

Matanel Foundation – Activity Report

October 2015

Name of the Program: **Beit Rachel Straus, AKIM-Jerusalem**

Year of Activity: **2014-2015**

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Actual State of the Program:

The renovation of Beit Rachel Straus finished in January 2015. Presently, the building is open six days a week from 9:00 until 21:00 (including Fridays). During the afternoon hours – 15:00-20:00 three of the seven rooms are fully occupied (Gym, Music and Exercise Studio) with the other facilities – Snoezelen, art workshop, lecture room and auditorium – in use 50% of the time. During the morning hours 9:00-15:00 two rooms – art workshop and exercise studio are in use two and a half days a week. The rooms are used both by AKIM-Jerusalem's own clients – residents from our hostels and sheltered living arrangements and children who still live at home with their families. In addition, the facilities are also used by normative members of the community who come for lectures, exercise, yoga and music lessons.

Main Achievements

AKIM-Jerusalem's vision is to make Beit Rachel Straus a center for inclusion. Based on this premise we have developed the concept of using the art workshop as a place to learn acceptance, tolerance and equality. Since May, after the opening of the Gallery of our clients' art, five schools of special education and one typical school have visited the building and learned about the world of art from the perspective of people with intellectual disabilities. They also visited the different rooms in the building and found it all to be a very pleasant experience.

Our goal is to achieve full financial independence in order not to have to appeal to governmental agencies, foundations or donors to cover maintenance. Since we have opened we have hosted twenty varying paid events in the building, including: book signing by an author, music events, cheese and wine party, birthday party, Purim party, lectures, Arab studies, Jewish mystical texts study, therapeutic classes on the subject of D.B.T. for people with psychiatric problems, medical yoga for women recovering from breast cancer and an additional class for those with fibromyalgia.

We are pleased, therefore, with the steady progress we have made since opening our doors – new clients have been willing to pay for using our purpose-built rooms and other groups of people with special needs have been introduced to our services and facilities.

Evaluation:

Methodology –

Special Needs Population

We were in touch with the Jerusalem Municipality's department for social services, social workers of different facilities in the Jerusalem area (both West and East Jerusalem) and based on their comments and recommendations we opened groups that would fulfill their present needs. We also spoke with different organizations that care for people with special needs, e.g., Alut (people who are on the Autism Spectrum), Nechim Achshav (people with physical impairments), Enosh (people with mental illnesses) etc., to find out if they needed facilities for some of their programs that they were unable to run in their own buildings.

Normative Population

We have built a website for Beit Rachel Straus together with its own logo. Likewise, we have opened our own page on Facebook. Through these social media sites we are trying to attract new populations to our facility. We have included photos of the different events held in the building, written comments from our satisfied clients and seen that after every entry more "friends" are passing on our name to their friends and family so that they, too, can enjoy the services.

Results -

1. Each month of operation we have seen an increase in numbers of people using this facility. More of our residents are now visiting Beit Rachel Straus as well as people from the general community.
2. We have been pleasantly surprised by the number of private individuals who have asked to use the various rooms for their functions. We do not take it lightly that they would be happy to share the space with our clients. We see this as an excellent path to a more tolerant society that meets with each other in a non-threatening space.

Comparison - This is the first year of operation, so we have no way of comparing the results with any other year.

Conclusion for the Future –

1. We would like to hold further meetings with the Jerusalem Municipality to see if they have new needs that we could help with in the building. We feel it to be important to be in touch with them on a regular basis in order to make sure that we are the first organization to be used for their projects.

2. We would like to be in touch with various other organizations that work with people who have special needs in Jerusalem to see if they also are looking for facilities for some of their programs.
3. We would like to develop our website and Facebook sites further so that we interest new populations to our work (videos of previous events, more photos, stories from satisfied customers etc.).

Provisional Guidelines for the Advancement of the program in the next year:

1. We are looking to open a "Moadon" (clubhouse) for people with intellectual disabilities from both sides of Jerusalem – East and West – for them to meet and make new friends. They will be encouraged to learn new skills together – communication skills, social norms etc. – while enjoying fun activities.
2. Classes of arts and crafts for women with special needs together with normative women from the local community to encourage inclusion.
3. To produce new art exhibitions of works by people with special needs – not only from Jerusalem but from around Israel or abroad that will be hung in our gallery.