

## **Al Bayader Proposal for a One-Year Pilot Project to Develop Holistic Early Childhood Support in Arab Municipalities in Israel**

*A society that cares about equal opportunities & social justice recognizes that investments in early childhood, starting from birth, form the basis for meaningful social change.*

### **Background and Rationale**

Research carried out world-wide demonstrates that investment in high quality early childhood education is one of the most influential factors in social development. Comprehensive, accessible, high-quality education frameworks for young children (from birth to 3 years) have been shown to make a significant contribution to a child's cognitive, social, and emotional skills and development, reducing economic inequality and advancing social mobility. These effects are especially pronounced in low-income families.

Yet in Arab society in Israel, the rate of enrollment of children in supervised early education frameworks (up to age 3) remains particularly low. This situation has implications for the families of these children in the present and for the children's life outcomes in the future. Although 58% of the children in Arab society live in poor families, their enrollment rate in supervised and subsidized Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) frameworks for the birth-to-3-year age group is low: 18% in the 2018/2019 school year (in contrast to 39% in the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) sector and 26% in the non-Haredi Jewish sector).

Over the last years, the Israeli government, as well as a number of nonprofit organizations and foundations, have worked to improve this situation. Despite these efforts, few supervised daycare frameworks operate in Arab society: only 1 for every 2000 children, in comparison with 1 for every 250 children among Jewish Israelis. This gap is caused by a number of factors, including barriers in land use and planning that impede construction of public daycare centers, the structure of public subsidies that disadvantages poor families in which the mother does not work, low workforce participation of women, low levels of awareness, and cultural factors. Finally, Arab municipalities lack basic data to plan for, and track the situation of, children under the age of four.

Now, in the midst of the current conflict emergency situation, the impact of these shortages of services and data is particularly severe. As a result, infants and young children remain without proper physical and emotional support – lacking safe spaces, resources, and guidance for parents, caregivers, and children to build resilience and handle these emergency needs.

## Vision and Goals

Al Bayader aims to design and implement a strategic plan for comprehensive developmental support to Arab children in Israel in all areas of the infant and child's life: health and safety, developmental, educational, family, and cultural. We seek to enable Arab children to grow up in conditions that support healthy growth and development – physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially. This will contribute significantly – in normal times, as well as in emergency – to social mobility and to closing socio-economic gaps for Arab society in Israel in the coming years.

This pilot project, which cannot be more timely, aims to design and implement a multi-disciplinary city-wide early childhood system that will advance social mobility while preserving unique characteristics and culture of Arab society. Al Bayader will work with three Arab local authorities, in coordination with civil society and Israeli government agencies, to put in place a holistic system to support healthy early childhood development from birth to age 6, with an emphasis on ages 0-3.

### **This coordinated system will address four axes:**

1. System-wide – planning, gathering data, managing and pooling resources among all those involved in early childhood care (e.g., well-baby clinics of the Health Ministry, daycare centers supervised by Ministry of Education, municipal urban planning, transportation, etc.)
2. Human Capital – training and mentoring childcare teams in both public and private settings, as well as training staff in community centers, the welfare department, and other municipal departments developing projects with families and children at home
3. Facilities and infrastructure – improving and expanding facilities for early childhood care, park and outdoor play areas, integrating understanding of early childhood needs into urban and transportation planning, etc.
4. Community Awareness – raising community, social and public awareness of early childhood development and its impact on the lives and future of children.

The proposed program is a one-year pilot project for establishing such a comprehensive model in three Arab towns. Al Bayader will work in cooperation with the Al Tafula Center, a well-respected, professional NGO with expertise in early childhood development. We aim to learn from this pilot project to develop methods and models that can be scaled up to the national level in cooperation with the Ministry of Education in the coming years.

## Objectives for Pilot Project

In this one-year project we aim to achieve the following objectives in the four axes of activity:

### System-Wide

1. Strategic plan developed for each town, based on data-gathering, mapping, data base, local vision, and targeted work plan.
2. New role of Early Childhood Development Coordinator defined and developed in each local authority – to lead municipal professional teams across departments. (Note: this involves upgrading the role definition and skills of an existing employee, not hiring a new employee.)
3. Steering Committee of Stakeholders established in each town, led by the mayor or designated official, including key municipal officials, local representatives of relevant government ministries (health, welfare, education), community leaders, NGOs, private sector, etc.

### Human Capital

4. Professional and managerial skills enhanced – among municipal employees who deal with early childhood issues (about 15 in each town = 45 altogether).

### Facilities and Infrastructure

5. Work-plan developed to improve the quality and safety of existing private childcare facilities (for ages 0-3), with the aim of assisting about 30% of them to become accredited as officially recognized facilities – in the year following the pilot project.
6. Recommendations developed for culturally appropriate models to enhance early childhood development for the 50% of children who are cared for at home (e.g., models for child development services in center-based or home-based settings).

### Community Awareness

7. Awareness of private daycare providers raised – as to the impact and the path to becoming accredited facilities.
8. Awareness of parents and families raised – about the ways and importance of enhancing early childhood development – in daycare and at home.

## Activities and Timeline

1. **Select Pilot Municipalities, Recruit and Build Work Teams (Q1).** This will be done by Al Bayader, in coordination with the Ministry of Education Department for Early Childhood Education. The choice will be based on:

- Interest and motivation of the local authority and its leadership, including mayor and Head of Education Department
- Capable municipal employee currently working with the early childhood sector on behalf of the local authority
- Geographic diversity of pilot towns
- Medium to large towns. The pilot towns will be chosen from among the ten towns with which Al Bayader currently works: Nazareth, Umm el Fahm, Taybe, Sakhnin, Kfar Yasif, Bassma, Kfar Kara, Arara, Kfar Kasem, Tira.

2. **Mapping and Data Gathering (Q2)**

Build municipal data base and conduct in-depth mapping of:

- Number of children in the early childhood cohorts, geographic distribution, etc.
- Existing early childhood frameworks (official and private) and relevant building plans
- Significant players in local authority and potential partners in the community (e.g., civil society organizations)
- Resources and investments in the early childhood field – crossing sectors
- Integration of data from health clinics (Kupot Holim), welfare department, health department (well-baby clinics, etc.)

3. **Formulating Needs Analysis, Strategy and Workplan (Q2 – ongoing)**

- Analyze strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities
- Develop local vision and strategy for systematic community intervention framework for early childhood: developmental-educational, family, social-emotional
- Develop database system for ongoing analysis of strengths and needs
- Create a municipal Workplan for early childhood development
- Define the new role of Early Childhood Development Coordinator and choose existing municipal professional to fill it. Al Bayader will mentor this professional.
- Design, establish, and activate a city-wide Steering Committee of Stakeholders (municipal, civil society, health professionals, private sector, etc.).

4. **On-the-Job Training and Content Development (Q2-Q3)**

- Design educational content in Arabic for early childhood development. Materials, including an early childhood education kit, will be widely available to daycare staffs, parents, community centers, etc.
- Design and administer pre-training questionnaire to establish baseline of awareness.
- Deliver on-the-job training course – to enhance and develop professional and managerial skills, as well as pedagogical tools, among municipal employees who deal with early

childhood issues. This will be an 8-session hands-on workshop for about 45 professionals in the 3 towns. The core group is comprised of municipal professionals actively engaged in early childhood issues. Specific sessions will include professionals whose work impacts early childhood concerns (e.g., city engineer, transportation and planning officials, etc.), allowing them to integrate approaches that support early childhood development.

**5. Raising Community Awareness (Q2 – and ongoing)**

- Develop appropriate materials in Arabic
- Design and administer a pre-campaign questionnaire/ focus groups to establish baseline
- Conduct community campaigns to raise awareness of parents and families to ways and importance of enhancing early childhood development – at home and in frameworks
- Raise awareness of private daycare managers (for ages birth to 3 years). Build understanding of advantages of accreditation, and the licensing process (e.g., improving physical facilities, health and safety standards, planning approvals, staff needs, etc.)

**6. Design recommendations for models of early childhood education with parents caring for children at home (Q4)**

- Conduct research and develop culturally appropriate models for enhancing early childhood development for 50% of children who are cared for at home. This significant population is often overlooked in municipal planning for early childhood education. Research may include reviewing Israeli and international models and conducting focus groups to understand the needs of parents and kids who stay at home, etc. Recommended models may include child development services in center-based, home-based, or family childcare settings.

**7. Conclusion of strategic plan, vision, organization framework (Q4)**

- Convene community conference to publicize the issue of early childhood development & the community's strategic plan
- Assess pilot project – including post-project questionnaires or focus groups to determine change in awareness.

**At the end of the year, Al Bayader, in conjunction with the Steering Committees, will review and evaluate the work of the pilot project in the three chosen towns, and will draw conclusions regarding:**

1. Key criteria for successful design and implementation of a municipal network for early childhood development
2. Insights for implementation in additional Arab cities and towns, including operation of effective public awareness campaigns.
3. Municipal models that can be implemented in Arab communities around the country.

<b>AI Bayader Early Childhood Education Pilot Project One-Year Budget 2024-25 (in U.S. \$)</b>		
<b>Budget Item</b>	<b>Total for Year (\$)</b>	
Senior Program Advisor	24,324	
Program and Pedagogic Director	81,081	
Project Coordinator (part-time)	42,162	
Data analysis (part-time)	25,946	
Database development & dashboard	8,108	
Toolbox and pedagogical materials in Arabic (design, pedagogical experts, etc.)	5,405	
Expert consultation (e.g., in fields of licensing, safety, community development)	12,514	
Design and development of public awareness materials in Arabic	5,405	
Public awareness campaigns	24,324	
Intensive training course for 30-45 professionals from three towns (8 sessions)	27,027	
Unexpected & overhead expenses	38,595	
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 294,891</b>	
<b>Income</b>	<b>U.S. \$</b>	<b>Status</b>
UJA-NY	95,000	<b>G</b>
Al Bayader	24,324	<b>G</b>
Matching Funds to be Raised	175,567	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$ 294,891</b>	
<b>NOTES: Budget based on a 12-month project, starting in June 2024.</b> <b>The exchange rate is calculated at \$1 = ILS 3.7</b> <b>Income status: R = Requested, G = Granted</b>		