

## Activity report

Jewish family centre in Saratov works for a year.

On the eve of the starting date the project the avrechim couples Broitman and Kopitman left Saratov because of the changes in the strategic course of Ner le elef Fund policy, so the project lost its leader and teachers of Jewish subjects and some other members of the pedagogical team who were related with Hana Broitman. In a relatively short time we managed to find a new director of the project. Natalia Kurchatova (Ph.D. in pedagogics) is a very talented person; she has a good experience in educational work with children, teen-agers and students. Now she is one of the Chief Deputies of Saratov Pedagogical University. She managed to build a team of teachers for the project: some of them are from the old team, some of them – joined the project with a new leader.

We did not expect the difficulties with the premises rent. But practically it turned out to be a problem to find a good place for children in the centre of the city at a reasonable price. Finally we rent premises with the separate entrance in an old former private residence.

We tried our best to start the project in time. But it was not fully prepared because of above mentioned organizational problems. So we gathered steam in the process of work. During the second semester the game room was made because instead of studying children spend a lot of time playing games and doing physical exercises

The advertisement in Jewish organizations of Saratov, e-mail and skype shot was undertaken.

Direct telephone calls were the second stage of riveting attention of potential participants for the program. The reaction was positive because it is the first educational centre for Jewish families in Saratov where children can acquire knowledge and skills using informal methods.

During all the period we worked seriously on information sharing: we tried to enlarge the database, to make direct calls and e-mail shot to rivet attention of potential participants, asked the members of the program to make recommendations to their friends and relatives.

Summer months were good time for making plans for the next semester, producing and discussing ideas of improving work of the project, negotiating with guest teachers and psychologists.

Teachers of the project and the families worked together during the school year in the office of the project and at the recreation family camp in summer. Some families became friends with each other and very close to teachers of the project. Sometimes parents ask for consultations or even call the teachers in difficult situations with the children. During this period the teaching staff showed well-coordinated work, each of them approached creatively to their lessons (used different video and audio production, made themselves special illustrated guides, etc), they spent time for individual classes and working with children during the breaks (using sport equipment, thinking up games, etc.). They eagerly worked on different posters together with children, played roles as actors in performances and parties devoted to the holidays. They covered for each other if someone had problems. Natalia Kurchatova managed their work to make the educational process functional and meaningful.

As for today the project team includes:

- director, rhythmic, Jewish dances
- psychologist of the project
- teacher of Jewish songs and theatre
- teacher of English
- arts and crafts teacher
- teacher of Jewish history
- teacher of Hebrew
- teacher of Tradition

There are 3 groups of children as it was planned

Group 1 (3-5 years old)

Contents of the program:

It's necessary to mention that all the lessons are closely connected with each other. So each topic is given from different points of view, the material of one lesson adds much to another, etc. The list of topics for 3 children groups may seem very much alike but they are taught according to the age of children and their reception.

**Hebrew:** several letters of the alphabet, the most common used phrases expressing welcoming and good-bye, "polite" words, words and small dialogues about the family and friends, names of members of the family, animals, rooms in the apartment, colors, small dialogues about those matters;

**Jewish history:** for the first half a year the trine tradition – language – culture is taken as the basis for the subject "Jewish history". It helps children to understand the origin of some holidays, the nature of some Jewish words. Jewish fairy-tales are used. During the second semester the lessons on ancient Jewish history were combined with information about the state of |Israel, its struggle for independence and tragic pages of Shoah.

**Jewish tradition:** traditions of autumn holidays, Hanukah and Purim, Passover, Lag ba Omer, Shavuot, Tamuz 17, Av 09

**Jewish songs and theatre:** Shabbat songs, songs for autumn holidays, Hanukah and Purim, short Purimshpil together with other children and parents, songs for Passover, Shavuot, playing of Jewish fairy-tales together with parents

**English:** common phrases, expressions about family, animals, colors, humorous poems and songs, cartoons

**Arts and crafts:** making different things of plasticine, nature materials, sand shell, grits, pencils. The favorite thing to do is a family coloring on the floor.

**Psychology:** forming of wide world outlook, lessons devoted to developing of a Jewish personality in combination with tolerance in ethic and psychological aspects according to the age of children, usage of fairy-tale therapy. All the tasks improve the manual dexterity of children.

Group 2 (6-8 years)

Contents of the program:

**Hebrew:** several letters of the alphabet, the most common used phrases expressing welcoming and good-bye, “polite” words, words and small dialogues about the family and friends, names of members of the family, animals, rooms in the apartment, colors, clothes, small dialogues about those matters;

**Jewish history:** for the first half a year the trine tradition – language – culture is taken as the basis for the subject “Jewish history”. It helps children to understand the origin of some holidays, the nature of some Jewish words. Jewish fairy-tales are used.

During the second semester the lessons on ancient Jewish history were combined with information about the state of |Israel, its struggle for independence and tragic pages of Shoah.

**Jewish tradition:** traditions of autumn holidays, Hanukah and Purim, Passover, Lag ba Omer, Shavuot, Tamuz 17, Av 09

**Jewish songs and theatre:** Shabbat songs, songs for autumn holidays, Hanukah and Purim, short Purimshpil together with other children and parents, songs for Passover, Shavuot, playing of Jewish fairy-tales together with parents

**English:** common phrases, expressions about families and names, humorous poems and songs using those words, expressions about family, animals, colors, humorous poems and songs, cartoons

**Arts and crafts:** making different things of plasticine, nature materials, sand shell, grits, pencils, making post-cards for the holidays, things for home decoration for the holidays, glass-painting, making pictures in traditional Jewish technique “reizele”. The favorite thing to do is a family coloring on the floor.

**Psychology:** forming of wide world outlook, lessons devoted to developing of a Jewish personality in combination with tolerance in ethic and psychological aspects according to the age of children, usage of fairy-tale therapy.

### Group 3 (8-10 years)

Contents of the program:

**Hebrew:** alphabet, first steps in reading and writing, the most common used phrases expressing welcoming and good-bye, “polite” words, words and small dialogues about the family and friends, food, colors, subjects at school and teachers, clothes, food, apartment, nature, dialogues about those matters

**Jewish history:** history of traditions, history of the language, history of the Jewish culture, on the basis of Jewish fairy-tales. During the second semester the lessons on ancient Jewish history were combined with information about the state of Israel, its struggle for independence and tragic pages of Shoah.

**Jewish tradition** traditions of autumn holidays, Hanukah, Purim, Passover, Lag ba Omer, Shavuot, Tamuz 17, Av 09

**Jewish songs and theatre:** Shabbat songs, songs for autumn holidays and Purim, short Purimshpil together with other children and parents, songs for Passover, Shavuot, playing of Jewish fairy-tales together with parents

**English:** common phrases, expressions about families and names, humorous poems and songs using those words, toys, animals, school

**Arts and crafts:** making post-cards for the holidays, things for home decoration for the holidays, glass-painting, making pictures in traditional Jewish technique “reizele”.

**Psychology:** forming of wide world outlook, lessons devoted to developing of a Jewish personality in combination with tolerance in ethic and psychological aspects according to the age of children usage of fairy-tale therapy.

Interest of parents for the project exceeded the expectations. Many people who have two or even three children understood that they understood nothing in children up-bringing. Even two “young” grandmothers asked for the permission to attend the lessons.

Parents have classes on Jewish holidays, Jewish philosophy and traditions due to the holidays (evening time and Sundays), psychological discussions on such themes as family in different cultures (family in Russia and Israel, f.e.), conflicts in the family, relations between children, conflicts and connections of generations in the family, history of Jewish family, advantages and disadvantages of religious families and “modern families”, number of children in the family and ideas of up-bringing, etc. The psychologist of the project (T. Dunaeva), teachers of tradition and Jewish history (L. Novikova, E. Ignatieva) prepared the classes, Rabbi of Saratov Michael Frumin took part in it.

We consider (and the parents supported the idea) to invite not only guest lecturers from Saratov but to get acquainted with the opinions of the most respected Jewish Russian-speaking lecturers. So we organized skype lectures of Rabbi E. Ksido, Rabbi A. Levitan, Rabbanit H. Kuperman, Rabbi U. Superfin, series of lectures by Z Hariyan. Rabbi M. Kopitman gave individual skype consultations. The serious advantage of his participation is that he worked in Saratov for 5 years and knows many of the parents privately. For the last two years he got the diplomas of several courses on family relations and works seriously in this field.

Parents and children prepared Hanukah concert, Purimspiel and different sketches together and had a lot of fun.

During the second semester we provided dance-therapy for mothers with children once a week. It is a brilliant psychological instrument that gives an opportunity for women to relax, to communicate with their children in informal manner and to get a lot of fun.

- It was planned to organize psychological trainings during summer months devoted to Family Teambuilding. But last year Jewish Religious Society won the grant support of Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund for holding Summer Family Camp. And the family

Camp was held on July 01-08 in the recreation centre near Saratov on the bank of Volga. We decided that it is a very nice matter to combine our activities because all the families in the camp are participants of our program. So during the whole week the team of teachers and psychologists (some of them - from the project, some of them - guests) worked with groups of children and parents. Each day in the morning and after forty minutes at 4 p.m. there were special lessons of music (Jewish and not), singing, drawing, molding from the plastic, balloon constructing, etc. There were lessons on Jewish tradition for children during day time. And in the evenings there were different family trainings, intellectual games, humorous theatrical shows, etc. for both children and parents. And of course they were devoted to different aspects of Jewish tradition, holidays, humor, and knowledge of Tora. Everybody got a lot of positive emotions and a strong feeling that we are a big Jewish family.

We had a very interesting guest in our camp – Rabbi Shimon Levin, Vice Chief Rabbi of Moscow, he is a former saratovite. He spent couple of days in the Family Camp giving consultations, lessons and participating in evening activities.

Instead of permanent teachers from the project (Natalia Kurchatova, Tatiana Dunaeva, Sofia Koplevatskaya, Elena Ignatieva, Irina Veysman) we had there a very professional psychologist Anna Birbraer and artist and restorer Andrey Borovsky.

- The first half a year of the project was mainly devoted to attraction of participants, as much as we can. And still this process is not finished. All the parents entered the door of the project received a short questionnaire about their expectations in the project. The second semester of the project was mainly devoted to attraction of participants and keeping them in the project.

Sometimes it is more complicated and more important to save the team. It is very important for us that nobody left the project. Of course there are some skips of the lessons but nobody told about their leaving because the project did not satisfy them. On the contrary some parents share their advice on improving the project.