

Early Childhood Center Model



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Executive summary

This document presents the Rashi Foundation's working perspectives and goals in its early childhood centers, by describing the way the early childhood center is organized, the issues it focused on, its organizational structure, and the roles of the center staff.

Background

In 2009 there were around 850,000 children under the age of 6 in Israel, approximately 8% of them defined as children at risk. About one third of the young children are Arab (29%). Within the Jewish population, about 40% of the children belong to the ultra-Orthodox sector. The demographic trends of Israel's population are clearly reflected in the early childhood population: there are two large minority groups: ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arabs, together constituting around 60% of all children. The remaining 40% include all the other Jewish sub-groups: secular, national-religious, new immigrants and others.

Early childhood centers have existed in Israel for many years, operating according to different models. A survey of the various models shows that they have much in common, particularly in their theoretical conception and the core fields on which they focus.

The differences between the centers are expressed in their operating strategy, focus, and the programs they operate (ranging from emphasis on enrichment, through therapeutic activities, to guidance and training for parents and the professional staff).

The model proposed by the Rashi Foundation is that of a central service for the town or community and its close geographic environment, which operates a wide range of activities for young children (aged birth - 6), their parents and families, as well as for professionals. We would emphasize that the center's accessibility for the entire early childhood population, and not specifically for children at risk, avoids a negative, stigmatic image, and allows all children and their parents to find services and programs which suit their needs.

The uniqueness of early childhood centers operated by Rashi

1. One Stop Center - concentrating information and services in one location.
2. An inclusive and holistic service, creating a therapeutic-educational continuum among all the agencies treating the child and his family.
3. A wide range of services for a wide range of needs, adapted to the population of the town or community (with a multicultural approach).

4. A universal, non-stigmatizing service.
5. To make the service accessible to the most needy children and parents, some activities are held in various locations within the community and not just at the center.
6. Parents' involvement and partnership in designing and implementing the programs.

Goals

Overall goal

Development and expansion of early childhood programs in periphery communities by establishing a network of early childhood centers, which allow the provision of quality services and programs in the areas of prevention, treatment and child development for young children, their families and early childhood professionals.

Goals

1. Detecting children suffering from developmental and environmental difficulties, with the goal of providing early intervention and enabling every child to make the most of his potential, in his general functioning and within the education system: pre-school and first grade.
2. Reducing gaps between the periphery and in the center of the country in the accessibility to early childhood services and programs.
3. Broadening the awareness of parents of young children to their children's needs, and providing effective tools for coping with the challenges they face as parents, during their children's various stages of development.
4. Raising the professional level of the educational-therapeutic staff working with young children in the community.
5. Creating partnerships and systematic work in the field of early childhood, within the local authority.
6. Coordinating and integratiing the community services for young children, and making them accessible to all clients: parents, family and community.

Target population

1. Infants and toddlers from birth to age 6, including at-risk populations.
2. Parents and family members of young children.
3. Professionals in the fields of education, health and social welfare.

4. Core components for the activity of the early childhood center

The work of the early childhood center includes several core subjects, which enable it to meet the needs of the three target populations: children, parents and other family members, and professionals.

1. Prevention, detection and enrichment programs for children

Objective: all children in the community with developmental, emotional or family difficulties, will be identified during the first years of life. Every child found to have special needs will have an intervention program created for him, adapted to his needs and those of his family.

Examples of detection programs: Ma'agan (pre-school support system), Ba'im Be'ahava and others.

Examples of therapeutic programs: a child development unit, accessible and available to the children in the community and providing a range of therapeutic solutions to those requiring them. In addition, the unit's professional staff provides guidance to parents and educators, creating a therapeutic continuum between the home, the educational framework, and the therapeutic unit. Developmental enrichment programs: designed to provide a therapeutic group solution for children who need development-adjusted enrichment.

2. Prevention, guidance and intervention programs for parents, and assistance to parents in fulfilling their role in an optimal manner

Objective: providing guidance, assistance and intervention programs for young parents with the goal of minimizing damage to the parent-child relationship from the child's early years.

Examples of prevention programs: guidance groups for parents and babies, a play room, lectures, parent-child activity groups, "healthy steps" and more

Intervention programs for parents: these programs are intended for parents who have been identified by the various community services as requiring intensive help and guidance.

Examples of intervention programs: Netivim Lehorut (Paths to Parenting), Reshit, the Nest Program, Urim and others.

3. Development of a professional workforce, by training and instruction for the professionals working with young children

Objective: every professional (at different levels) working with young children and their

families will take professional in-service courses aimed at improving their professional performance.

Examples: paraprofessionals such as caregivers in day care centers, assistants in pre-schools, will take courses on topics connected with educational practice, for example: how to structure activities for children of various ages, working with parents, child development etc.

Professionals at other levels will take courses in subjects linked to their professional development, innovations in child development, etc.

The course subjects will be jointly determined annually by the inspectors, the director of the early childhood center and representatives of those taking the courses.

4. **Building an organizational structure for multi-system work to pool knowledge, resources and manpower, and promoting coordinated inter-service work for the benefit of young children and their families**

Objective: promoting a comprehensive and coordinated view of the needs of young children and their families, building a continuum of educational and therapeutic solutions for the child and his family.

Examples: in every community there will be forums which meet regularly to advance coordinated work of the services and the programs in the community:

Early Childhood Forum: includes representatives of all the community services; meets biannually to outline policy and receive reports.

Early Childhood Steering Committee: includes representatives of the main community services involved in the operation of the early childhood center's services and programs. Meets around 5 times annually.

Steering Subcommittees on various topics, such as: detection programs, enrichment, parents programs, etc.: Their role is to accompany the implementation of programs on an ongoing basis, solve problems, report on their progress etc.

Criteria for Rashi's involvement in establishing an early childhood center

1. Personal commitment of the head of the local authority.
2. Approval of prominent figures in the community.
3. Agreement for cooperation and pooling of resources.
4. Allocation of a designated budget for the center's operation by the local authority.
5. A suitable building owned by the local authority.
6. Partnership between the local authority and the Foundation in formulating work principles in the initial stages.