

Beth David Institute – Center for Deaf-Blind Persons
Evaluation Study of the Center for Deaf-Blind Persons
Executive Summary
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Introduction and Methodology

The Center for Deaf-Blind Persons provides a range of services for individuals of various ages who have different levels of the dual disability of deafness and blindness. The Center was founded in response to surveys conducted in the 1980's as to the characteristics and size of the target population. After approximately 15 years of operation, and in light of recent changes in the field in Israel which affect the status of the Beth David Institute as the only service provider, the Board of the Beth David Institute decided to have the services of the Center professionally evaluated.

The evaluation took about a year to complete and included individual meetings with each member of the staff, the management of the Center and the management of the Rehabilitation Department of the Ministry of Welfare, as well as personal interviews with clients of the Center. The client interviews were conducted and documented on special evaluation forms which were drawn up for this purpose. Throughout the evaluation the staff of the Center served as a sort of steering committee and provided information about the Center's history and future. The meetings focused on central issues such as the Center's mission statement, name, a new analysis of the services provided and ways to further improve coordination between members of the staff. Information from the Center's clients was gathered with the greatest caution, and was complicated by the fact that the majority of the interviewees were interviewed via tactile sign language. The interviews were conducted by individuals who are not on the staff of the Center. The questionnaires were built according to the abilities of the interviewees to understand and to quantify their answers. A summary of the results will be presented in this section.

Summary of results

General evaluation of the organization

The results of the survey showed an overall high level of satisfaction among the clients. The level of satisfaction of the clients as per the various services provided ranged from satisfied to very satisfied. The majority reported that they enjoy coming to the Center and are satisfied with the services provided as well as the support and empathy provided. **They were very pleased, too, with the availability of the Center as a framework for them.**

The individuals surveyed had used the Center's facilities for an average of 9 years. The majority of the respondents (66%) said that they participated in the social activities at the Center, 40% received assistance in using their legal rights, 26% received emotional help, 20 % participated in the Learning Center and a small minority (about 10%) participated in the Role Model program. Most of those that participate in the Role Model program do not attend activities at the Center.

The vast majority of those surveyed visit the Center on a weekly basis. About half of them are satisfied with this frequency, and the other half would like to come more often.

Evaluation of the Social Services Offered by the Center

The provision of social services was one of the goals for which the Center was opened 15 years ago. Today, they continue to be a main component of the Center's activities. The majority of the respondents (75%) to the survey of these services reported that they have attended the Social Recreational Club for two or more years. The respondents were asked to rate the services provided on the Likert Scale, which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). From their answers it is clear that their level of satisfaction with the program ranged from very satisfied to completely satisfied. Only the range of additional social activities received a slightly lower score.

It would be advisable to examine ways to increase the level of satisfaction among the participants as per the content of the ongoing activities. It would seem wise as well, to reinstate the initiative to annually elect a representative committee and to help them develop the skills to choose, initiate and carry out activities. Such an action could help to maximize the match between the social activities offered and the expectations of the clients. A further recommendation would be to expand the activities to include an additional meeting each week, with the possibility of holding this additional meeting in Jerusalem and in the North, with the intention of increasing the availability and overcoming the difficulties imposed by geographical distances.

Evaluation of the Emotional Counseling Services Offered by the Center

The Center for Deaf-Blind Persons offers a range of services for emotional support and assistance. The services offered include individual and group therapy, a psychodrama group, help in getting one's rights and dealing with the various authorities. The majority of the respondents to this section of the survey (60%) noted that they have used these services for two or more years.

The results of the survey show that those who use this type of service expressed a significant level of satisfaction with the fact that such a service is available to them and that they benefit from it. It provides them with a permanent source of support and a haven in times of crisis. They also reported, overall, a slight improvement in the quality of their life, apparently due to the lack of additional sources of support in their communities.

It would be appropriate for the social services to be combined into a single unit which could be called the unit for emotional counseling. This would be a positive development as it would create and encourage coordination between the coordinators of the different fields and turn them into a team for professional and strategic planning. It would be appropriate to consider, as well, including the Role Model project in this unit.

As the Center is the sole provider of these services, it is important that it run them where necessary, respond to requests, and expand them to include clients of all ages. This should be done in consultation with internal and external experts and the creation

of an advisory committee should be considered. It is clear that with the additional development of the services for emotional counseling there will be a need to adjust the amount of staff accordingly.

Today, the work of the social workers at the Center also touches upon the field of employment. It would be appropriate for the approach of the Center to the field of employment to include intervention to integrate individuals with a dual disability into the work force, with the help of existing services.

Evaluation of the Services offered at the Learning Center

One of the main goals of the Center for Deaf-Blind Persons is to improve the basic skills of individuals with a dual disability, in order to help them become a part of society. The Learning Center was founded by the Center and its classes include a range of educational activities. These include basic skills for daily life, alternative methods of communication, courses for matriculation or degree completion and an Ulpan for new immigrants. Those who need additional assistance with mobility are referred to "Migdal Ohr" which specializes in this field. Each session at the Learning Center lasts 45 minutes, and is usually individual, although occasionally the students are taught in pairs.

The results of the survey show that just under half of those who use the Learning Center have done so for up to one year and just over half for a longer period, of more than two years.

The individuals that use this service clearly expressed a high level of satisfaction with the range of services offered and feel that the training received contributes to their daily lives. An additional important statistic is that the clients feel that the skills and knowledge gained from this framework are applicable and practical. The vast majority rate this service as very highly recommended.

In order to further improve the work in this field it would be wise to clarify the expectations from each relevant staff member and to encourage communication between them.

Evaluation of the Role Model Program

For the last two years the Center has run a mentor program for children and youth who have been diagnosed with Usher Syndrome. The intention is to accompany them from the initial stages after the diagnosis through the gradual loss of vision. The mentoring process provides emotional support, access to information and a role model who demonstrates how one can live with this Syndrome and not be overcome by it.

The Center provides additional support for these young people at their schools. This is designed to combat the lack of knowledge and common misconceptions about this Syndrome and to create a more comprehensive supporting environment.

The results of the survey for the services provided in the framework of the Role Model Program show that all of the participants who responded have participated in the program for about a year, which is the minimum period of time for a mentoring

program to be effective. The questionnaires were administered to the students by their teachers in their schools.

A very high level of satisfaction was recorded among the students who were helped by various aspects of this support service. It should be noted that this program received the highest ratings of all services offered by the Center.

The high level of satisfaction recorded with the availability of this service shows that it is strongly grounded, professionally, and provides an answer to a real need. It also reinforces the need to extend the services provided by the Center to a younger clientele.

Overall findings as to the organization as a whole

While the impression is that the Center achieves the goals for which it was established and that its workers are dedicated to their tasks, there is a need to reassess the existing organizational structure. Despite the important professional ideas raised by the current staff to further develop the services offered, there is a clear lack of a designated staff person with the necessary organizational and marketing skills to bring these ideas to fruition. Such a person, preferably with a background in community service, should be appointed immediately to fill this gap. The inter relations between the staff need to be re-organized, as they are somewhat complicated and there is an insufficient flow of important information between them.

In light of the many difficulties and few successes of integrating people with a dual disability in the work force, as well as the creation of an additional NPO which is trying to develop employment opportunities for this population, it would be advisable for the Center to focus on being the first and only provider of services for dually disabled individuals of all ages, primarily in the field of social, emotional and various disciplines of personal development and study. It would be wise to expand the intervention to include the family and the community. Likewise, as many of the Center's clients feel a lack of emotional support and interpersonal connections in their local communities, it would be appropriate to extend the Center's activities in three areas. One, expanding the social activities to include at least one additional evening every week, whether at the Center or in a centrally located city such as Jerusalem or Haifa. Two, opening a workshop, at least three mornings a week, for those who are not integrated into any other workplace. Third, to seriously reconsider opening a sheltered living apartment near the Center. The combination of day services, social activities and living facilities will form the basis of a supportive community for those who lack one where they live. It is clear that the development of these services will require the appropriate expansion and/or adaptation of the existing building.

Summary

The current examination shows that the Center is meeting the goals for which it was created. Likewise, the high level of satisfaction expressed by its clients in a range of fields mark it as a central source of support for the clientele it was created for. The latest developments in the field caused a need, on the one hand, to reevaluate the existing services offered, and on the other hand, and to keep, expand and emphasize the unique spheres of activity that were developed at the Center over the last decade and a half. Organizational advice and the addition of a staff person oriented toward organization and community will help transform the recommendations in this report into reality.