



CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON DISABILITIES

RESEARCH REPORT

Development of an Effective Model of Supported Housing in the Community for People with Disabilities: Evaluation Study

Ellen Milshtein ✦ Dori Rivkin

The study was initiated by JDC-Israel Unlimited and funded with its assistance

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Executive Summary

Description of the Program

The Supported Housing program was developed by JDC-Israel Unlimited (a partnership of the Government of Israel, JDC-Israel and the Ruderman Family Foundation) together with the Rehabilitation Division and Service for People with Autism and PDD at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Services (MOSAS) and several local authorities.¹ The program is intended to assist people with physical disabilities, high functioning people with autistic spectrum disorders² and reduced cognitive ability,³ who wish to move from their parents' home or an institution into independent housing, but have difficulty doing so without assistance. The program is also intended to support people who have moved into independent housing but are still in the adjustment stage. The program provides a broad range of assistance, including finding an apartment and flat-mates, modifying the home for accessibility, advice on household and financial management, employment, social and recreational activities, and connections to services in the community. From April 2012 through December 2014, a "pre-pilot" of the program was implemented in several local authorities in the north, center and south of Israel. In each area, one organization was selected to implement the program: Kivunim, Slav, and ADNAM, Ltd. Each organization appointed a team led by a care coordinator who is a professional therapist and has overall responsibility for the program, for contact with other agencies in the community and for drawing up an individual assistance plan for each participant. In addition, the teams include several independent living counselors, usually students, whose role is to meet with the participants in their homes and help them acquire the necessary skills. Independent living counselors and care coordinators accompanied the participants through personal meetings and phone calls 4-6 hours weekly. Altogether, 71 young adults participated in the pre-pilot.

Evaluation Study

The study used qualitative methodology, due to the relatively small number of participants in the pre-pilot. This method allowed the researchers to examine the participants' experience in depth and identify the main issues concerning implementation of the program. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the organizations involved in the program, members of the staff, and program participants and their parents. In order to get a direct impression of the living conditions, we interviewed the participants in their homes. The other respondents were interviewed by phone.

¹ At the time of the evaluation, the following authorities were taking part: Nahariya, Kiryat Yam, Haifa, Ra'annana, Ramat Hasharon, Ramat Gan and Ashdod.

² This term replaces "Asperger's syndrome", a category removed from DSM-5 in 2013.

³ People with learning, functional and adjustment difficulties with reduced cognitive ability with regard to borderline intellectual functioning (IQ between 70 and 84) – MOSAS, *Survey of Social Services 2012* (Hebrew).

Main Findings

Recruiting the Participants

- ◆ The participants were recruited for the program by various organizations including social service departments, NGOs and organizations for people with disabilities (e.g., ILAN and Effie – Association Asperger Israel, centers for independent living and residential programs), as well as through other programs run by the program implementers.
- ◆ Representatives of JDC-Israel Unlimited, the local authorities and representatives of the implementing organizations in the three areas reported a relationship of sharing and reciprocal trust. The local authorities were very helpful in identifying and recruiting participants. Compared with the north and central regions, in the south there were serious problems identifying and recruiting candidates. There are a number of possible explanations for this, including the fact that the program was implemented in only one local authority in the south (Ashdod).

Program Staff

- ◆ The coordinators and counselors in the three areas participated in concentrated professional training, which lasted several days and covered relevant subjects, e.g., autistic spectrum disorders and reduced cognitive ability, tailoring individual plans, working with families and leaving the parents' home, integration into the community and employment. In addition, a psychologist working for the program provided supervision. The rights of people with disabilities to services and different aspects of home modifications were not among the subjects addressed in the training.
- ◆ The connection with the staff is very important to the participants. They described their relationship with the staff as deep, personal and long-term.. For this reason, the high turnover of counselors, which was particularly characteristic of the south, was very problematic for the participants, who had built up relationships of trust with them. Turnover could thus be harmful to the process.

Areas and Extent of Assistance

- ◆ An individual plan is developed for each participant, by the participant and a member of staff. The plan includes long-term goals, such as moving into an apartment, as well as short-term goals, such as looking for an apartment or applying for a job.
- ◆ The individual plan is designed to meet the participants' needs in various areas. Some of the participants and their parents stressed that without the assistance provided by the program, it would have been impossible for them to move into independent housing. Participants who had moved into independent housing reported that the program had made the move possible or very much easier. Participants who had not yet moved indicated that the program had helped them to believe that they were capable of moving and had helped them to plan the move. Many participants noted the close guidance they received from the program staff in looking for an apartment and the process of moving in, including help exercising their rights at various organizations, accessibility modifications to the apartment, and signing the lease. In the initial adjustment stages after the move, many of the participants needed extensive counseling on

managing their household and budget. The counselors taught them how to perform different activities such as cleaning and arranging the home, cooking and washing laundry, as well as how to plan their monthly budget according to their income. The program staff also provided guidance and support to the participants looking for jobs, such as writing resumes, preparing for job interviews, negotiating with employers and solving interpersonal problems at work.

- ◆ The amount of assistance provided under the program (4-6 hours per week) was sufficient, according to most participants.

Family Members

- ◆ The program affects not only the participants themselves but also members of their families. In cases where family members object or are apprehensive about the move to independent living, the program staff mediate and try to enlist the family's support.
- ◆ Moreover, according to parents of the participants, the staff ease the burden on the family and help them and the participants themselves to complete the process of separation leading up to the move.
- ◆ The parents of the participants reported satisfaction with the cooperation between them and the program staff and noted that in general they were pleased with their son or daughter's participation in the program.

Completion of the Program and Duration of the Assistance

Most of the respondents – representatives of the organizations, participants and their parents – did not think that the program should be time-limited since some of the participants would need support for a long time or even for the rest of their lives. However, the amount of assistance required is expected to decrease over time. Furthermore, some of the participants are likely to quit the program themselves when they have completed the move and no longer need help. In fact, during the first 2.5 years of the program, five participants elected to discontinue participation in the program after they had moved into independent housing and felt they no longer needed help.

Success of the Program

- ◆ All the respondents – representatives of the organizations, participants and members of the participants' families – felt that this program is important and pioneering in its field and that it provides a service that was previously unavailable.
- ◆ At the time of the study, 47 of the 71 participants were still active in the program.
 - 17 of them moved from their parents' home or from a residential program to independent housing through the program
 - 3 moved from one independent home to another
 - 15 were preparing to move
 - The remaining 12 were already living in independent housing when they joined the program and received support and assistance in completing the process.

- ◆ Apart from the 47 active participants – 24 people were no longer in the program
 - 5 participants had already completed the move and left the program as they felt they did not need further assistance
 - 19 had dropped out of the program before moving to their own apartment.
- ◆ When the program is expanded in the future, outcome measures should be defined. These measures should include not only the actual moving to independent housing, but also increased independence in other aspects of life, participation in the community, and a sense of belonging.

Discussion and Recommendations

- ◆ Recreation and social life: One of the topics of concern to the program initiators is whether the program should offer the participants group social activities – and if so, how often. Most of the respondents believe that group activities are important and even essential to meet the participants' social and emotional needs and to help them with practical needs, such as finding flat-mates. It is, however, important that the social activities be flexible and adapted to the particular and changing needs of the participants. It is recommended that a range of activities be offered so that the participants can choose those suitable for them. Different avenues can be used, such as social networks and phone contact, which can also serve to connect participants who are reluctant to come to group activities.
- ◆ Participation in the community: Some of the participants and their parents reported feeling lonely after the move to their own apartment. In order to help them feel less lonely, it is important to do as much as possible to help them participate in activities and use services offered in the community in areas such as health, recreation, employment and education. Integration in the community is essential for a successful move.
- ◆ Family members: The family plays an important role in the move to independent housing, by supporting the idea and providing emotional, practical and financial support during and after the move. It is important to support the staff's work with the immediate family and perhaps to build models for working with parents as part of the program.
- ◆ Readiness for the move: The program accepts people who want to move into independent housing and feel that they are ready to do so. However, it is not always possible to rely on the candidates' declarations that they are ready. Many of the participants were apprehensive about moving and were not able to do so, despite the help offered. It is therefore important to learn how to identify those who would be capable - with the appropriate help - to move into independent housing and those who are not ready to do so. In addition, thought must be given to the time needed for a participant to "mature" and be ready to move, and ways to help those participants who are accepted to the program when it becomes clear that they will not be able to make the move.
- ◆ Permanent positions for the staff: A permanent staff with experience, knowledge and sensitivity in the relevant areas are key to the success of the program. During the evaluation period, the three care coordinators were permanent, which strengthened their bond with the participants and contributed to the accumulated experience. However, there was turnover of independent living

counselors in all three areas. This turnover is typical among students who consider the work temporary and an opportunity to acquire professional experience. Thought must be given to ways of recruiting more mature counselors who are looking for permanent jobs and are more likely to stay on.

- ◆ Duration of the assistance provided: Almost all the respondents – representatives of the organizations, participants and their parents – believe that the assistance and support should continue for as long as the participants need it, with a gradual decrease in intensity. Most thought that the number of hours currently provided (4-6 hours per week) was sufficient. Some of the participants thought that they would need less or no assistance in the future, but they could not predict when this would happen. This is borne out by participants who have moved into independent housing and discontinued their participation in the program once they no longer needed help.
- ◆ Expanding the target population of the program: The program offers a new service that had not existed previously for most people with disabilities and it is therefore important to expand the target population – not only to new areas of Israel, but also to people with additional types of disability. Increasing the number of eligible participants in each area should benefit participants both socially and practically, particularly in finding flat-mates.
- ◆ Adapting the program for the ultra-Orthodox and Arab populations: The interviews revealed the need to extend the program to these populations, with adaptations to their cultures and values. For example, it is not accepted in either of these societies for young men and women to leave the family home unless it is to get married and start a family.
- ◆ Flexibility of the assistance package: In light of the diverse needs of the participants, the package offered by the program must remain particularly flexible and offer assistance in a broad range of areas. For example, the main need of participants who moved into independent housing long before they joined the program is assistance solving social problems, while those moving into independent housing for the first time through the program need assistance with household and budget management.
- ◆ Personal autonomy and the right to free choice: Exercising the right to independent housing allows participants to exercise free choice in other areas as well. The participants are able, sometimes for the first time in their lives, to make their own decisions, from choosing the food they will eat to forming intimate relationships. However, their choices can lead to their being exploited by others, or to unsafe behaviors (alcohol, drugs, etc.). In this context, thought should be given to how the program staff should be involved when they have the impression that a participant is making poor choices and putting him/herself at risk. Evidently, the spirit of the program determines that in these situations the staff should let the participants make their choices, and point out the risks involved in their decisions, yet thought should be given to determining when the staff should intervene more actively.

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