

Masira "Journey" مسيره

The Program for the Advancement of the Status of People with Disabilities in Arab Society in Israel



JDC-Israel
Unit for Disabilities and Rehabilitation

Statistics About Masira:

Three years of work in the field have led to the following achievements:

- 15 programs operate in 20 towns and villages, run by 11 different NGOs for the disabled.
- 5,000 people with disabilities and 400 family members participate in a variety of programs.
- 2,000 people with disabilities have received information on rights, entitlements, and services for the disabled.
- 3,000 people with disabilities have received training and guidance on the availability and use of assistive devices.
- 400 service professionals from different fields have joined a professional network focusing on the issue of disabilities.
- 120 imams (Muslim clerics) have participated in training seminars on disabilities and have begun to bring about change in their communities.

Disabled for the Disabled: Creating Social Change

The most effective efforts to improve the lives of people with disabilities have been those initiated and carried out by the disabled themselves. One way Masira does this is by identifying people with disabilities who are accomplished in a range of fields—e.g. academic studies, employment, volunteer work, leisure activities, and family life—and further advancing their skills and knowledge, enabling them to serve as leaders, activists, role models, and mentors for their peers. Hanaa Shalata, a blind woman from Sakhnin with an MA in gerontology, is one such leader. Hanaa is the local coordinator of both the Supportive Community for Independent Living for the Disabled and the Accessible Community. She also volunteers at a number of local NGOs for the disabled and for other populations.

Masira aims to improve the lives and status of adults (ages 21-65) with disabilities in the Arab community in Israel. In 2006, JDC-Israel's Unit for Disabilities and Rehabilitation launched the Masira initiative, which operates in partnership with government ministries, municipalities, NGOs, foundations, and individual donors.

People with disabilities in the Arab community in Israel (an estimated 150,000) face many difficulties, including a shortage of accessible services, physical obstacles preventing their mobility, limited access to information on rights and services, low self image, negative stigmas, and difficulties in finding employment.

Goals of the Initiative

- To improve the status of people with disabilities in the Arab community in Israel.
- To develop community-based programs that meet the unique needs of Arab society.
- To establish strong organizational and community infrastructure that can maintain and promote long-term programs for the disabled.

Masira Components

- Strengthening NGOs run by the disabled and their families.
- Developing leadership among people with disabilities.
- Making culturally sensitive information accessible to the disabled.
- Working to change attitudes and stereotypes within the Arab community towards people with disabilities.
- Promoting multi-sector dialogue on the development of services for people with disabilities and their families.



Hanaa Shalata of Sakhnin receiving from Supreme Court Justice Emerita Dalia Dorner the "Equality Prize" awarded to people with disabilities who have broken new ground in their integration into society. December 2007

Masira: A Look Ahead (See page 4)

Religious Leadership Adopts the Disabled Cause

Changing negative attitudes regarding the disabled is critical to promoting integration in the community. One way Masira works to dispel widespread stigmas is by working with community leadership. Such revolutionary change is being carried out by 120 imams, who participated in a project initiated by Masira, in partnership with the Interior Ministry's Department for Religious Communities and the Massar Institute. Following training seminars, these imams deliver sermons to improve attitudes towards the disabled and develop community projects for people with disabilities.



Conferences on disabilities for imams. 2007-2008

"The truth is that we met people [with disabilities] whose personal qualities and abilities are much greater than most of ours. I don't know anymore who is disabled—us or them."

The Meaning of Accessibility: Overcoming Physical, Cultural, Social, and Language Barriers

Physical Accessibility

People with disabilities in the Arab community suffer from limited physical accessibility. Many Arab towns have neither sidewalks nor handicapped parking spots, and public buildings are rarely accessible. This makes it very difficult for disabled people to get around and to integrate into society.

Masira has upgraded and expanded the Accessible Community program in the 13 Arab towns in which it operates. Currently, more than 100 Arab citizens with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities—all active members of Accessible Communities—are working to improve physical accessibility in their towns.

Program Partners: JDC-Israel, the Israel Association of Community Centers, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services, and local municipalities.

Culturally Sensitive and Disabled-Accessible Information

Since few materials are available in Arabic, people with disabilities in the Arab community have difficulties learning about rights, entitlements, services, assistive devices, and support organizations. To meet this need, Masira does the following:

- Operates an Arabic-language information hotline on rights and services with the Bizchut organization. Produces and distributes booklets in Arabic and provides lectures in Arabic on services and entitlements for the disabled across Israel. Over 2,000 people have already benefited from these services.
- Runs workshops on assistive devices and accessibility in Arabic with the Milbat organization. More than 3,000 people with disabilities and service professionals have participated in these workshops in the North, the Triangle region, and the South.
- Masira supported the translation of the Sela website into Arabic, operated by the Institute for the Advancement of Deaf Persons in Israel. The website aims to assist deaf persons and their families to be knowledgeable consumers of services and assistive devices.

Masira publications - see page 4.



The occupational therapist Hamudi Ichtilat, coordinator of the Assistive Devices program in the Arab community, demonstrates the use of mobile ramps at a conference on assistive devices. Deburiah, May 2008



Majid Agbariya, coordinator of Accessible Communities in the Arab community and Claire Calderon, National Program Director, with activists. Hura, March 2008

The Deaf and Hearing Impaired

The rate of deafness and hearing impairment in the Bedouin community is higher than in any other population group in Israel. Deaf and hearing-impaired individuals are marginalized within the Bedouin community. Women in particular live in isolation. Most family members do not know sign language, making it tremendously difficult for deaf people to communicate with their environment. Local schools lack programs adapted for the deaf and hearing impaired, and there is very limited transportation to larger towns where services and programs do exist.

In order to assist deaf and hearing-impaired Bedouin in the Negev, Masira runs the Model of Success leadership and empowerment program for deaf men and women (in separate groups). The program provides participants with information on entitlements, develops a group of activists, and trains deaf counselors who serve as role models for deaf children.



Deaf and hearing-impaired women from the Models of Success program in Hura, along with Dana Levy, training coordinator from the Institute for the Advancement of Deaf Persons in Israel

The Blind and Visually Impaired



Attorney Abbas Abbass, director of Almanarah, uses a computer adapted to meet the needs of the visually impaired

Attorney Abbas Abbass, director of Almanarah ("lighthouse"), the Association for Advancing Arab Blind in Israel, who is himself blind, rejects the use of the term "people with disabilities" to describe disabled individuals. Rather, he refers to them as "people with unique abilities." Abbass and a group of Almanarah members work tirelessly to realize their vision of social integration for the blind, changing attitudes toward the blind, improving access to entitlements, and full integration into the job market. In partnership with Masira, Almanarah runs awareness workshops, training seminars, self-help groups, and an assistance hotline.

The Forum for Women with Disabilities

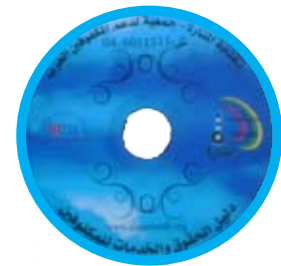
Maryam Chayar Techibesh is an active volunteer in the Forum for Women with Disabilities, which was established through Masira and is operated by Al-Tufula. A resident of Kfar Ya'asif who works as a secretary in Acco, she regards volunteer work with women with disabilities as an important aspect of her life. *"Meeting with these special women has awoken in me many questions about myself: Why didn't I pursue higher education? Why didn't I make more of an effort? What can be done to change the difficult attitudes of families, professionals, and society at large to women with disabilities? And what can I do to make a difference?"*

Volunteering with the women's group has been a very important experience for me. I call women, locate them, and drive them to the meetings. I don't ask for any material remuneration. The work itself has given me great spiritual satisfaction. We must help these women get out of their homes for regular activities and open a window to integrate into society - work, studies, and more. I personally hope to study social work or psychology."



Maryam Chayar Techibesh is committed to improving society's treatment of the disabled and to enabling women with disabilities to participate in a variety of activities outside of their homes

For the 6,000 blind people in the Arab community, an Arabic audio CD that explains rights for the blind was prepared by Almanarah



Attiya El Nabari (far right), Deputy Director of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Be'er Sheva and the Negev, meets with CIL activists

The Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Be'er Sheva and the Negev Reaches Out to People with Disabilities in the Bedouin Community

Attiya El Nabari: *"Until a few years ago, I had no self-confidence due to my disability. In fact, I always looked at the ground when talking to people. However, thanks to the Center for Independent Living (CIL) and JDC's leadership training program for people with disabilities, today I am the deputy director of CIL and try to assist other Bedouins with disabilities. At the CIL, we work to inform all people with disabilities about their rights and help them obtain their benefits. In addition, through our Peer Mentoring program we utilize our life experience to help others overcome everyday challenges. There are thousands of people with disabilities in Bedouin villages across the Negev. From my standpoint, if we reach 10% of them, that will already be an important achievement."*

Masira has enabled us to expand our programming to the Bedouin community and to serve people with disabilities whom we previously were unable to reach. Today, some 400 Bedouins participate in CIL programs."

