli Arab Society, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute.

increasing, it is still much lower than that of Bedouin men. During the period from 1998 to 2003, 129 Bedouin men were awarded a B.A. compared to 54 women.

In addition to these external obstacles, Bedouin women wishing to exercise their right to education, including higher education, also face cultural barriers that restrict their movement and prevent them from going out to study, or to study in the same classes as men.

### **The Bedouin child**

Nearly 60% of the Arab Bedouin population is comprised of children less than 18 years of age. Over 100,000 Bedouin children under the age of 18 live in the Negev, about half of them in unrecognized villages. The infant mortality rate (0-1 year) in Arab Bedouin society is significantly higher than in the Jewish sector. In 2004, the infant mortality rate was four times that of the Jewish sector.<sup>10</sup> The percentage of Arab Bedouin children living below the poverty line is as high as 60%, and even higher in the unrecognized villages.<sup>11</sup>

The state provides daycare centers for infants and toddlers between three months and three years of age, under the supervision of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Labor. These centers are intended for working mothers as well as for children referred to them by social services. In the Arab Bedouin sector in the Negev there is one single daycare center operating in Tel Sheva. In addition, there is a system of 104 home-based pre-nursery play groups, each of which caters to about five children. In total, these facilities care for 553 infants and toddlers up to the age of three.

Arab Bedouin children are entitled to free education from three years of age. However, the Ministry of Education does not organize transport for such young children for reasons of cost and safety. As a result, in some of the unrecognized villages children are unable to exercise this right. Some 12,200 children aged 3-5 attend kindergartens in the Arab Bedouin community. In 2005 there were 332 kindergarten groups in the permanent townships. In 2006 122 kindergarten groups were being run in the unrecognized villages. 80% of the kindergartens in the

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<sup>10</sup> Weissblei, Ety. 2006. *The Children of the Bedouin Sector in the Negev: A Report on the Situation*, submitted to the Committee for Children's Rights, the Knesset, Research and Information Center.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.:2.

permanent townships, and all of the kindergartens in the unrecognized villages, are housed in buildings that were not intended for such usage, including in mobile homes and other temporary structures.<sup>12</sup>

In summation, Arab Bedouin society in the Negev has undergone drastic changes in recent years that have influenced and reshaped many aspects of its social life. Women in Arab Bedouin society, and especially those in unrecognized villages, live in poverty and unemployment to a greater degree than other populations. They have to cope with the enormous challenges that result from their belonging to an oppressed minority in Israel and because of their exclusion by traditional male society in the Negev.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.:3.

## **The “Parents as Partners” Project**

The “Parents as Partners” project<sup>13</sup> was established with the aim of providing solutions to some of the problems and needs mentioned above and in particular to create a program which the parents played a major role in developing and shaping. As previously noted, there is a considerable lack of frameworks for young children in the unrecognized villages.

The program combines a traditional approach, based on traditional and knowledge and skills, with knowledge drawn from contemporary theories of child development. The objective of the project is to expose mothers to various fields of knowledge and to bring the traditional and familiar approaches that have informed their child-rearing for years together with theoretical knowledge regarding child development. The idea is to establish continuity between local and academic knowledge through cultural adaptation and to integrate the different worlds to which children are exposed. Thus, the project strives to bridge the gap between the traditional world, represented by the values imparted to the child by his mother, and the modern world, represented by the education system. This bridge would enable children to proudly draw on their cultural heritage at the same time as adapting to changing lifestyles.

Similar to many societies around the world, in Arab Bedouin society the mother is the child’s primary educator.<sup>14</sup> For many years, before the shift to permanent settlements and changes to the Arab Bedouin’s traditional way of life, mothers relied on traditional skills and sources of knowledge in bringing up their children. Children would learn their language and cultural history from the stories told around the campfire; they would learn arithmetic by counting the livestock in the herd and the colors from the patterns on their mother’s dress. While running errands from tent to tent, little children would learn directions, how to measure distances and how to communicate with the adult world. With the shift to permanent settlements from the

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<sup>13</sup> The project was developed by NISPED-AJEEC – The Arab-Jewish Center for Equality, Empowerment and Cooperation. It is one of the organization’s first projects to deal with early childhood. It is an informal program for the education and development of young children in Arab Bedouin society that is culturally adapted to the needs of that society and implemented by Arab Bedouin mothers. The project was conducted in unrecognized villages.

<sup>14</sup> From the program submitted to the National Insurance Institute by AJEEC.

1960s to the 1980s and with the penetration of modern aspects into the traditional way of life, mothers became detached from their children, who now attended school. Traditional fields of knowledge borne by the Arab Bedouin mother lost their relevance for children, thereby creating two opposite poles – tradition versus modernity – that influence the Bedouin child.

This polarity poses a danger for the future of the Arab Bedouin child: he is exposed to modern materials at school, while at home traditional messages still dominate. This is liable to alienate the Arab Bedouin child from the bearers of tradition, and especially from his mother. This process could eradicate the traditional roles of the Arab Bedouin mother, isolate her from her socio-cultural environment and undermine her parental authority, while at the same time creating a child who is ashamed of his mother and scorns his natural environment.

The “Parents as Partners” project is an educational-developmental program that is embedded in Arab Bedouin ways of life. It strives to empower mothers and help them to build bridges between two contradictory worlds, thereby narrowing the gap between the education system, to which their children are exposed, and the traditional educational methods with which they educate their children at home.

The project combines training the mothers of young children in the main areas related to normal child development: developmental stimulation, healthy nutrition, accident prevention at home, health care, and the inculcation of good habits. The project also deals with other aspects of family life.

### **The rationale behind the project**

The project’s objectives are implemented through the development of an informal framework for nurturing and developing young children in Arab Bedouin society. The program is culturally sensitive to the conditions and ways of life of that society, in that it trains women from the target villages to work as counselors for mothers and their children in the village. The counselors are trained to pass on knowledge, skills and self-confidence to the mothers, thus enabling them to fulfill their role as the most significant educators of their children. The project provides solutions to a number of

needs: first, the need for effective information transfer and interpersonal communication between equals through peer education; second, the need for role models of women who know how to advance themselves and their families; third, the need to create places of work for women in the community.

In addition, the project aims to create highly cost effective educational frameworks for children in the target villages - in other words, frameworks that are based on the active partnership of the children's mothers. Mothers' involvement is voluntary, and supplements the framework's staff at no extra cost.

Finally, the project aims to create a leading cadre of women in the field of education in Arab Bedouin society.

### **The project's objectives**

Primary objective: To develop an informal framework for early childhood (birth to 3 years) education and development in the unrecognized villages of the Negev that is sensitive to the culture and way of life of the target population.

#### The project's objectives

- To promote the child's optimal development in a broad range of areas; to help him to realize his potential without detaching him from his cultural heritage; and to develop his creativity while drawing on his cultural heritage.
- To build on the mothers' traditional knowledge of childrearing and home making while providing them with new knowledge on a variety of issues, in accordance with the cultural, educational, social and economic needs of the Arab Bedouin population; to use educational tools to strengthen the relationship between mother and child.
- To train Bedouin women from the target communities as paraprofessional early childhood counselors and as role models for their peers, with the aim of promoting women's status in Arab Bedouin society and encouraging Arab Bedouin women's employment both in their own communities and further afield.

## **Guiding principles**

- The project has an educational and community approach that is culturally sensitive to the way of life of the Negev Arab Bedouin society.
- The project strives to provide training for mothers, in clear and comprehensible language, by women from the community who have been trained in peer teaching. This approach empowers the mother, as the counselor provides a realistic role model: “If she can do it, so can I.”
- To encourage parents’ active involvement in their children’s education and to provide the tools needed to do so successfully. This approach empowers the parents as educators and active citizens.
- To pay special attention to Arab Bedouin women as primary educators, and to position them as the most important educators of their children; in addition, to locate them in the public, and not only the private sphere.
- To establish frameworks that constitute a natural extension of the Arab Bedouin women’s way of life: the congregation of women in a “women’s tent”; to create an educational framework for children that is an extension of the family’s way of life, in terms of both physical environment and content, and that is based on Arab Bedouin culture while incorporating modern aspects (stories, songs, religious festivals, the use of familiar concepts and images, etc.). This approach contributes greatly to giving the child a clear, proud and secure sense of identity, and reduces the cultural conflict in which the children and parents find themselves.
- To involve the community in shaping and implementing the project - a process that strengthens the community’s belief in its ability and responsibility to shape its own fate.

## **Description of the project**

The project's paraprofessional counselors undergo an initial 100-hour training program.<sup>15</sup> In the first year following their training, the paraprofessional counselors organize and guide groups of mothers and their children (0-3 years) in their villages. These groups consist of ten to fifteen mothers and meet twice weekly for three hours

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<sup>15</sup> From a report by AJEEC, *The “Parents as Partners” Project, 2004-2007* (Note: this has since been expanded to 800 hours, in accord with the demands of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor which has extended its recognition and support to the program.)

of joint and separate activities for mothers and children, led by two co-counselors. In the second year, permanent educational frameworks are established for the children (ages 1 to 3) – "The House of the Mother and the Child" – in each target community. These frameworks are run in the mornings by two counselors and one mother. The mothers participate in a rota system, in which one of them joins the staff each day.

### **The objectives of the evaluation research<sup>16</sup>**

The objective of this evaluation is to examine the suitability and implementation of the "Parents and Partners" project. It also evaluates its actual educational influence on the various circles of the target population: the mothers who were recruited and who participated in the preparatory mothers' and children's groups, their children, who attended "The House of the Mother and the Child", their husbands, and their wider social circles, such as community members who had no direct involvement with the project but who were nonetheless influenced by it to a certain degree.

### **Research approach and methodology**

This report makes use of two interrelated research methods: in-depth interviews and focus groups.

#### **The research tradition**

The research strategy falls within the anthropological paradigm of studying different cultures and is based on the manner in which participants relate their personal narrative. It is based on data collected in the field, and constructs theory from the bottom up.

#### **In-depth interviews**

The in-depth interview is a tool for communicating and understanding that which cannot be gathered from observations. This study uses informal interviews-discussions, meaning that the information collected differs from interview to interview, and the questions are adapted to the style of each interviewee.<sup>17 18</sup> The interview is conducted as a regular conversation.

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<sup>16</sup> The evaluation is based on the gathering and analysis of data through qualitative methods, the collection of materials through in-depth interviews and documents that are submitted to textual analysis, and the cross-referencing of information.

<sup>17</sup> Bate-Marom, R., Alice, S., Ashkenazi, M., and Tzemach, M. 1986. *Research methods in the social sciences, the principles and styles of research [unit 4]*. The Open University: Tel Aviv.

<sup>18</sup> Patton M.Q.. 1987. *How to use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA :Sage.

### **Focus groups**

Some of the interviews were conducted in groups in which a number of participants carried out a conversation. Their responses and comments were documented, as well as their direct and indirect answers to the questions asked.

### **The case studies: The villages of Um Batin and Awagan**

This evaluation study focuses on the villages of Um Batin and Awagan, which served as case studies.

Awagan is an unrecognized village near the Arab Bedouin township of Lakiya. The village has a population of 2,300 and lies within the municipal jurisdiction of Beer Sheva and the Bnei Shimon Regional Council. The village itself lacks all basic services, which its residents receive from the neighboring township, Lakiya.

The unrecognized village Um Batin, in the Beer Sheva valley area, is in process of becoming recognized. It has 3,800 residents and lies within the municipal jurisdiction of the Abu Basma Regional Council. The village has an elementary school and a clinic.

Interviews were conducted with counselors and mothers from the two villages, with AJEEC's professional team (Amal Alsana-Alh'jooj, Nada Abu Ganem and Ruth Paz), and with Garziella Perelman from the Gevanim Center.

### **Gaining entrance to the villages**

#### **General background**

The "Parents as Partners" project is a community education program aimed at early childhood. There were two main reasons for the choosing early childhood as the focus of the project: first, the understanding that the education of young children greatly influences their future functioning, and that parents play a critical role in their child's normative development; and second, the reality in Arab Bedouin society in the Negev, in which there are no programs or educational frameworks for children from birth to three years old.

After the initial success of the project in the village of Abu Quider in 2002, it was decided in 2004 to expand the “Parents as Partners” project to another five unrecognized Arab Bedouin villages (Um Batin, Awagan, Al Dada, Al Grain, Al Sayyed). The project was expanded with the support of Ashalim, the National Insurance Institute, and the Ministry of Social Welfare.

The choice of unrecognized villages was based on needs in the field. As mentioned, unlike the recognized townships, unrecognized villages lack basic infrastructure and formal and informal educational frameworks, especially for the under-threes. The need of mothers to “get out of the house”<sup>19</sup> and to be part of a framework was also expressed in the field. It was assumed that the project would have a greater chance of succeeding where there is a need and a human infrastructure hungry for change. Another assumption was that the unique nature of the project – which aimed to developing a model that would integrate cultural heritage with modern education while selecting its content in a culturally sensitive manner – was particularly appropriate for implementation in the unrecognized villages, where traditional elements are extremely dominant.<sup>20</sup>

Gaining entrance to the villages was not simple. The process was gradual and in keeping with the response from the field. Nada Abu Ganem, the project coordinator, described her first visits to the village of Awagan as follows: “I looked for signs that would help me find my way to the village, and when I finally found it, I couldn’t avoid the gaze of people who were wondering: “Who are you? Why are you here? What do you want? You’re a stranger here!”<sup>21</sup>

After overcoming the physical obstacles of accessing the villages, the real challenge began: persuading and recruiting the target population. At first, entrance to the village was through the men: “We started to go into the field and present our vision and the project’s objectives to the men, who passed the information on to the women.”<sup>22</sup> However, this in itself was insufficient and more publicity was needed. Advertisements were taken out in the local press, which gave greater exposure to the project.

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<sup>19</sup> From an interview with Amal Alsana, 20.2.08.

<sup>20</sup> This is not the case in the recognized townships. Because of their urban characteristics, traditional markers have become blurred in the light of modern attributes.

<sup>21</sup> From the diary that Nada Abu Ganem has kept since her entrance into the field.

<sup>22</sup> From an interview with Nada Abu Ganem, 7.2.08.

The first contact points were actually men, who gave the project its social legitimacy. In order to reach the target population of women and children, we first had to go to the men and receive their seal of approval. Later, contact people were chosen from each of the villages in order to assist in the next stages.

### **Recruitment and training of paraprofessional counselors**

The professional team at AJEEC was given names and telephone numbers by the contact people in the villages. Criteria for selecting women for training as counselors were decided upon: 1) ten years of schooling; 2) self-confidence; 3) warm relations with the environment; 4) women who were accepted by the community, who were afforded respect, who had no trouble with their family, and whose husband supported them; and most importantly, 5) women who were mothers, or were shortly due to become mothers.<sup>23</sup>

During the recruitment process, preference was given to women who received support from their family, and especially from their husband. This preference was based on a long-term view which saw the success of the project as dependent on a stable initial core group. In other words, the first recruits had to be able to demonstrate internal support from their family that would enable them to focus their energies on the project and not on conflicts within the family. The women received 120 hours of training from a professional team that specialized in education, child development, safety, communication, nutrition, and so on. After completion of this initial training, the women were faced with a mission that would determine their future in the project - the recruitment of other mothers for participation in the program.

### **The mothers' and children's groups**

In preparing the program for mothers and their children, cultural constraints in the Arab Bedouin settlements were taken into account. The counselors worked in pairs in their own villages and only with women from their own tribe or clan, organizing groups of mothers and children under the age of four that met twice weekly in their homes. During those meetings the mothers received guidance from the counselors in a range of subjects: child development; sensory stimulation; the importance of playing with and talking to their children and how to engage them in play; hygiene and health,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.:10.

nutrition, methods of education, parent-child relationships, and more. While one counselor worked with the mothers, the second counselor, equipped with a kit of toys and play materials, played with the children, organizing play activities suitable for their different developmental levels and ages. Finally, the mothers were encouraged to play with their children in similar fashion and introduced to the various toys and their purpose.

The counselors periodically completed a self-evaluation form; in addition their strengths and weaknesses were professionally evaluated, following which they were offered personalized training programs. The counselors reported making significant professional progress thanks to their personal training and their self-evaluations, and said that these enabled them to measure their progress over time.<sup>24</sup>

### **The target population: characteristics and recruitment methods**

The project's *direct* target population is comprised of Arab Bedouin mothers and their young children (birth to 3 years) living in the unrecognized villages that were selected as target sites for the project. Through the mother, the project is also intended to indirectly influence the functioning of the entire family. Every woman who has children of the appropriate ages is a possible candidate for participation in the project. Families were recruited to the project by the paraprofessional counselors with the assistance of the project coordinator. This complex mission is one of the most important in the project. The counselors deliberated as to how they should try to persuade mothers to participate in a project that was being newly operated in their village. The counselors were aware that without the mothers there would be no project: "We went to mothers' houses and felt as if we needed them. We said that if we fail at this task then the whole project is over," related the counselors from Awagan.<sup>25</sup>

### **Encountering and dealing with opposition**

#### **Suspicious among women of the tribe**

The counselors came from the same village as the target population of mothers. They shared the same cultural background and by and large had the same level of education. These similarities made it harder to recruit mothers to the project, as the

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<sup>24</sup> From an interview with counselors in Um Batin, 13.1.08.

<sup>25</sup> From an interview with counselors in Awagan, 15.1.08.

counselors explained: “It was very difficult to recruit mothers in my village, even though there are lots of mothers. They refused to take part in a project that I was involved in.”<sup>26</sup> They were not perceived as a source of knowledge and learning but rather from a tribal perspective. Despite the counselors’ intensive training, the feeling among other mothers tended to be something like, “I’m just like you; what have you learnt that you can teach me?”<sup>27</sup>

The mothers were not particularly interested in the counselors’ descriptions of the content of the project. Instead, they were concerned with questions aimed at comparing themselves with and undermining the counselors: “I’m explaining the schedule to a mother and she asks me, ‘Who’s signed up? You’ve only got three? Really! Who have you gone to? How much are you earning?’ I felt as if I was under investigation.”<sup>28</sup>

The mothers felt that the counselors posed a threat to their social status and that they undermined accepted norms in the tribe. Women who earn a salary are seen as having a higher status. “The resistance was not only based on ignorance, but on jealousy as well. She’s sitting at home, she hasn’t studied anything, doesn’t do anything, and suddenly she sees her friends going to Beer Sheva to work and get ahead. They’ve got money, they’ve become important, and she asks herself, why them and not me?”<sup>29</sup>

The women dealt with this threat by refusing to send their children to the proposed frameworks in the hope that the project would not be implemented and that the women who had gone out to work would have to return to their non-threatening position: “And then they say to themselves, if I don’t send my child, maybe the framework will be ruined and have to close down.”<sup>30</sup>

It was easier for the mothers to accept the authority of an external figure who did not threaten them. This was especially so when the figure came from a recognized village:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.:10.

“When Miriam came there was more legitimacy, more women took part, because she’s from the outside, and it’s easier to accept her than me.”<sup>31</sup>

### **The opinion that the home is the best environment for children**

Many mothers were nervous about sending their children because of the outlook that the home is the safest environment for them, as one of the mothers explained: “I know how to look after my child in the best possible way. What is he lacking at home? He’s got everything.”<sup>32</sup>

They saw the new framework as offering no added value, viewing it merely as a place for children to play: “My child doesn’t need a kindergarten to play; he can play at home.”<sup>33</sup>

This approach among mothers illustrates their fear of the different and unknown, and testifies to their self-perception as the best educators their children can have. It also suggests a deeper layer in the mothers’ educational outlook regarding their children, namely, that their role is to provide a safe environment and a place to play, or in other words, that the essence of motherhood is to see to their child’s most basic needs.

### **Women leaving the house**

The most common opposition to the framework among the mothers actually reflects their husbands’ opposition to their participation: “My husband wouldn’t let me sign my child up. The only place I can go with him is to the Well Baby Clinic [Tipat Chalav].”<sup>34</sup>

The men’s opposition points to a deeper level in gender relations and to the delicate texture of those power relations. Among men, opposition to the project stems from their desire to preserve the status quo, including their control over women. The only places that women can legitimately visit are those that are related to children’s essential needs, such as the Well Baby Clinic.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.:11.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.:11.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.:10.

However, the "House of the Mother and the Child" is also related to the child's needs, and yet there was resistance to women's participation there. Why was this? One possible answer is that the father is the dominant figure in Bedouin children's educational frameworks. In the public sphere it is the father who attends parents' meetings and who is called to school if his child causes trouble, and so on. The place of the Bedouin women is in raising the children in the private sphere, where her husband defines the extent of her social mobility. The framework of the "House of the Mother and the Child" is seen as related to the child's educational needs, and as such, men's expectations are that women have no place there. Moreover, this points to men's anxiety about women entering a domain that is meant to be theirs. In short, it would appear that the men's resistance expresses their opposition to something that is new and that lies beyond their dominant authority, which might therefore diminish their power at home and undermine their influence over their wives.

Their opposition is also related to a concern that the women will move ahead and leave them behind: "At first, the men opposed the framework. They were scared that we would start to develop and that they would be left behind."<sup>35</sup>

The men's anxieties reveal their perceptions of the "House of the Mother and the Child" as a framework that might help their wives develop and progress. In other words, the framework was seen as providing a solution not only to the children's needs, but also to the mothers', in such a way as might lead to their advancement.

### **Internal social-tribal tensions**

Another aspect of opposition to the project can be seen against the background of internal social tensions related to the familial composition of each of the villages. One of the counselors read the situation as follows: "In Awagan there are a number of families that all come from different areas and they don't cooperate much with each other. This was expressed in the women's cooperation with me and in the opposition to the framework."<sup>36</sup> These tensions were more acutely felt in Awagan than in Um Batin, according to one of the mothers from Awagan.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.:11.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.:11.

## **Means of persuasion**

### **The power of the rumor**

In order to overcome opposition to the project, the counselors began their efforts at persuasion in their closest social circles in order to recruit internal community support and sign children up to the framework. “I started with my immediate circle, family, friends, my nieces,” said one of the counselors at Um Batin.<sup>38</sup>

This meant that the frameworks were opened and began to operate regardless or in spite of the opposition. “When the village saw that we were working day in day out, and that we opened the framework regardless of them, that we have internal support and don’t need them, the next year word got around and they started to be encouraged and sign up.”<sup>39</sup>

Rumors that the framework had opened gained speed. Hearing that other parents sent their children there, more parents began to do the same. “When they saw that the Abu Gaber children were coming, the Al H’jooj family started sending their children too,” said one of the counselors from Awagan.<sup>40</sup>

It would appear, then, that the power of rumor works in two directions: it strengthens opposition and helps to overcome that opposition. The same intra-social dynamic that obstructed the opening of the frameworks now operated as a kind of “positive jealousy”: if my neighbor is sending his child, then I’m going to send my child as well.

Moreover, by not caving in to the opposition, the counselors passed “the test of the collective.” They successfully overcame the collective’s resistance and thus won the trust of their peers. As one of the counselors from Um Batin noted: “When we didn’t give up and they saw we were persistent and serious, then even those who had been opposed began to send their children and they slowly came to accept the framework.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Providing a good alternative for the children**

The counselors tried to persuade the mothers that they were able to offer a better alternative for their children in two ways: first, by meeting the child’s needs, and second, by providing knowledge.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.:10.

### **Meeting the child's needs**

“I began to tell a mother that rather than keep her child stuck at home she should bring her and she'd get a routine and be able to play,” related one of the counselors from Um Batin.<sup>42</sup> She could also offer a *safer* alternative to the situation in the unrecognized villages: “There are mothers who brought their children because they feared for them. Here we have an organized framework instead of letting the children play outside in the wadi.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Providing knowledge**

The counselors persuaded the mothers that the framework not only provided an alternative physical environment to the home, but that it also helped the child and gave him knowledge. “Mothers heard from their neighbors' children that they were learning to talk and count. So much so that one neighbor, who had a child older than those in the framework, when she realized that he wasn't talking and didn't know how to count like the younger children in the kindergarten, this influenced her, and she decided to sign him up. The father was opposed, but she presented it to him as an accomplished fact and said: "Look, the neighbor's child is already talking and our child sits at home and doesn't know anything.”<sup>44</sup>

The provision of knowledge was a powerful tool of persuasion. As soon as a mother realized that the framework was imparting knowledge she was able to stand up to her husband and persuade him that they had to sign their child up.

### **Men persuading men**

The mothers who had been persuaded were asked to convince their husbands. This created a difficulty among the counselors because they were culturally prohibited from talking to men: “We went to the mothers and trained them and they asked me to talk with their husbands, but I'm not allowed to talk to them.”<sup>45</sup>

This required the involvement of a third party, namely, a man who would talk to the other men and try to persuade them: “At first it was hard to recruit mothers.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.:10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.:10.

Eventually we involved Abthasam's husband, who persuaded the men in their family, and they agreed."<sup>46</sup>

The counselors adopted a culturally appropriate method for reaching the women and persuading them to sign their children up for the framework, namely, by getting men from the community to persuade other men.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.:10.

## Training of Paraprofessional Counselors





**Working  
with Groups  
of Mothers  
and Children**



## 'House of the Mother and the Child'



# 'House of the Mother and the Child'



## Findings

In this chapter we divide the findings into three central categories: first, behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the "House of the Mother and the Child" frameworks; second, the provision of knowledge; and third, changing attitudes, that is, the way that the attitudes of the mothers, the counselors, the children and the environment changed as a result of the knowledge that they acquired. Findings are also divided according to the subjects that came up in the interviews.<sup>47</sup>

### Preventing violence

#### Mothers

<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>
<i>Beforehand I used to hit my children. I didn't know you're not supposed to hit them. My mother didn't teach me that you're not supposed to hit your children.</i>	<i>I learnt that hitting a child can damage his personality.</i>	<i>I stopped hitting my children.</i>
<i>When my daughter used to interrupt my neighbor and me I used to hit her and tell her to be quiet.</i>	<i>I learnt that I need to listen to my daughter and explain to her that I'm busy right now and then she'll stop interrupting.</i>	<i>I learnt to reorganize my priorities and put my daughter at the center.</i>
<i>I used to think that it was my role to make my child shut up and to hit him, because that's how my mother acted with me.</i>	<i>I learnt that I mustn't hit my child because it can damage his personality.</i>	<i>I realized that my child understands better when I talk to him than when I hit him.</i>

The mothers went through a process of change regarding their roles as mothers. They became aware that their actions have an impact on their children. They learnt that they have a role to play in educating their children, and that they need to improve their relations with them in keeping with new norms and rules, according to which it is forbidden to hit a child because of the possible damage to his personality.

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<sup>47</sup> The quotations are presented using the turns of phrase and specific concepts employed by the interviewees.

The mothers also learnt rules of behavior with their children, in particular that children are no less important than adults and should be treated accordingly, including talking to the child, explaining things to him, and being attentive to his needs. They internalized that they should rearrange their priorities so that the child is at the center. The mothers acquired new tools for dealing with their children that replaced those they had learnt at home (violence). They understood that violence is an inappropriate and destructive tool to use against their children.

It can also be seen that the patterns learnt by the mothers at home change as they become more aware. In fact, through their children they are able to understand the mistakes made in their own education and to learn alternative models. As a result, they become more patient and supportive, which points to their desire to advance their children and testifies to their aspirations to be better parents.

The mothers learnt that the most effective way to better educate their children is by talking, and not through violence.

**Personal development**

**The counselors**

<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>
<i>In the past I was unable to be a counselor, to stand up in front of an audience. I didn't have the power to recruit mothers, to sit with them.</i>	<i>AJEEC gave me the tools, the content, but mostly gave me self-confidence.</i>	<i>Today, when I'm with my family I start to tell them about issues to do with child development.</i>
<i>Before I started working I had no income, I was dependent on my husband. I'd take good care of the money because it was my husband's money.</i>	<i>This is the first time I've had an income. I've started managing my affairs by myself, to spend money on myself.</i>	<i>I felt that I could trust myself, I felt capable.</i>

We can see that the counselors underwent a significant change from being women who were unable to stand up in front of an audience to empowered women who have begun to believe in their internal strength, their capabilities, and their abilities. This is

a result of their positive experiences, which diminished their anxieties and fears while nurturing their self-confidence. They also acquired economic independence, which furthered their personal development. They are no longer dependent on their husbands - neither financially nor in other ways. They have learnt that they are capable of independently managing their own affairs and that they can rely on themselves.

At a more latent level, in terms of income their status is similar to that of men, which gives them a degree of influence. In a broader sense, it should also be noted that as soon as the counselors believed in themselves, they were able to transfer that belief to others.

**The mothers**

<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>
<i>Beforehand I didn't have any time, I was buried at home with the children</i>	<i>When I put my daughter into the kindergarten I found that I had more time than before and I took advantage of this and signed up for a Hebrew course. I said to myself, I want to learn.</i>	<i>I started going to more lectures for my education, and when I saw how much I was getting out of it I took heart and decided to go and work at the Well Baby Clinic. I felt I was worth something.</i>

The mothers realized that their children's routine helped them to construct a routine of their own. They had more free time to develop their personal abilities and to develop in different directions. This belief increased their self-confidence, and their social status in the village improved from one of inferiority to one where they had influence. The framework influenced the mothers and their children in a positive way and enabled them to pay attention to themselves and to feel that they are worth something.

## Changes in self-perception

### The counselors

<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>	<b>The husband</b>	<b>The environment</b>
<i>In the past I felt inferior.</i>	<i>I look at myself at a different level; it's as if I'd finished university. I have changed a lot because of the knowledge that I've acquired</i>	<i>I'm a partner in making decisions, I have value.</i>	<i>My husband consults with me, talks with me, encouraged me to get a driving license and bought me a car, even though not a single woman in the tribe has a driving license.</i>	<i>My social status has improved, people treat me differently.</i>

We can see that knowledge has given the counselors power. Their self-evaluation has changed and they see themselves in a different light: as worthy and as equal partners in making decisions with their husband. As soon as the counselors internalized this self-perception, their self-confidence grew something that they radiated to their environment. Their husbands treat them as having value and encourage and support them. One man even bought his wife a car, which was unprecedented in their village. Indeed, the counselors themselves are unprecedented in terms of their newly acquired knowledge. Their social status has also improved and they feel that they are a source of knowledge that is esteemed by the environment.

## Child development

### Toys

<b>Child development</b>	<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>
<b>Counselors</b>	<i>I didn't know that toys influence the child's development. I thought that children just play for fun.</i>	<i>Garziella taught me what children learn from toys and how it influences their motor development.</i>	

<b>Mothers</b>	<i>I'd bring any old toys and tell my children to play with them. I wouldn't sit with them and teach them how to put the toy together. I'd put it together and leave.</i>	<i>I learnt that there are toys that work on the child's development.</i>	<i>I learnt that I've got to let my child try things for himself and that I need to enable him to do that.</i>
<b>Children</b>	<i>My child didn't know how to put the toy together</i>	<i>My child learnt how to put the toy together.</i>	<i>I can see how my son teaches his brother how to put the toy together.</i>

The counselors understood the importance of play and how toys can influence a child's development and help him progress according to his individual needs (developmental level, age, etc.). The training that the counselors received from AJEEC's professional staff increased their awareness and enabled them to pass their knowledge and awareness on to others in their wider social circles.

The mothers understood that they have to actively select toys for their children, and that their involvement in their children's play was important. They internalized that their direction and guidance as mothers helps their child to understand the game.

The mothers also internalized that by trying things to do things by themselves their children are able to learn and develop. In other words, toys are for the child, and not for the mother. The mother's role is to mediate between the child and the toy and to follow what he does with it; the importance of the toy goes beyond the fact of playing with it.

The children acquired playing skills and learnt their educational influence over the other children in the home. The child gains self-belief, as he is able to implement his newly acquired skills and pass them on to his siblings.

<b>Matching the toy to the child's age and development</b>	<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>	<b>Other/siblings</b>
<b>Mothers</b>	<i>I didn't know that you're meant to choose the toy according to the child's age. I'd bring a toy from kindergarten for a three year old.</i>	<i>The counselors taught me that I should buy toys according to the child's age and then I started to know more.</i>	<i>I started paying attention to the child's age and what was appropriate for that age and to buy toys that were right for that age.</i>	<i>I also started paying attention to the toys of my son in fifth grade and to buy him toys for the right age.</i>

The mothers apply their newly acquired skills to their other children and start to buy toys appropriate for their ages. The mothers and children who participate in the framework become agents for change within their homes.

### **Nutrition**

	<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>
<b>Mothers</b>	<i>Before the lecture on nutrition I didn't care what my child ate. I used to say that if he ate then fine and if he didn't then he doesn't need to.</i>	<i>I learnt that children need to eat fruits because they contain vitamins, and to cut back on sweets.</i>	<i>Today, when my child sees other children eating sweets he tells them it's not good.</i>

Awareness regarding child nutrition increased among the mothers and heightened the importance of the mothers' role in educating their children. The mothers internalized their central role in educating their children, and learnt that they are able to influence their children. The more knowledge the mother has, the more her children will also know and influence the environment.

**Language**

	<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>	<b>Siblings</b>	<b>The husband</b>
<b>Children</b>	<i>My daughter didn't talk very much.</i>	<i>I feel that my daughter is more developed now in her movements and her speech.</i>	<i>Now my child talks normally and sometimes sings at home.</i>	<i>All of sudden she knows the names of the animals and the words of songs and she encourages her siblings. She goes up to her sister and tells her to sing the song "Shater Shater."</i>	<i>My husband sees our daughter and he's amazed: "What are these songs she's singing?"</i>

The framework influenced children's language development and the mothers' personal development. The mothers have become more aware of the developmental processes their children are going through. They are able to identify the processes and realize that their children can understand things even when they are very young.

This understanding is also shared by the husbands. Both parents understand that their young child is able to absorb information, in contrast to the notion that education only starts later on. The parents can see their child developing, and take their development seriously. They have understood that language is not only important in speech, but also in movement, singing, naming animals, and so on. Through their child, the parents learn about developmental processes. The child is thus the agent of change, mediating between the educational framework and his parents.

## Life skills

	<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>
<b>Children</b>	<i>Beforehand, my child was scared of other children. He was scared to mix with other people.</i>	<i>There has been a big change since my child started going to the framework. He's not scared of anything.</i>	<i>I can see an improvement in his movements and how he plays. Even his ability to express himself has improved.</i>
	<i>My daughter was scared of everyone who came to our house and who wanted to play with her. I was scared that she'd have complexes.</i>	<i>I saw that my daughter could understand and was learning from what they told her.</i>	<i>When children come round to play with my daughter she tells me to get the toys like at framework.</i>

The mothers are witness to changes in their children's behavior: they have stopped being scared and have started to adopt the prevalent patterns of behavior in society and have learnt how to relate to their peers. The mothers have begun to understand their young children's emotions. Children imitate behaviors they are exposed to at the framework and try to implement the rules they learn there in their homes.

The children are exposed to strangers from outside the familiar framework of the family. This makes them learn to behave with them in a certain way and to develop social relations and life skills.

## Order and tidiness

	<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>	<b>Siblings</b>	<b>Environment</b>
<b>Children</b>	<i>My child used to throw things and turn the house upside-down. Sometimes he'd defecate outside and I'd have to tidy up after him all the time.</i>	<i>My child has learnt to wash his hands with his brother before eating, to blow his nose by himself, and to go to the toilet by himself. He even gets his clothes by himself so I can change them.</i>	<i>When I give food to my child together with his brother, he tells me to put food on his own plate like at the framework and then he wants fruit like at the framework.</i>	<i>When my child sees his brother urinating outside he tells him that you're not allowed to pee outside, you have to pee inside.</i>	<i>Even my mother-in-law came to see the framework and went home all excited, how neat and tidy.</i>

In the past, the mothers were helpless and lacked the tools to deal with their children's behavior. The educational framework provided them with the means for attaining the desired behavior: rules of hygiene, order and tidiness, and so on. They were performing tasks in place of their children: they would tidy up after them, clean up their mess, and not give them responsibility and independence, and would rely on themselves more than on their children. They did not believe that their child was capable of learning new patterns, because "he's just a child", as they put it. Now the mothers are aware of the importance of structure in educating their children. Behavioral patterns learnt at the framework have become an integral part of the rules at home, and are even transferred to mothers-in-law.

The framework has changed mothers' outlooks and new patterns of behavior have been introduced to the home. This has been viewed with astonishment by the environment, and people want to see the place that has changed the children's behavior so drastically.

**Communication skills**

	<b>Behavioral patterns prior to the establishment of the framework</b>	<b>The provision of knowledge</b>	<b>Changing attitudes</b>
<b>Mothers</b>	<i>When the counselors told me that a child understands when he's in his mother's womb my reaction was, "What nonsense, how can he understand anything when he's in the womb?"</i>	<i>The counselors explained that I should talk to my child at an earlier stage. Whenever I'm breastfeeding and whenever I'm doing something I should talk to him like a person and not like a baby.</i>	<i>What made me change was when the young children were fighting and I started to talk to my younger son and to tell him not to take his sister's toy. I slowly saw that he could understand me and he stopped taking the toy and I discovered that little children can understand.</i>
	<i>Once, whenever my child asked me something I'd tell him to shut up and I'd ignore him. I did that because I was impatient. I'd tell him to leave me alone; I don't have the energy for you. I thought, what can he understand, why do I have to make an effort to explain things he doesn't understand anyway?</i>	<i>The counselors told me that I have to answer the question, it's important, and it doesn't even take a minute. I started answering his questions and paying attention to him and that calmed him down.</i>	<i>Today I realize that when a child asks something it's because he wants to know and that he can actually understand.</i>
	<i>In the past, when I wanted to go out without my child seeing me I'd just run out and my child would cry until I came back.</i>	<i>The counselors taught me that I should explain to my child that I know it hurts him when I leave but I have to go and I'm asking you to stay with the neighbor or my sister and I'll come back soon, what would you like me to bring you?</i>	<i>I realized that as a mother if I promise my child something I have to do it so that my child can learnt to trust me. That way I can help his personality develop properly so that he knows to trust people.</i>

The mothers acknowledged that their children understand from a young age, and so they started to act differently with them and to talk to them. They began to relate to their children through conversation and with understanding.

The counselors played an important part in mediating in the communication between mother and child. They provided tools for interpersonal communication, which enabled the mothers to change their behavior with their children. They now feel closer to their children and have become aware that their children have the ability to understand even when they are very young.

## **Discussion**

Analysis of the findings shows that the framework has created significant change in the community: among the counselors, the mothers, the children, and the immediate environment (husband, siblings, others).

The counselors underwent a process of development and personal empowerment: they are financially independent of their husbands; they feel worthy and able to make decisions that used to be exclusively made by men. This has led them to expand the scope of their influence over the mothers and children.

The counselors are seen by their communities as a source of knowledge. As a result, they are able to transfer their knowledge to the mothers, the children and their environment, thereby expanding their spheres of influence.

Old educational patterns were deeply embedded in many of the mothers. They therefore found it very difficult to change them. These patterns included using violence to educate their children and perceptions of children as unable to understand their environment or language. Accordingly, they did not see the way they treated their children as important and did not recognize other tools for dealing with their children.

Due to the frameworks and the guidance they received from the counselors, the mothers have changed their outlook and way of thinking. They have recognized their ability to change and influence in two ways: first, in the creation of a framework that enabled them to organize their time correctly, to develop personally, and to gain self-confidence; and second, in terms of their role as a parent and an educator who is able to shape the way her child develops by using skills that enable the child to realize his potential.

When he comes home from the framework, the child is an agent of change, positioned between the public education system and the tribal family system. He brings with him patterns of behavior that are prevalent in the education system, which astonishes his parents and brings them to change their way of thinking. They understand that their

child is able to learn, talk and understand, and that his development depends on how much they invest in him and how they treat him. Thus, the "House of the Mother and the Child" has given the mothers the confidence to believe in their children and put their needs at the center. The mothers understand that they have an influential role to play in educating their children, and this has changed their outlook, attitudes and behavior toward them.

Following their sessions with the counselors, the mothers started to be more attentive to their children's needs. They have become more empathetic, and tend to consult the counselors with questions about their behavior. They have started to ask for guidance aimed at making them better parents and have become pro-active in their children's education.

The mothers understand that their parenthood is important when their children are very young, and not only when they get older. In this regard the children themselves have been agents of change, providing the link between the public educational institution and the familial tribal institution.

The mothers have developed awareness regarding the importance of the early childhood framework in educating their children, and it has taught them rules for behavior and norms vis-à-vis how to act with their children. The home environment has become an extension of the early childhood framework.

The mothers have even begun to use their own judgment and have become partners in the education of their children by choosing toys that are appropriate for their age and developmental stage. The mothers understand the need to sit with their children and converse with them, and see themselves as being able to influence their children. This in turn has impacted on their immediate environment: at home the mothers deploy their new knowledge among their other children; and despite leading the opposition to the framework at its outset, the fathers are astonished at the new things their children have learnt and now recognize the importance of the framework in their development. Community change has also taken place in wider circles – fathers, mothers-in-law, and others in the community – at two levels: the level of awareness, and the practical level, where the former is projected onto the latter.

The level of awareness involves the acquisition of new knowledge that was unavailable to the community prior to the establishment of the framework. The mothers, children, fathers and mothers-in-law have been exposed to new information and given practical tools and skills for dealing with children. Their questions have been answered and they have been given guidance regarding how to act with their children. They can even see the influence of this knowledge on their children.

At the practical level, the mothers, fathers and mothers-in-law, who are influential figures in society, can see the changes their children have undergone. This increases their awareness of the importance of the "House of the Mother and the Child" frameworks and even drives them to set up similar frameworks in their own villages. Attitudes have been changed in a culturally sensitive way that takes into account the community's needs and norms. The framework does not negate the tribal family; rather, it has succeeded in integrating itself within the family by providing knowledge and guidance. This is what attracted the women and brought the community to accept the framework and the changes it proposes. These changes are seen in a positive light, and are not considered to threaten the structure of the community or the mothers' place in it.

Because the mothers participated in the mothers' and children's groups for a number of months while the "House of the Mother and the Child" framework were being established, the children did not feel torn between two worlds. Instead, they feel part of two complementary and mutually influential worlds.

## Conclusions

- **Children as agents of change and mediators between public educational framework and the tribal family system**

The "House of the Mother and the Child" framework has instigated significant changes in terms of providing knowledge and changing opinions among the children who have participated in it. They have received skills that have contributed to their development as children. The children are the primary mediators between the two frameworks – the "House of the Mother and the Child" and their own homes – and bring home the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Siblings, fathers and mothers-in-law are exposed to these skills and are extremely impressed by them. This has increased awareness of the importance of the "House of the Mother and the Child" framework and legitimized it, despite initial opposition.

- **Mothers as agents of change**

The mothers are a main axis of change. They serve as a bridge between their children and the school, and also between their children and other family members (fathers, siblings, mothers-in-law). They also constitute the link between the children and the community. The moment the mothers are empowered they develop self-confidence. This helps their personal development and directly impacts on their environment through their becoming agents of change in the community. The mothers have a number of spheres of influence which in turn impact on the entire society. When the mothers are empowered, the society itself is also empowered. The mothers are part of a chain where each link is important and must be reinforced. The "Parents as Partners" project has empowered the community by strengthening each link separately and in parallel.

- **Cultural sensitivity in the use of local tools and content from the world of child development.**

The "Parents as Partners" project has been culturally adapted and makes use of local tools. This has contributed to its success. The frameworks were set up in the target population's villages; the counselors were selected from the

villages; opposition was dealt with using local cultural tools, including recruiting men to persuade other men and constructing a study program aimed at mothers and children. This cultural sensitivity has been a fundamental aspect of the project's success.

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## **Interviews**

Interview with AJEEC's professional team: Amal Alsana-Alh'jooj, Garziella Perelman, Ruth Paz, Nada Abu Ganem

Interview with the counselors from Um Batin

Interview with the counselors from Awagan

Interview with the mothers from Um Batin and Awagan