



## **The Mandell Berman Fund For Research on Children with Disabilities**

**September 2016**

Established at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB) in 1999 by Mandell Berman of Detroit, Michigan, the Mandell Berman Fund for Research on Children with Disabilities enhances and promotes the educational, health, and social well-being of children with special needs and their families, through research that improves policy development, program planning, service delivery, and implementation.

Since its establishment, the Berman Fund has contributed toward research projects to benefit children with disabilities and their families. This support enables MJB to leverage additional research funds to create a critical mass of studies that are making a real difference in the lives of Israel's children with disabilities and their families. In addition, the fund has been endowed for the future. The current focuses of the research supported by the Berman Fund are:

1. Supporting children with disabilities and their families
2. Expanding opportunities in the education system
3. Promoting the successful transition to adulthood of youth with disabilities

### ***Supporting Children with Disabilities and their Families***

Children with disabilities and their families face unique challenges in obtaining appropriate care and in helping the children develop and realize their potential. The Berman Fund has recently supported or is supporting a number of MJB efforts, including:

#### **◆ Children & Youth in the Mental Health Reform**

As part of the major reform of mental health services in Israel, the Government of Israel has transferred responsibility for providing mental health services to the health plans. In its efforts to monitor this transition, the Ministry of Health commissioned MJB to plan and conduct a survey of the general population focused on issues of mental health service availability, accessibility and stigma. This survey incorporated a special sub-study of children and youth and placed particular emphasis on disadvantaged populations. Initial findings indicate that there is no significant difference in the rate of children suffering from emotional or behavioral problems whether they are Jewish or Arab, wealthy or poor. However, socioeconomic factors do affect the rate of children who turn to professional treatment. A follow-up survey in 3 years, will examine how these issues have changed in the wake of the reform. The summary report of the current research is scheduled for publication later this year.

- #### **◆ Comprehensive Support Centers for Families of Children with Disabilities.**
- Based on an MJB planning study, JDC-Ashalim developed a model for family support centers that offer a broad range of support services for families with children with all types of disabilities. This year, MJB is concluding a 5-year evaluation of the model and its expansion into additional cities. The evaluation found that the program has helped provide important information to families about rights and resources, raise

awareness of and promote people with disabilities in the community, coordinate therapeutic recreational family activities, and develop support groups, volunteerism and community-based leadership among parents. There are already 11 centers around the country, with plans to add 4-5 new centers each year, until the project serves the entire country. MJB's summary report is scheduled for publication later this year.

- ◆ **Daycare Centers for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities: A Survey of Parents.** One of the most important developments in recent years for children with disabilities and their parents has been the creation of the national network of daycare centers for children with disabilities ages 0-3. This network has grown and expanded over time, with 64 centers now caring for 1900 children. These centers offer rehabilitative treatment for the children, and support parents in the challenging task of raising a child with a disability. MJB recently published a comprehensive survey of parents of children in the care of these centers. Feedback from both Jewish and Arab parents is very positive regarding the childcare, as well as the guidance provided to parents. The survey also noted issues that need to be addressed, such as improving transportation to the centers and increasing home visits, and policy makers are currently exploring ways to address them.
- ◆ **Early Diagnoses and Treatment for Children with ADHD.** Research shows that early diagnosis and treatment can reduce or prevent symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and enable children to function better in school, with their families, and in all areas of life. A 2012 pilot study, conducted by MJB together with the Hebrew University Medical School, screened over 1100 children and found that over 8% displayed symptoms of ADHD. A follow-up study is exploring the longer-term impacts of early screening on the treatment and progress of children with ADHD. The study is also examining the accessibility of services and barriers to using them, and the role of the education system in this process. The study will be published later this year.
- ◆ **Children with Disabilities who are Victims of Abuse.** Children with disabilities are more likely than other children to suffer from violence, abuse and neglect. Data exists on children with disabilities and child victims of abuse, but little is known about how many children in Israel fall into both categories. MJB was commissioned by JDC-Ashalim to develop an estimate of the prevalence of different types of abuse among children with disabilities and to map their various needs for services, with the goal of better tailoring programming to this especially needy population. In the process, MJB will also develop measures that can be shared across agencies to identify and monitor the children and their needs over time. Findings will be published in early 2017.

### ***Expanding Opportunities in the Education System***

Children with disabilities deserve appropriate, quality education, whether in special education settings or in regular school environments. The Berman Fund plays a key role in MJB's research to promote this goal.

- ◆ **The Allocation of Special Education Resources.** The Ministry of Education established a professional committee to revise the basis for allocating resources for children with disabilities. This effort is part of a national reform to help integrate special education students into mainstream classrooms by providing allocations to the school for each child according to his or her need. For years, MJB has provided professional expertise to the committee, by contributing to the preparation of instruments to accurately evaluate each child's functional capacities. Instruments have been prepared for kindergarten, elementary, and middle school students and implementation pilots are underway. The committee is now concluding its activity and the Ministry of Education will begin implementing the recommendations.

- ◆ **A New Publication from the Institute's Learning from Success Series.** The book entitled, *What Have We Actually Done? Success Stories of Support Centers for Students with Learning Disabilities*, was published together with the MOFET Institute. It is the product of an intensive collaboration of a 'learning community' of directors and staff of twelve support centers for students with learning disabilities studying in institutions of higher education throughout Israel. These centers provide important support to enable these young people to successfully complete their education. Using the Learning from Success method developed at MJB, the learning community met to discuss and analyze the centers' activity with students with learning disabilities in order to uncover the principles and best practices that lead to their success. The extensive volume is intended for professionals who work in the field of learning disabilities as well as for people with learning disabilities and for their families. A joint MJB-MOFET conference was held in Tel Aviv this July, to launch the publication of the book and generate more public discussion of how to best enable these young people realize their potential.

### ***Promoting the Successful Transition to Adulthood of Youth with Disabilities***

Young people transitioning from the educational system to adult life need to make important decisions about their future. Those with disabilities face particular challenges at this critical juncture in their lives. The Berman Fund is supporting MJB's evaluation of two important initiatives that have emerged following the first study in Israel of the transition to adulthood of young adults with disabilities, conducted by the Institute in 2016.

- ◆ **Preparation of High School Students for Work Life.** In the past, young people with disabilities completing special education at age 21 had limited expectations of getting a "real" job. The ministries of Social Affairs and Education have joined together to develop a new program aimed at changing that reality. This national pilot program provides life skills and vocational experience to young people with a range of disabilities ages 16-21 in the secondary educational system. The program is far more than job preparation workshops in the schools; it provides exposure to a variety of work options in the real work world and helps develop "soft" job skills. MJB is in the midst of a four-year evaluation, which will guide the ministries' national implementation.
- ◆ **Vocational Training Programs in Special Education.** In Israel, as in many European countries there is growing interest in vocational training programs for young people in Israel, as is common in. MJB reviewed such programs offered within special education tracks in the US and Europe on behalf of the Israeli Social Security Administration, to identify best practices in the vocational training of high school students with disabilities. Findings are being used by the Administration to begin vocational tracks for job training within the special education system.

*The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute is Israel's leading center for applied research on social policy and services, serving Israel, the Jewish world, and the international community. The Institute is an independent, non-profit partnership between the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Government of Israel, and the David and Inez Myers Foundation. To learn more about the Institute, visit [www.jdc.org.il/brookdale](http://www.jdc.org.il/brookdale).*