



75 Years of Successful Treatment of At Risk Children and Youth

NEWS FROM JERUSALEM HILLS

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Alon Brit – "The Hand in Hand" Initiative

In recent years, a special connection has developed between the children of our on campus school and those of the Alon Elementary School, which is located close to the children's home. Because of the very positive encounters and activities between the two schools there has developed a real desire to deepen the connection between the children and give them the opportunity to really get to know one another. This school year our school was given this opportunity through the "Hand in Hand" initiative instituted by the Ministry of Education (with support of other government bodies). Our project was submitted to the initiative in cooperation with the Alon Elementary School.



The program includes two main initiatives: "Bar/Bat Mitzvahs Groups" that pairs our junior unit children with the sixth graders at the Alon School, and the "Equal Groups" that pairs our Keshet and Ofer groups with the Alon School third graders. The meetings are based on an educational-social process in which students learn to recognize and appreciate similarities and differences. This process allows for the children through acquaintance, mingling and joint activities, to initiate and create informal relationships that change attitudes; teaches the children about openness and acceptance of the other and, through leading different activities together, empowers the students and strengthens their self-image.



In anticipation of the first meeting between the JHTC junior unit and the Alon sixth graders at the Alon School, teachers from JHTC spoke with the Alon students about the children in the Home and what to expect in the first meeting. Our children went through some preparation as well. They started out by playing introductory games in groups. Then they went into the auditorium and watched a movie together. Each Alon student brought with him two bags of popcorn, one for him/her and one for a friend from the Children's Home. The meeting was a success and many children from both schools expressed their desire to meet again and get to know each other better. The interaction between the children was very positive and an onlooker could not tell who was from which school. Children from both schools asked their new friends many questions like: "When do you see your Mom?", "When do you go on a shopping trip?" "Can I have your phone number?" and more. The questions were asked with great delicacy and some children asked for assistance from their teachers when broaching some of the topics.

The excitement was apparent not only among the children, but among the staff as well. "I have to say that it was a great experience for us adults," wrote the Alon initiative leader. "I was very excited to see how the children sat together and talked among themselves while watching the film ... It was heartwarming" ...

Being a Counselor at JHTC

In the Jerusalem Hills Children's Home there are 22 counselors that work directly with the children. Most of the counselors live on campus in the dormitory complex, some with their spouses and families. A group of three counselors accompanies each of the seven units in the Home. The counselors are with the children from the moment they wake up in the morning until the first school bell and then again from the last bell until the children put their heads on their pillows at night.



Many of our counselors seek out employment at JHTC because they have heard about the Home and the important work that is being done here. "To be a counselor at JHTC is to experience the kids and feel the work all the time. You always have in mind that this is not just another job ... we work our shifts but the kids live here, so I often say that I am with the kids rather than that I am at work. Even when I am not on my shift my mind is with them. If I'm not thinking of what is happening with the children now in the cabin then as a counselor I'm always questioning myself, wondering if I acted correctly with that child in that specific situation and if I should have said something else or done something else at that moment" ...

In the elementary unit, a counselor accompanies his/her group for a period of 4 years. In the junior unit the children are in the group for a period of 3 to 4 years. Then comes the graduation stage and the separation. "Separation is difficult because as a counselor you are with them from the moment they get up until they go back to sleep at night, you care for them, laugh with them, talk and especially see the process they are going through. And then the parting is hard and the whole process is difficult because you really get attached to the children.." When the children leave there are staff members who stay in touch with the children via phone calls or messages, but the relationship is not as intense as during the time that they are in the Home.

The children in the Home often exhibit aggressive and violent behavior and inability to control their impulses.



Because of this, the counselors need constant professional support and training throughout their work, training that provides them with a "safety net" and prevents professional burnout. Thanks to this, the counselors work at the Home an average of 10 years, which also indicates their dedication to the children, the job and the place. A number of counselors even move up to be group coordinators in the Home, or go to study social work or psychology and return to the Home as therapists. The directors of both the Children's Home and the Kemper Group Home started out as a counselors themselves many years ago.

Art, Drama and Pet-Assisted Therapeutic Treatment

The Jerusalem Hills School has a therapeutic curriculum alongside the educational classes, which includes art therapy, drama therapy, and pet-assisted therapy. The school has four art therapists, a drama therapist and a pet-assisted therapist who work with the children, in four well-equipped art rooms, a drama workshop, and a spacious and well-kept petting zoo. The therapeutic system is an integral part of the daily routine of the children. The treatments take place in groups of 3-5 children where the children receive (and give) feedback, reflection and personal support from both their peers and the therapists. In addition, these therapists provide individual psychotherapy treatments as part of JHTC's psychotherapy system.

In art therapy, children are invited to play and create from their inner world. This is made possible by deploying a wide variety of materials, in the presence of an attentive art therapist that maintains a safe space for the children. Her role is to help each child shape their experiences and feelings, find meaning in them, and

communicate them in a way that eases loneliness and anxiety that the misunderstood child experiences. The success of such a process is reflected in the formalization of the child's personal identity and in strengthening his/her self-image. Most children create in an open studio in which each child can choose which materials, what subjects and to what purpose he/she creates. The rooms are equipped with ceramic material, plaster, wood, large and small scraps, various colors, paper and boards, craft and jewelry materials, fabrics and wool; the children are exposed to art work by artists, as well as to the works of their friends. At the core of the work of an art therapist is the recognition of the healing power of art, the creation of images and symbolization, and their centrality to the development of the child.



Pet-assisted therapy takes place in the petting zoo, a space designed in such a way that the structure and the environment give the feeling of a bubble for the children. The petting zoo has two areas: the closed room, which contains different small animals and the outdoor area with large cages, a large pen and a pond with ducks. The petting zoo has a variety of animals and rich and enveloping vegetation, full of stimuli that include smells, sounds and space. Pet-assisted therapy is based on the emotional bond that develops between the child and the animal. In the emotional space that is created in the petting zoo, the therapist can broach issues that concern the child. Later, and together with the therapist, the child can process and internalize these issues. Pet-assisted therapy has qualities that can serve as a catalyst for the therapeutic process even with a patient whose verbal communication is not natural to them; in this case the animals can serve as a bridge and mediating factor where communicating with the child is concerned.

Drama Therapy plays on various creative fields from the world of theater - such as writing, directing, costumes, scenery, movement, acting and more - in order to enable self-expression and to provide emotional strength and healing. This is done through creating a safe space, accompanied by the therapists who simultaneously recognizes the individuality of each child and the children's common processes. Drama Therapy works on the principle of distancing. The child does not speak directly about his inner world, but rather expresses his inner experiences and concerns through various characters he portrays. Because the characters are a portrayal of the child himself, the child is given greater freedom of expression. By portraying other characters, mental processes are formulated. In addition, with some children the therapists and the child can examine how the characters they portrayed relate to their lives. Although the emphasis is on free and spontaneous expression, in drama therapy they do learn theatrical tools in order to equip them with additional means to express themselves and to contain their experiences.



Pet-assisted therapy, drama, and art enable children to express themselves, to create and to have experiences in an alternative or symbolic reality, which is essential for children who have suffered and suffer from trauma. The various settings provide the children with a safe space where they express their chaotic inner world and their initial, disintegrating experiences. The therapists collect and integrate the child's experiences by finding their meaning. All this is in order for the child to formulate his inner self, and lead to healthy engagement, learning and creativity. It is clear that the children look forward to these treatments, and experience meaningful sessions. The healthy and creative forces that develop during the treatment strengthen hope and help children build their place in the world.

In addition to the regular group treatments and the individual treatments, there are sometimes joint projects between the therapists and the children's direct staff; these are opportunities to work together and create a group project, which increases the staff's collaboration and is a cause for pride among the children.



JHTC is committed to restoring to each at-risk boy and girl under our care their faith in themselves and their belief that the world is meant for them as well. The success of our highly personalized long term treatment program depends to a large extent on the generosity and support of our friends and supporters all over the world. Your support will make a real difference and a lasting impact.

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