



## **Hagar: Bilingual Jewish-Arab Education for Equality**

### **Winter-Spring 2008**

As we approach the end of Hagar's first school year, we reflect on what all of us who have helped launch this project-Hagar staff, parents, children and everyone else who participated in realizing this initiative-have accomplished. We are delighted to present some of our activities and achievements of the past few months as well as to share our exciting plans for the future.

Hagar Kindergarten and Preschool began its first year with forty-nine Arab and Jewish children. During the year, the Hagar community grew and expanded. As we come to the end of this year, our kindergarten and preschool are alive with the sounds of children and teachers preparing for the end-of-the-year party. Registration for the coming school year is almost closed, and preparations for opening the first-grade class are in full swing. In the coming year we also plan to expand our community programs and to strengthen our outreach efforts

#### **Hagar Preschool and Kindergarten**

The main focus of Hagar throughout the current school year has been to strengthen the foundations of our growing school. We placed great emphasis on encouraging academic excellence, providing a healthy learning and social environment and stimulating personal growth, and we continue to work toward achieving Hagar's main educational objectives: **equality, tolerance and bilingualism**, which play a major role in the daily lives of our children and staff. *"As some one who grew up in Be'er Sheva, I would like to give the next generation growing up here, in the Negev, the opportunity to share a multi-cultural childhood where all the communities who live in the area are regarded as equals. As a physician, I do see the different communities meet , but usually only during times of crisis. I believe that encounters with different cultures and languages at an early age and on a daily basis, will lead to a thriving community."* Akiva, Ido's father

#### **Academics**

Each class has a special program finely tuned to its particular age group. Our preschool children work on hand-eye coordination and learn about geometric shapes, nature, and color composition.. The older group (Kindergarten) has an additional curriculum of 1<sup>st</sup>-grade preparation that meets the requirements of the Ministry of Education

Since our Jewish and Arab teachers teach in their mother tongues, the children have already started to become bilingual in Hebrew and Arabic. *"Our daughter is very happy in the kindergarten.*



**Our Kindergarten & Preschool have a Reading Corner with books in Hebrew, Arabic as well as in both languages. Above, L to R, Lian and Hadar reading. In the background, the Arabic and Hebrew alphabets.**

*She receives a lot of warmth and love while learning and developing. Her self-confidence has grown. She has many friends, both Arabs and Jews. We feel that, together with the other children's parents, we are like one big family and that the differences of origin and religion have turned out to be an advantage. She is learning two languages and about different cultures and religions. This arouses her curiosity. And lately, she's been asking: 'How do you say this in Hebrew? in Arabic? in English?' and, even, 'in Russian?'"* Weesam, Hanan's mother.

### **Pedagogy**

Throughout the term, our staff participated in a twofold mentorship program led by experienced Arab and Jewish mentors. The first program, Pedagogic Mentoring, was headed by Dr. Rachel Har-Zion and Nadira Younes, both of whom have had years of experience in bilingual education. The second, Psychological-Moral Mentoring, was led by Dr. Ariela Bairey Ben Ishay, a political psychologist and an expert in intercultural dialogue. These two programs were made available to both individual teachers and groups of teachers. Our staff is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

### **Cultural Activities**

Holidays, seasons and changes in nature found their expression in the classroom and outside, often with the participation of parents and the community. The winter term included the celebration of a number of Jewish, Muslim and Christian holidays, allowing the children an opportunity to celebrate their own as well as each other's holidays. December was dedicated to learning about and celebrating the Muslim Id Al-Adha, the Jewish Hanukkah and the Christian Christmas.

In February, Hagar celebrated the Trees' New Year (Ied Al-Shajar and Tu-Bishvat) with a day of fun and games with families. The school became a lively venue for learning about nature, ecology, natural resources and taking care of the environment. We brought in Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking instructors from the Society for the Protection of Nature (SPNI) who led creative activities centered on local flora and fauna.



**1. A model of a "living together neighborhood" created by children, parents and staff. Each kindergarten built its own neighborhood.**

**2. A child tells his friends about building his own house with his parents.**

In May, we paid special attention to the different national holidays: Memorial Day, The Palestinian Nakba, and Israeli Independence Day. With the help of parents and pedagogical professionals, Hagar's educational staff created a special cultural sensitivity program designed specifically for preschoolers. As part of this program, children learned about the two different national narratives as well as the importance of living together in Israel. One of the highlights was when the children built a model of a "living together neighborhood." The children created a magnificent multi-cultural space out of handicrafts, which includes a mosque, a synagogue, a church, as well as schools and other community institutions, all standing alongside the children's own homes that they prepared with their families. The message of cooperation and co-existence also characterized the marking of Memorial Day, since, alongside the pain and sadness of this holiday, the hope for peace was emphasized

The children at Hagar enjoyed a wide range of enrichment activities, including music from around the world, physical education and environmental classes. We offered an activity called "The Clown within Me." This is a body/mind enrichment class during which children learn how to express their feelings through games and laughter. In addition, we introduced an early childhood democratization program for the kindergarteners (ages 4-5). Still another activity--a series of meetings on democracy



and identity-- was led by a specially trained, bilingual instructor from the Adam Institute for Democracy and Peace.

Since the Hagar School is committed to community involvement, we encouraged parent participation in the school's activities. The parents were involved in various aspects of our kindergarten and preschool, both in expressing their views on intercultural topics or on sensitive national issues, as well as in implementing special programs for the kids, the families and greater community. For example this year, one Friday every second month was dedicated to parent-led activities, chosen by the parents and related to their areas of expertise or their hobbies : *"The thing I really like at Amiri's kindergarten is the parents' involvement. I came to the kindergarten several times to get the kids involved in cooking and baking (just as other parents gave enrichment lessons, too). Whenever I stayed in the kindergarten, I couldn't help noticing the calm atmosphere there and that the children were having a good time. I have also had the opportunity to express my opinions about the kindergarten through the parents' evaluation process, which allowed us not only to make suggestions about improving the kindergarten in the years to come but also to learn about ourselves."* Yehiel, Yimiri's father.

The parents also initiated and organized a number of family day trips. The pleasant atmosphere of these get-togethers and the good humor surrounding the tasting of the different foods, which everyone brought, contributed to a bonding experience and a deep sense of partnership. The parents also helped to plan our Purim celebration, a time for dressing up in costumes, acting silly and clowning around. Arab and Jewish kids and grownups alike had a great time



### **Community Outreach**

This year we started a community outreach program of bi-monthly activities designed to involve the wider Be'er Sheva community. These included activities for children



and parents, such as a children's play about coexistence and mutual understanding, which was put on by Arab and Jewish actors. This activity was carried out in conjunction with the "Peres Center for Peace" and was open to the Be'er Sheva public.

As part of the community outreach program, we offered a class for spoken Arabic. Parents, staff and the general public participated in and enjoyed two successful semesters. Plans for advanced spoken Arabic classes are underway.



**New beginnings: Be'er Sheva and Hagar children watch a play together.**

### **Visitors**

We are always open to visitors who are interested in seeing and hearing about our school. Recently, Hagar and the Be'er Sheva Municipality hosted a group of educational directors from around the country, all of whom were very impressed by what Hagar has achieved. We also welcomed several groups of Jewish educators and young leaders from the US and introduced them to our unique project, its complexity and promise. Given the enthusiastic feedback we received, we plan to host additional groups in the near future and show them a different face of Israeli society.

### **New Hagar Members**

We are delighted to welcome **Orly Almi** as our new **Development Director**. Orly has been working in the Negev for several years. In her former position, she was responsible for "The Right to Health in the Unrecognized Villages" Project, sponsored by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel. We are confident that Orly will contribute a great deal to the expansion of the Hagar Association as well as to its professional and organizational growth.

Our **Substitute Kindergarten Teacher** is **Mariam Al-Hmamdah**, who joined us soon after the start of the school year. Mariam is in her final year of a BEd in Education and Teacher Training at Kay College, Be'er Sheva. During her studies, she has worked in public kindergartens in Be'er Sheva and in Bedouin Arab towns in the Negev.