

MATANEL FOUNDATION

ACTIVITY REPORT

Program- BARASH

Year: 2015-2016

Name of the Program: BARASH

Year of activity: 2015-2016

Name of the report's writer: Efrat Wagner

Function of the report's writer: Resource Development Director- AKIM-Jerusalem

Mail: efrat.wagner@akim-jerusalem.org.il

Phones: 054-7917348

The Matanel Foundation's support for the renovation of Beit Rachael Strauss (BARASH) is improving the quality of life for individuals with special needs and is becoming a bastion of integration of all people in Jerusalem. We reported to you at the onset of our journey and we are proud to present our continued achievements over the past year- its first year of operation after the renovation.

Beit Rachael Strauss (BARASH) facility is AKIM- Jerusalem's community center whose main purpose is to provide social, cultural, spiritual, and developmental activities for the intellectually disabled. The building, situated in the Talpiot neighborhood, is listed as worthy of conservation. BARASH serves, first and foremost, the 181 residents of AKIM-Jerusalem as well as some 200 other intellectually disabled young adults from Jerusalem's western and eastern neighborhoods. Both Jews and Arabs are welcomed at BARASH, where social stigmas are slowly broken down and inclusion becomes the norm. The building operates 5 days a week from 8 am till 10 pm, and on Friday from 8 am till noon. Activities that took place at the building this year include: gym, music, theatre, gardening, art workshops and exercise classes. We offer a Snoezelen room furnished with equipment, space for lectures and an auditorium.

AKIM-Jerusalem is dedicated to the belief that those who are disadvantaged have the moral and legal right to be integrated within society and BARASH is a meeting point for communal activity in which mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance are the foundations of the building.

The following are some of our main achievements at BARASH over the last year:

- **Integrative activities**-AKIM-Jerusalem participants in the art workshops partnered this year with Bank Yahav's workers whom, weekly, volunteered their time to engage in creativity. This was an activity that promoted communal inclusion and the beautiful artwork which decorates our walls reminds us that we can succeed in positively bringing awareness of the capabilities of individuals with special needs to the wider community.
- **Social Club**-an obstacle to integration of people with special needs is often a lack of proper social skills and appropriate responses to various everyday stimuli. As a result, people with special needs can experience maladjustment leading to social isolation. AKIM-Jerusalem received requests from its coordinators, parents and protected work environments to establish a social club venue to assist in developing socially acceptable behaviors.

- **Communal Cohesion**-various community providers of services to individuals with special needs use BARASH for their programming. It is important to us at AKIM-Jerusalem to assist and become a service provider to others in their work on behalf of the special needs population
- **East Jerusalem Initiative**-Each Friday, 15 children with special needs between the ages of 6-16 meet at BARASH to take part in fun, therapeutic and enriching activities. There is a serious lack of programming for those with special needs in the Arab community despite the fact that there exists a staggering per-capita rate of disability due to high degrees of intermarriage. As a result, many families, who often have more than 1 child with special needs, can become overwhelmed and much burdened. AKIM-Jerusalem's coordinator to East Jerusalem identifies the families whom can benefit from our services and points them in the direction of BARASH. This ingenious initiative is one for which we are striving to better and continue.
- **Financial independence**- A goal which we set for ourselves was to achieve financial independence in order not to have to appeal to governmental agencies, foundations or donors to cover maintenance costs. The revenue that we receive from room and space rentals is helping us to achieve this aspiration. Since opening the building we have hosted a variety of cultural, religious, educational, health and social events for the general public.

Over 380 peoples with disabilities arrive at BARASH every week with over 20 activities to choose from. New and innovative ideas for enriching and expanding these activities are being planned. Currently, 27 customers currently rent space at BARASH from 1-15 hours per week for various cultural, educational and recreational purposes and an average of 300 people from the community visit BARASH per week. In order to advertise ourselves to the public we have built a BARASH website as well as opened a Facebook page.

Evaluating the Program

Success of our project is quantifiably measured by the consistent attendance that we have at the activities as well as the satisfactory feedback which we receive from the participants, their families and the various governmental agencies with whom we are in contact. We also see success in the increased self- esteem of the participants, as a result of participation in the activities, friendships that are fostered between participants, cohesion of AKIM-Jerusalem's participants of varying ages and stages at the activities and the interest that the greater community has displayed in BARASH and AKIM-Jerusalem's work.

Methodology

In May, the Welfare ministry initiated a meeting between AKIM-Jerusalem and the Jerusalem municipality at which the municipality evaluated our work and the activities which we provide for the special needs population as well as our ongoing efforts to establish BARASH as a community center. The meeting consisted of various municipal and AKIM-Jerusalem workers whom concluded that AKIM-Jerusalem's has the ability to provide even more social, fitness and educational programming to the wider community (both special needs and "regular".) The assembly concluded with a guarantee to meet again to discuss achievements and advancements in the activity designs which were proposed during the meeting.

Looking Ahead

A significant obstacle that young adults with special needs face is finding employment that properly fits their needs and capabilities. In the coming year at BARASH we would like to implement a program that provides coaching in different areas to enable smoother integration at future workplaces. We also continuously work to increase the number of participants that arrive to BARASH.

