

Hagar Community Newsletter
September-December
2008



In the past few months, the Arab and Jewish communities of the Negev have had to face an escalation in violence and hatred, which is threatening to undermine the delicate balance and achievements of those who wish to see a different future here. Hundreds of Gazan children were killed and injured, while thousands of Israeli children, including our own, have been living under the threat of rockets. We feel more strongly than ever that strengthening Hagar's initiative in the Negev, and thus promoting true coexistence, is the only way of coping with the latest outbreak of violence. These are tense moments for the Hagar community, but we are confident that we will be able not only to deal with the tension but also eventually overcome it by educating a new generation of Jews and Arabs - a generation for whom violence is simply not an option. September 1st marked the reopening of the Hagar bilingual preschool and kindergarten. Forty-nine children and their families are currently taking part in this unique educational initiative, experiencing Hagar's special multicultural atmosphere. We would like to reflect for a moment-with our friends and supporters-on several of Hagar's achievements during this period as well as share some of our upcoming challenges with you.



Permanent housing for kindergarten and preschool

The Beer-Sheva Municipality has allocated a permanent structure for the Hagar preschool and kindergarten. The capacious building is a 2-wing structure (one wing for the preschool and the other for the kindergarten) with a shared yard. During the Fall of 2008, Hagar, in conjunction with the Beer-Sheva Municipality, undertook a renovation project, and together with a volunteer landscape architecture firm (Haikin-Hefer) redesigned the building and yard and tailored it to Hagar's particular needs.



Bilingual school – First grade

As part of our elementary school initiative, we are currently working on expanding Hagar by opening a first grade class. To further this end, in the past few months we have been meeting frequently with the Beer-Sheva Municipality and the Ministry of Education. We see Hagar preschool and kindergarten as the building blocks of our future Hagar school (elementary-12th grade), which is meant to create a lively Jewish and Arab bilingual community in the Negev – a community based on equality, tolerance and respect. Following a joint decision made by the Municipality, the Ministry of Education and the Hand in Hand Association, we decided to postpone the opening of our first grade until September 2009. This decision was made in order to give Hagar another year to strengthen and deepen its relationships with the educational authorities as well as the various communities of the Negev and thus ensure the successful inauguration of our first-grade class.

2008-2009 School year opening

The same educational team that founded the kindergarten and preschool has successfully launched and enriched our second year. After experiencing and working through the challenges of Hagar's first year, our now experienced team has proven itself more than able to confront new challenges and promote Hagar's newest initiatives.

The 2008-9 academic year began with a celebration of Rosh-Hashana, Id-al-Fitr and Sukkot. Those joining us for their first year experienced Hagar's special multicultural atmosphere and had the opportunity to learn about new customs and traditions. The excitement of the holidays was following by the pursuit of Hagar's creative, play-based, multicultural pedagogical curriculum. All of the children learned about the autumn, geometric shapes, and the human body, while our kindergarteners spent time on the Hebrew and Arabic alphabet as well as basic age-appropriate arithmetic. The curriculum and educational program is closely supervised by our pedagogical team.



Development and enrichment

Enrichment activities are a crucial part of the Hagar curriculum and testify to our commitment to academic excellence. During the school week, children participate in a wide variety of enrichment activities, including a world music class, movement, a “young scientist” program, and yoga. Through Hagar’s special multicultural curriculum as well as through these special programs children learn about themselves, others, the world and the environment in a way that encourages their creativity, curiosity and independence.



Parent involvement

Parent committees, each with four elected parent representatives, have been created for both the preschool and the kindergarten. Each committee has two Jewish and two Arab parents, thus representing the variety of voices and attitudes of the parents; the committees work closely with the staff. Parent enrichment activities, which are planned and executed by parents, have, for example, included bringing interested parents to the school on a bi-weekly basis so that they can share their hobbies, interests or work with the children.



Parents have also organized weekend nature trips for the families of both the preschool and the kindergarten, which have enhanced the communal experience and allowed for further bonding and new friendships between the different families.



Volunteering

Hagar provides various volunteering opportunities for individuals and for organizations interested in promoting Hagar's objectives. "Granddad" Yossi is a senior citizen adored by the children. He attends the preschool and kindergarten regularly, playing, reading and giving the children one-on-one attention and affection. Yossi empowers both children and staff with his enthusiasm, warmth and optimism. Hagar's Community Service Project is supported by the AJIC and the Scouts movement. This project brings together young high-school graduates, Arabs and Jews, who want to volunteer in the community. As part of this project, every Tuesday four young adults--2 Jews and 2 Arabs--come to Hagar and participate in the day's activities, enriching the children's experience and strengthening Hagar's standing in the community.

"Ben and Roni speak Hebrew to us, Iat and Manal speak Arabic. The time they spend with us is fun and we look forward to it all week long. They eat breakfast with us, play with blocks and dolls, draw and talk with us. We have a lot of fun playing with them in the playground. They climb, play ball, dig in the sandbox and play catch. We love their presence"



Scholarships

An independent committee--comprised of a social worker, a community representative and a Hagar representative--is in charge of allocating scholarships to families with financial needs. Hagar is dedicated to ensuring that high quality education is accessible to all. We are therefore very proud of having been able to accommodate the needs of all of the families who have requested financial aid.

Community activities and parental encounters

This year has Hannukkah and Id-al-Adha fell around the same time, allowing both communities to share the other's traditions and customs. Id-al-Adha is the major Muslim holiday, commemorating Abrahams' devotion to God, his willingness to offer his son, and his eventual sacrifice of a



passing ram. In order to honor and celebrate Id-al-Adha, parents and volunteers decorated the school with white angels, and during the celebration the children dressed in white and sang traditional hymns and songs. The

special and festive atmosphere was accompanied by a bi-lingual play depicting different aspects of the holiday. Hanukkah provided the Hagar community with another opportunity to celebrate together, and we conducting a festive candle-lighting ceremony, which was followed by holiday-related activities and driedel games.



Hagar is firmly committed to community outreach and is involved in several public initiatives. One such initiative is an Arabic course for adults, conducted jointly with the Negev Co-existence Forum; Another initiative is an after-school Eastern-Western music class that is facilitated by Jewish and Arab music educators and is open to the wider Beer Sheva community; Yet another initiative is a workshop at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, which is attended by the staff of all of the bi-lingual schools across the country. In this workshop, which is facilitated by anthropologist Dr. Zvi Beckerman, the teachers reflect upon their work, achievements, and difficulties.