

360° – The National Program for Children and Youth at Risk Learns from Success: Success Stories of Program Directors

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Related Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute Publications

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Abstract

360⁰ – The National Program for Children and Youth at Risk (hereafter: NPR) is an inter-ministerial project involving the ministries of Education, Health, Aliya and Absorption, and Public Security. Its goal is to change the way that Israeli society copes with children and youth at risk by strengthening and broadening the community services addressing them.

In 2014, the NPR asked the Unit for Learning from Success at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB) to implement a systematic, structured process of identifying, investigating, and documenting stories of professional success in the work of NPR directors in various localities.

The process of investigation was conducted according to the method of Learning from Success – the Retrospective Method – developed at MJB. It exposed the professional knowledge that, on the whole, was tacit and undocumented. The stories of success that we documented were chosen by members of the accompanying team, comprised of key NPR figures and the head of the MJB Unit for Learning from Success.

The book is based on the process of investigating and documenting 14 stories of success. The first part presents the background of the NPR, the method of learning from success, and the process of writing the book. The second part presents 22 common action principles that emerged from the stories of success. The principles are illustrated by examples from the stories. The third part presents the 14 stories that were recounted at length by NPR directors and other key figures. The stories include such topics as finding the best possible personnel to take on the job of program manager, establishing an end-line team to provide the therapeutic response to children and youth at the extreme pole of the risk continuum; establishing and implementing a forum of early-childhood supervisors.

Among the common action principles:

1. Implementing varied practices to recruit and retain program personnel
2. Creating mechanisms for mutual acquaintance, the formation of interpersonal ties, and joint learning by various stakeholder involved in the programs
3. Consistent, systematic and considered work, and decision-making based on data collection as program routine
4. Culturally appropriate and sensitive work; for responses in Arab society, the emphasis should be on the provision of universal non-stigmatic responses

This book presents insights into practices that led to the success and improved functioning of professionals, and to improvement in the situation of the program's target population – children and youth at risk. The insights emerging from the book are already serving as a resource for the mutual learning and professional development of stakeholders working with children and youth at risk in general, and of NPR stakeholders in particular.

Executive Summary

360⁰ – The National Program for Children and Youth at Risk (hereafter: NPR) is an inter-ministerial project involving the ministries of Education, Health, Aliya and Absorption, and Public Security. The program is conducted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA). Its goal is to change the way that Israeli society copes with children and youth at risk by strengthening and broadening the community services addressing them.

The program rests on several principles including: the adoption of a uniform definition for children and youth at risk and the setting of national goals to reduce risk situations based on this definition; the promotion of inter-ministerial cooperation and work; planning, evaluation, and organizational learning.

In 2014, the NPR asked the Unit for Learning from Success at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB) to implement a systematic, structured process of identifying, investigating, and documenting stories of professional success in the work of NPR directors in various localities.

The process of investigation was conducted according to the method of Learning from Success – the Retrospective Method – developed at MJB. It exposed the professional knowledge that, on the whole, was tacit and undocumented. The method consists of ten stages of investigation facilitating the extraction of a system's tacit knowledge to make it explicit and formulate it in action-oriented terms. Thus, learners accumulate a repertoire of actions and action principles leading to success. The knowledge may be innovative and creative, defying familiar professional truths and theories. In addition, the use of the method helps place the employee's success on the agenda of an organization. It makes it possible to sustain learning systems that accompany the daily work of the organization and staff. And in so doing, it makes it possible to expose an organization's successes, to formulate action principles, and to bring the organization nearer to realizing its mission and vision.

The stories of success that we documented were chosen by members of the accompanying team. The team comprised key NPR figures and the head of the MJB Unit for Learning from Success.

The process of identifying and documenting the stories of success consisted of three stages:

1. A workshop to train NPR learning companions to convert the investigation into stories of success
2. The formulation of criteria to identify and choose the stories of success to be investigated and their documentation by NPR learning companions
3. Investigation and documentation of the stories of success by NPR's learning companions

The stories were chosen according to criteria set by the learning companions. The stories should:

- Contain testimony of initiative, creativity and special motivation
- Deal with more than a single occurrence, showing steady success over time
- Derive from NPR principles and aims
- Include the involvement of additional parties in a locality (apart from the local NPR director), of additional systems and of key figures.

The book is based on the process of investigating and documenting 14 stories of success. The first part presents the background of the NPR, the method of learning from success, and the process of writing the book. The second part presents 22 common action principles that emerged from the stories of success. The principles are illustrated by examples from the stories. The third part presents the 14 stories that were recounted at length by NPR directors and other key figures.

The stories include such topics as: finding the best possible personnel to take on the job of program manager; dealing with the completed online forms coming in from the field; establishing an end-line team to provide the therapeutic response to children and youth at the extreme pole of the risk continuum; establishing and implementing a forum of early-childhood supervisors; developing a volunteer force and setting up inter-program synergy; extending to all participants the use of the TAMI system – local information infrastructure – for program follow-up, control, learning, evaluation and decision-making; providing inter-disciplinary training as a basis for building local cooperation.

Common Action Principles:

- 1. Implementing varied practices to recruit and retain program personnel.** Before implementing significant steps in the program, various practices should be carried out to help recruit action partners. It is also important to retain their willingness to cooperate over time. This applies to both new partners who have just joined the process, and old partners. Program directors are careful to stay in contact with the people in various positions in order to keep them updated about the program and regularly reinforce their cooperation. Thus, for example, in the story of success in Bat Yam, the city's NPR director held a round of preliminary personal meetings prior to convening the first session of the Early Childhood Committee. The meetings were held with different people who subsequently were to participate in the committee sessions. The director's goal in holding the meetings with them was to improve their mutual acquaintance, to enlist them in the cause for which the committee had been established, and to learn first-hand of their attitudes on a variety of professional topics. Another example concerns the establishment of a forum of supervisors in the south. Sabi and Ronit, program managers in the southern district, invited a supervisor from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor (MITL) to join the forum of early-childhood supervisors. The supervisor refused at first, but Sabi and Ronit persisted. They kept her abreast of developments by sending her material. And in every conversation with her, they stressed her importance to the forum and put across the message: "Join us to have an impact, to contribute, to be involved and a partner." Ultimately, the supervisor joined the forum. Another example relates to the recruitment and activation of volunteers in Majd al-Krum. The story describes the practices that contributed to recruitment and retention: through the year, the student volunteers received instruction and training, and social rewards such as excursions, social gatherings, and meetings with highly-placed people. They also received regular, follow-up data on the progress of their volunteer work.
- 2. Creating mechanisms for mutual acquaintance, the formation of interpersonal ties, and joint learning by various stakeholder involved in the programs.** Some stories of success describe a situation in which various personnel work alongside one another over time yet do not really know each other personally or professionally. One action principle leading to success is the formation

of ties between the different partners and their enlistment in joint action and joint learning. Thus, for example, the story about interdisciplinary training in Haifa shows how training contributed personally and professionally to the mutual acquaintance of the personnel, to joint learning, and to the establishment of professional cooperation. Before the training, relatively new professionals had no opportunity to get to know one another or the more veteran personnel. The training covered professional topics as well as personal and emotional ones and served as an excellent platform and arena for mutual acquaintance and improved adjustment to the locality. During the training, relations were formed that were close enough to permit the participants to discuss and expose, for the first time, issues that they had refrained from dealing with previously. In addition, so successful was the training, that for professionals, the local NPR director became the person to turn to on a variety of issues related to the professional development of different teams in diverse areas.

3. **Consistent, systematic and considered work, and decision-making based on data collection as program routine.** Consistent, systematic and considered work, thought out in advance according to the chartered course of the National Program; work that skips no stages. It is highly important that the decision-making process in the program be based on up-to-date, accurate and complete data. Thus, for example, in the success story on constructing a forum to be responsible for responses in Tamra, the National Program director in the locality built the forum while preparing, at the start, a detailed presentation of all the stages of the forum, step by step, in a way that was structured, systematic and thorough. The presentation was shown at the first meeting of the forum and the steps described served as the basis for further action. Another example is the success story on the Match Benjamin Regional Council – dealing with the development and implementation of systemic work procedures for the focused treatment of 12-16-year-olds – the committee chairman presented MITL school data as a basis for its work. The committee schedule and MITL data were organized in tandem by the committee chairman and the local NPR director. Subsequently, school principals were asked to map the situation of the children at risk with the help of a tool developed by the local NPR director and Education Department. The tool was designed to individually map students at risk in every school and consisted of different categories, including difficulties with the subjects of mathematics, Hebrew and English, as well as emotional difficulties.
4. **Culturally appropriate and sensitive work; for responses in Arab society, the emphasis should be on the provision of universal non-stigmatic responses.** The thinking, planning and adoption of operative measures that allow for the cultural characteristics of the target population (such as the ultra-Orthodox or Arabs), their needs, and the challenges they face. Modes of work appropriate for one population are not necessarily appropriate for another. The importance of providing a universal response is that much greater in Arab society where there is a good deal of mutual acquaintance and many families live alongside one another. In light of this, and for fear that rumors of their participation would spread in the community and cause the children and youth harm, people may be reluctant to take part in programs tagged as "negative", such as 360⁰ or MOLSA-sponsored programs. For this reason, it is highly important to meticulously maintain confidentiality. Thus, for example, in the story of success in Mazra'a, the local NPR director found that residents were highly apprehensive about using such terms as "children at risk," "families at risk" and "prison."

She saw that the professionals in the locality invested great effort in trying to hide information about children at risk. For instance, they avoided speaking of a child or family by name. In light of this, she did not attempt to change the situation in the initial stages of the joint work. Only afterwards and gradually did she voice before the action partners the difficulties arising from this sort of concealment and the advantages of greater transparency in the discussion of children at risk in the locality. Yet another example is the support group for mothers in Qalansawe, which is held at the school, with the participation of the school guidance counselor, rather than at a venue for a vulnerable population, such as the SSD in the locality.

Additional action principles that emerged from the stories of success include: implementing varied practices to maintain the program involvement of office holders; providing remuneration and positive reinforcement to the different partners carrying out the work; utilizing chance opportunities to promote the implementation of the programs; inspiring the partners to display meaningful creativity and connect with their personal credo; relating to professional challenges as to personal challenges on the part of the local NPR directors.

This book presents insights into practices that led to the success and improved functioning of professionals, and to improvement in the situation of the target population of the program – children and youth at risk. The insights emerging from the book are already serving as a resource for the mutual learning and professional development of stakeholders working with children and youth at risk in general, and of NPR stakeholders in particular.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	5
Part I: Background to the National Program, the Method of Learning from Success, and the Process of Writing this Book	7
1. The National Program for Children and Youth at Risk	8
2. Learning from Success as a Lever of Personal, Professional and Organizational Growth	9
3. The Work Process that Led to Writing this Book	12
Part II: Common Action Principles Emerging from the Stories of Success	15
Part III: Stories of Success in the Work of National Program Directors	27
1. "Side Roads"- on Recruiting a Resistant Partner and Establishing Trust: A Story of Success in an Ultra-Orthodox Neighborhood in Jerusalem	29
2. From Concealment to Recognition: A Story of Success from Mazra'a	37
3. Development of the Hand-in-Hand Program: A Story of Success from the Gilboa Regional Council	45
4. Best Possible Manning of Position for Person in Charge of Responses: A Story of Success from Bnei Brak	55
5. Use of Resource Mapping and a Database – Promoting the Identification of Needs and Matching Citywide Responses to Children at Risk: A Story of Success from Bat Yam	63
6. Seeing Far, Seeing Close – Establishment of an "End-Line" Team from within the Early-Childhood Committee: A Story of Success from Beit Shemesh	69
7. Development and Implementation of a Systemic Work Procedure Focusing on Children Aged 6-12 and their Parents: A Story of Success from the Mateh Benjamin Regional Council	73
8. Around the Round Table – Sustainable, Interdisciplinary, Inter-Organizational Care of at-Risk Youth: A Story of Success from Ofakim	81
9. Establishing and Implementing a Forum of Early-Childhood Supervisors: A Story of Success from the South	89
10. Expanding the Use of the TAMI System Citywide to all Participants: A Story of Success from Dimona	97
11. Interdisciplinary Training as a Basis for Building Citywide Cooperation: A Story of Success from Haifa	103
12. Joint Steering of the Early-Childhood Committee by the Divisions of Health and Social Services: A Story of Success from Qalansawe	113

13. The Secret of Giving – Development of a Volunteer Force and Establishment of Inter-Program Synergy: A Story of Success from al-Krum	119
14. Success in Establishing a Forum in Charge of Responses: A Story of Success from A Story of Success from Tamra	127
List of Sources	135