

FROM CRADLE TO CAREER IN KIRYAT MALACHI

BY BATSHEVA POMERANTZ

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The steering committee is the key to the city's social mobility.

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Very quietly and away from the spotlight, the small southern town of Kiryat Malachi is undergoing a revolution in the field of informal education. Within a year, the number of participants in youth movement activities increased by 30%, while the range of informal frameworks has expanded as well.

A new initiative encourages a city-based investment strategy as part of the Collective Impact method in tackling specific social problems. Kiryat Malachi is the first town in Israel to benefit from the Collective Impact approach.

The Rashi Foundation, the Tauber Foundation and Gazit Globe – the three major supporters of social projects in Kiryat Malachi – joined forces with the municipality and established a steering committee with all the stakeholders: the local authority, relevant government agencies, community representatives, NGOs, philanthropic foundations and businesses.

“The partnership of the municipality of Kiryat Malachi with the Rashi Foundation, the Tauber Foundation, and Gazit Globe has led the city to have the vision of advancing education from early childhood until after the army,” states Mayor Eliyahu Zohar, adding, “The young people of the city will become citizens who contribute to their country.”

“Many organizations and NGOs mean well in advancing and improving the lives of residents of the periphery,” says Erez Roimi, who directs the Collective Impact in Kiryat Malachi. “There are good intentions, but the interventions often aren’t moving forward. This is because the NGO or government agency will see one point without the general perspective.

For example, a specific project can see the youth through eighth grade, but what will happen to them afterwards in high school, and then in the army?” American philanthropist Joel Tauber and representatives of the Rashi Foundation met in 2014 to further advance social mobility and to increase opportunities for children in Israel. The Rashi Foundation has been advancing

education and welfare in Israel for more than 33 years. Its projects reach out to the periphery, both geographical and social.

“We realized that in the periphery there is a lack of shared perspective, investment in infrastructure, the ability for the public to express their needs, and the mapping of data,” says Roimi. The latter is an essential part of the Collective Impact method.

Erez Roimi traveled to New York to learn from the experts who developed the method. He met with representatives of FSG, a consulting firm that helps organizations achieve lasting results for challenging social issues. Later on, Roimi met Greg Landsman, the former CEO of the Strive Partnership based in Cincinnati, Ohio, which encourages partnership of various sectors to change the education system for each child – “from cradle to career.”

Consultants from these organizations, who have accompanied the initiative for the past three years through weekly visits, came to Kiryat Malachi and Ashkelon to study the situation up close.

“Landsman helped us adapt the main points of Collective Impact to Israeli culture,” explains Roimi. “We learned to research and use the data with the participation of the public. This was then applied on a municipal level. After one year of research, we realized that to improve the situation, we needed to strengthen the infrastructure in order to see results. The municipality is the best body for intervention to navigate the results that are needed.”

Last week, a symposium was devoted to the citybased investment model with the participation of Landsman, government officials, the local authorities, and

philanthropists, in the hope of eventually applying the model in other cities.

The steering committee is the key to the city's social mobility. "It's a kind of evolution to say loud and clear: We're focusing on making the city infrastructure stronger. By connecting together the NGOs, the municipality and the foundations, there is an equity principle for all to choose the common agenda."

Concerning the informal education and youth movements, a survey carried out by the steering committee in 2016 found that less than a quarter of the city's children and youth (from fourth to 12th grades) were involved in after-school activities through youth movements or other frameworks.

"This was due to a lack of awareness, role-modeling at home, a 'what's in it for me?' attitude, and what the city's been doing to attract youth. When it became a city issue, it became totally different," notes Roimi.

In response to the survey, the municipality has defined informal education as high priority and decided to allocate more than NIS 1 million – an unprecedented amount in local terms – to enlarge both the range of activities and the number of participants.

Less than a year into the project, the youth movements have experienced a growth of 30%. This was due to an expansion of existing activities of the Scouts, Bnei Akiva and other movements, along with opening new branches of additional organizations.

This dramatically reduces loitering and crime, while increasing the social

engagement of youth and their community involvement.

Hodaya Molla, 17, is a senior at the Gymnasia Darca High School. She belongs to the Puzzle youth movement. “The motto is ‘a puzzle connects parts,’ so we should connect with each other,” she explains.

“I joined the youth movement three years ago. Members of this youth movement are also counselors. I used to be shy, but developed abilities to reach others. Soldiers and national service volunteers help us advance our skills.

“Initially I was a counselor for fourth graders, and now I am a counselor for older children. They learn values like helping others. Here the youth look forward to coming to the weekly meeting, knowing that they won’t be distracted by their smartphones.”

Formal education has also benefited. Other partners who have impacted education in the city in recent years, creating the basis for the Collective Impact initiative, are Gazit Globe Israel, the Rashi Foundation, and its subsidiaries – the Tafnit Association and the Darca School Network.

In Kiryat Malachi’s three high schools, 82% of the students have matriculated, surpassing the national average. In the secular Darca school network, for example, the matriculation rate went up from 56% to 85% between 2012/13 and 2015/16, and the rate of students who study mathematics also increased from 17% to 25% in those years.

Without dismissing or replacing the school team, teaching methods were

improved and teaching hours were augmented. This reflects the spirit of the entire city: Instead of continuing to hope for external help, the city is taking matters into its own hands by tapping into existing capabilities, pooling resources and advancing cross-sector collaboration.

When the steering committee in Kiryat Malachi pinpointed the main problem in field of the early childhood – the needs of the under-three age group – it set two goals. The first was to introduce a uniform diagnostic tool for all preschool children (ages three to six), which will be used to build a database and develop an appropriate intervention program.

The second is to build a work plan for children under the age of three based on the findings of the survey. Although activity in this field is at an early stage, the signs of change can already be seen.

A few months ago, a therapeutic daycare center was opened in the town, enabling families to receive essential services close to home. An innovative science- oriented preschool was also opened last year, offering a unique enriched curriculum in science and technology in a cross-sector partnership among Lockheed Martin, the Rashi Foundation, the Education Ministry and the municipality.

Mayor Zohar concludes that “the collaboration of the steering committee, including educators from past and present, leads to success in education. Also, the residents of Kiryat Malachi know that they have an address and have trust in the system.”