

The idea of creating supportive environment for children with disabilities and their parents on the example of beit issie shapiro organization

Systemic approach to support assumes taking care not only of persons with disabilities but also their families. Moreover, main sources of support should be placed in their nearest environment and local community in order to be available when needed. In addition, the support should be comprehensive and multidisciplinary, what involves cooperation of various professionals [Zamkowska 2009, pp. 149-152]. The idea of support which takes into consideration the above-mentioned assumptions has been implemented by Beit Issie Shapiro, a non-profit community organization in Israel. During my visit to Israel in 2006, in the framework of cooperation with Open University in Raanana, I had a chance to visit the center for people with special needs and their families run by this organization. The center is a very good example of comprehensive and multidisciplinary support offered to people with disabilities and their families. It also undertakes many practical and innovative initiatives aimed at developing multidisciplinary support for people with special needs both on a national and international level. The paper presents the main principles and directions of these initiatives to illustrate the idea of creating supportive environment for people with special needs.

1. The history and the main guidelines of Beit Issie Shapiro programme

Issie Shapiro was a humble and deeply religious man. He believed that the principles of the Torah provided structure both for his own life and the life of his family. Issie Shapiro believed that 'all people have the right to attain full human potential and dignity' [<http://www.beitissie.org.il/Eng>]. After the death of Issie Shapiro, his family, inspired by his passion, love and kindness, took upon themselves to fulfill his mission. In 1980, they established 'Beit Issie Shapiro', a not-for-profit community organization that aims at furthering the rights, opportunities and services for people with special needs in Israel.

The Vision of Beit Issie Shapiro is a society which assures the rights and opportunities for inclusion, maximum growth and development of children and adults with

special needs. Its Mission is to initiate, lead and involve people with disabilities, families and allies from the different sectors, in collaborative efforts to further their quality of life and opportunities.

The Strategies implemented to accomplish the mission are based on developing and providing high quality services for people with special needs and their families. Moreover, BIS is involved in influencing policy and changing communities through education, raising awareness and advocacy, as well as conducting research, training students and sharing experience and knowledge with service providers, community leaders and others.

Beit Issie Shapiro directs its efforts to four groups of recipients:

1. Children and adults with diverse special needs including developmental delays, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism, P.D.D. Down's syndrome, Rett syndrome, dual diagnosis (mental retardation as well as emotional, psychiatric and behavioral difficulties), learning disabilities, rare metabolic and genetic syndromes and other disabilities.
2. Families with special needs children (including parents, siblings and grandparents).
3. Communities in which people with special needs live. The aim of Beit Issie Shapiro is to build caring, accepting and involved communities. Therefore the organization is active throughout Israel, promoting volunteerism, educating youth leaders, providing consultation on service development, and working in partnership with others to grant more rights to people with disabilities.
4. Professionals and other service providers. Through the Trump International Institute of Continuing Education in Developmental Disabilities, Beit Issie Shapiro broadens the skills of professionals by engaging them in research, trains students and professionals from many disciplines and disseminates knowledge.

A brief characteristic of selected treatment programs is presented below.

2. Daycare and Treatment Programs

Beit Issie Shapiro provides therapeutic daycare for children with a wide range of special needs through three frameworks: The Aaron De Lowe Early Intervention Center for children aged 1-4, The Sindian Early Intervention Center for Arab children aged 1-6, and The Special Education Center for children with moderate to severe mental retardation aged 4-12.

The Aaron De Lowe Early Intervention Center provides an enriched treatment and special education program for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. The basic principle of the approach is to start treatment early. Moreover, the team of professionals addresses the child's total development with multi-disciplinary treatment. The center is managed by a developmental psychologist and employs various professionals: special educators, occupational, speech and physical therapists, aqua/hydrotherapists, creative therapists, social workers and alternative intervention therapists. A high infant: caregiver ratio is maintained with the assistance of volunteers and women working in fulfillment of their national service. The educational and treatment program is tailored to the needs of each child and incorporates a whole variety

of treatment: physical, occupational and speech/language therapy; training for independence; integrated play and educational programs; hydrotherapy, sensory stimulation; creative therapies including art, music, movement, pet therapy; vacation programs and dental care.

Another basic principle of the approach is to promote consistency between the daycare center and home, as well as make efforts to promote the integration of the child in their neighborhood. Parents are treated as partners in the process of their child's assessment and in developing treatment goals. A wide range of support services are available also to the extended family.

The center has also introduced the Home Community Integration Program, which aims to make the child and his family feel like part of their natural community. In the school year 2007-8, eight children from the Early Intervention Centre took part in the program. Every child was allocated to an appropriate nursery school and taken there by their parents every Friday. Accompanied throughout the day by an integration aide, they spent 4 hours with regular children, participating in all the educational and social activities, and making new friends. Three children participating in the program have been mainstreamed and attend a regular nursery school.

Sindian Early Intervention Center

In 2001, Beit Issie Shapiro opened an Early Intervention Center, the first comprehensive therapeutic daycare service in an Israeli-Arab community, serving as a model of an intercommunal cooperation. The center provides support for Arab-speaking children. An individualized treatment program is developed and carried out for each child. This includes a daycare, educational enrichment, occupational, physical and speech therapy, music and art therapy and social stimulation. Parents are included, as much as possible, in their child's assessment and treatment. The center offers support to children and their families in a number of frameworks: home visits, practical advice and guidance.

The whole range of professionals are employed in the center, including special educators, occupational, speech and physical therapists, aqua/hydrotherapists, creative therapists, social workers and alternative intervention therapists. Professionals from the Arab population are employed there to the fullest extend possible.

BIS makes every effort to bring the community into the center, and to promote greater acceptance of children with special needs. The youth of the region participate in a social education and leadership development programs, and are encouraged to volunteer at the center and at other facilities for people with special needs.

Special Education Center

The center runs four classes for children of elementary school age and one kindergarten. A multidisciplinary team builds a personal educational program for each child, in cooperation with their parents. Programs focus on social and cognitive skills, motor and physical function, communication abilities, self help skills and recreational activities.

The Professional Team consists of occupational, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, hydrotherapists, art and music therapists, a sports teacher, a holistic therapist and a social worker. The Schneider Children's Medical Center provides the support of psychiatrists and additional medical doctors.

The center works very closely with the children's parents, involving them in the program as well as strengthening and supporting them. In addition, it offers support services to grandparents and siblings. It also creates opportunities for children to interact and share activities with their peers in neighborhood regular schools through a variety of educational and social activities.

3. Supplementary Treatment Programs

Beit Issie Shapiro provides many different supplementary treatments and services for people with special needs - children and adults alike. In many cases these treatments are pioneered and developed at Beit Issie Shapiro, and then taught to professionals both in Israel and abroad. The services include:

A child development unit providing supportive treatments for children with developmental disabilities and learning disabilities in regular school frameworks such as: physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, Snoezelen therapy, preparation for 1st Grade.

A dental clinic exclusively serving children and adults with a range of developmental disabilities and functional disorders. Full range of dental treatment including orthodontics and dental implants is provided there.

A hydrotherapy and swimming center provides hydrotherapy for people of all ages, from infants to seniors, with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. It offers many different programs such as: individual hydrotherapy programs for infants, children, adults and seniors; programs for groups with special needs, a swimming club for people with special needs, competitive swimming groups; group activities in the water - for pregnant women, for the improvement of physical fitness, swimming instruction and swimming for babies - a program for healthy infants and their parents.

The hydrotherapy program is engaged in a number of research projects. In 2005, a research carried out by Dana Roth lead to the developed of an assessment tool for hydrotherapy intervention with infants. The test will identify infants for whom hydrotherapy may be inappropriate or even harmful. Another interesting research showed that hydrotherapy in a small room adapted with multi-sensory stimulation features (soft lights, music and other sensory effects) provides great benefit for people with special needs [E. Levie, M. Shapiro, M. Julius 2005].

Beit Issie Shapiro is well known as the pioneer and developer of the Snoezelen - controlled multi-therapeutic method, and its use in treating children with developmental disorders and special needs. Under the auspices of The Trump International Institute of Continuing Education in Developmental Disabilities, Beit Issie Shapiro has taught practitioners and allied fields about the method and has guided the setting up of more than 350 Snoezelen rooms. The professional staff have also shred their expertise and research findings on an international level in a from of consultation and

paper presentations. In 2005 Beit Issie Shapiro organized its First International Conference on Snoezelen-Controlled MultiSensory Stimulation.

The Sport and Recreation Center specializes in incorporating therapeutic elements into individual and team sports activities and adapting physical activity to various needs of recipients. The center serves very young children through to adults, and has a special interest in children and youth with physical, cognitive and learning difficulties. Many of the children assisted attend regular schools. After an initial assessment, an individualized program is built, according to the individual's or group's unique needs.

The center is also involved in research projects. Their first project was aimed at finding out how daily physical exercise programme with treadmill is able to improve physical fitness of persons with Rett syndrome [M. Lotan, E. Isakov, J. Merrick 2004]. Another project was devoted to paired modeling and positive reinforcement, and their implementation in treadmill training programs for children with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities [E. Vashdi, Y. Hutzler, D. Roth 2008].

Child and Family Therapy Center was established to provide psychotherapeutic treatment to the families of special needs children, including children with dual diagnosis. The center offers a whole range of therapeutic services: individual, couple and group counseling; family therapy; child therapy (art therapy) and psychiatric consultation. Family therapists, child therapists and psychiatric consultants are involved in providing support for the families.

A comprehensive assessment and treatment service is also offered to children living abroad, aged 1-14, with various disabilities, including attention deficit disorders (ADD), PDD (pervasive developmental disorders), learning disabilities, dysgraphia and other problems.

Most children at Beit Issie Shapiro receive a combination of physical, occupational and speech therapy to stimulate their development and achievement of independence. Treatments are given in different frameworks: both individually in private sessions as well as in the classroom and other natural settings. All the therapists, educators and aides – including the child's parents – participate in 'trans-disciplinary' training sessions aimed at building a supportive environment. Goals are formulated to support the child's progress. Where indicated, assistive technology such as computers and other devices, are used as well.

Beit Issie Shapiro is also developing programs to improve the lives of children with Cystic Fibrosis and people with Alzheimer's disease. Beit Issie Shapiro's psychotherapy center offers children with CF individual psychotherapy/play therapy, psychotherapy groups and special dental treatment. They also provide adequate support to their parents.

Beit Issie Shapiro is working with experts in Alzheimer's disease to develop service models and resources for people with developmental disabilities, such as Down's syndrome, who have a high propensity for developing Alzheimer's disease in later life. Those in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease who can be brought to the center and participate are offered hydrotherapy, Snoezelen controlled sensory stimulation and dental treatments.

Moreover, BIS is working on adapting physical and social environment in order to stimulate the responsiveness of both the above-mentioned groups of people. To this end it carried out an international research project on the quality of life of families with children with special needs. As a result of the project a tool for measuring a family's quality of life was developed. In addition, BIS's Trump Institute for Continuing Education in Developmental Disabilities is currently developing a special curriculum to train caregivers and other professionals caring for patients with Down's Syndrome and Alzheimer's disease.

4. Family Support

Families of children with developmental disabilities face special challenges and need support and guidance at various points of their family development. Over the years BIS responded to these needs by developing a continuum of services designed to empower and support family members in their efforts to raise and educate their special children. Social workers conducted intake interviews to assess the child's suitability for the program and provide emotional and informational support. Supportive intervention is given in a range of forms including individual meetings, couples therapy and group meetings. Of special importance are groups for fathers, which provide a forum for sharing experience and offering mutual support. Special educational and support programs for grandparents and siblings are offered as well.

5. Community Services

The mission of BIS is to ensure that the rights of people with special needs are respected and that they are able to access educational, health and social services they need. Beit Issie Shapiro's community work program is implemented by a team of community workers. They work cooperatively with other agencies to influence policy and legislation and advance the integration of people with developmental disabilities in a wider community. The team also provides consultation for other organizations and community leaders developing new services.

One of the most interesting initiatives was the first Israeli Accessible - Inclusive Adventure Playground called "Park Chaverim - Friendship Park", opened in 2005. The new playground, established in the Ra'anana City-park, ensures that children with special needs are able to enjoy the recreational facilities of the park together with their 'regular' peers. The park, with all its play equipment, has been specially adapted to suit the needs of disabled children and adults. This includes adaptations for children with hearing and sight impairments, as well as paths, swings, carousels that can accommodate a wheelchair.

Beit Issie Shapiro's team, together with the staff of the "Accessible Community" of Ra'anana's Social Service Department, has put in a great deal of effort to provide a wide variety of activities and opportunities for children to enjoy. As children with different levels of ability do not often play spontaneously together, special programs of activities were introduced to teach them how to do it.

Beit Issie Shapiro is also involved in meeting the needs of Israelis living in parts of the country threatened by missile attacks. Beit Issie Shapiro went out to assist residents of the war zone, and offered help at a time of crisis, especially to families who have children with special needs. Beit Issie Shapiro's Social Club staff hosted people with mental retardation who had to be moved from their places. The BIS staff contacted all rehabilitative daycare centers in the North, and offered to help families that had temporarily moved to the center of Israel by taking their children into BIS daycare facilities. They also organized fun days in 'Park Chaverim' to relieve the children from the stress of being in bomb shelters.

Conclusion

Beit Issie Shapiro center for people with special needs and their parents sets a good model for building the system of comprehensive support in the local community. First of all, while making the child's needs the focal point of the centre, BIS embraces a holistic philosophy in which a child is always viewed within a family and community context. Secondly, services are provided by a multidisciplinary staff in partnership with the child's parents. The center has also introduced several inclusive programmes enabling children with disabilities to interact with their non-disabled peers. Moreover, due to its considerable experience in supporting people with special needs and their families, BIS has become a training center for students and professionals. Finally, it is also a research and innovation center enriching its expertise by carrying out research projects and undertaking new initiatives in cooperation with both national and international experts.

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