

AVIsrael Report for 2016

April 2016

Dear Geoffrey,

I am writing you this letter just before Passover begins. With the change in seasons, the weather here is still upside down- one day hamsin and rain the next. This is how our last month at AVIsrael has been. There was a chance that we would have to move out of our Jerusalem offices- but in the last minute, our new landlords decided to allow us to stay on. This is a huge relief as we just invested this past year in our new audiological center within the office premises. Moving this project into our center was an excellent strategy- it has brought more children to us for therapy and has offered a flexibility that we could not provide before.

We have just completed a successful Purim Mishloach Manot campaign and we are continuing to provide services to a growing number of children in our 4 services sites (Jerusalem, Beit Shemesh, Hod Hasharon and Sdot Negev in the south).

What is perhaps most interesting this year is our focus on breaking into Israel society and policy. It is still hard for me to believe that in 2016, there is an investment and even a renaissance of deaf culture and sign language in programs for youth with hearing loss. Just last week, my daughter Dana (who you know has bilateral cochlear implants) was photographing a wedding. The bride had made all of the arrangements with her over the phone (!). At the wedding, many of the guests were deaf as the bride works at the organization for deaf young adults. Among those guests were many with bilateral cochlear implants- but they were using sign language to communicate. They recognized Dana and came up to speak with her. Dana does not know sign language and they do not speak clearly. For me, that story is a microcosm of the chasm between the two worlds. Although they were the same age, privy to the same technology, they were worlds apart. Our efforts at AVIsrael have been and continue to be towards the full inclusion of children into the hearing world so that they can maximize their potential and be creative and contributing members of society. While the technology makes this possible, the experience that Dana had reminds us that it is not just about technology- it is about rehabilitation and focusing on listening to learn spoken language and having expectations that these children will develop typical language and normative behavior. This is what we do at AVIsrael.



Advocacy

Much of our effort this past year has been focused on rooting ourselves in the Israeli consciousness – spreading the word of the possibilities for children with hearing loss today to truly be included in the hearing world. As it stands today, only families that select to have their child in the special programs for the hearing impaired that are supported by government funding (Micha, Shema, Shma Koleinu and Shmaya) benefit from services at no cost. Families that choose the AV approach for their child are aware of the financial cost that comes with their decision. They are truly brave and committed parents!



We have been working with a strategic planning and lobbying firm to help us break the glass ceiling of government support for existing organizations at the expense of parents who choose the AV approach for their child with hearing loss. We are working on bringing the broad message into the mainstream with the help of an advertising campaign under the direction of Goren Amir Ltd.

We have been visited by officials of the Ministry of Education and of the Jerusalem Municipality to introduce them to our families and their needs. By applying pressure in a variety of areas, we hope to have our children and their parents heard!

HeyDaron: AV Services in the South

In our AV program in the south, we are in the midst of a two year training period for local professionals. We have a speech pathologist from the area in training and she has begun to take on some of the clients under the supervision of our experienced therapist towards full independence. This will allow us to expand our services and offer more families the option to raise their child through AV strategies. Our pediatric audiology program has grown significantly this past year, since we have hired a local audiologist who is in training in the project. Although people pay privately, the services are heavily subsidized as we are bringing the staff down from Jerusalem weekly for this two year training period. We are hoping to sign an agreement with the Klalit Health Plan- but as is the Israeli way, and especially in the peripheries, this is taking longer than we planned. In 2015, our staff performed 200 hearing tests in one day of work. **In the first quarter of 2016, our staff has performed 79 hearing tests, almost 40% of last year's annual total.** This is a service in demand in the south. AVIsrael is cutting the waiting time for children to receive hearing test by months, facilitating them getting other services that they need in order to thrive.

New Service: Social Worker

In September of 2015, we brought a social worker on staff. She has been a great asset to the team- acting as the coordinator of our Fund for Disadvantaged families, meeting with parents on issues of advocacy and support, assisting the staff in the interactions with some of the parents, coordinating our School for Parents. What started slowly, meeting with the social worker has now become routine for our parents. Since she began to work for AV, Eliezra has met with over 20 families for consultation. This is a good indication of the need for such a position.

In our School for Parents, we held 4 sessions since September on subjects that were both timely (Securing your Children's Rights in the Education System) and inspirational (Meeting with Irit Shelly from Netivot on her story of raising her deaf and blind son to become the winner of the International Bible Contest and college graduate in business) and more. We learned how critical the position is to our program and are hoping to increase her hours with the help of the Ministry of Welfare, but in the meantime are in the need of \$25,000 to cover the expenses of this salary.

International Certification of our professionals (LSLS- Listening and Spoken Language Specialists)

We are continuing with the certification program of our staff and are presently in the third and final year of the process for two of our professionals. Two other therapists are now interested in joining this program. Mrs. Miriam Cohen, our Professional Director, is the only professional in Israel qualified to supervise this process. We are thinking of advertising this LSLS mentoring as an additional service of AVIsrael worldwide.



Research with the National Insurance Agency on Results of Children with Hearing Loss raised in AV strategies

One of the most exciting and potentially influential projects that we are embarking upon this year is the national research project that AVIsrael initiated with Bituach Leumi- the National Insurance Agency. Collecting data on our graduates in comparison with graduates of other programs and typically hearing young adults, we hope to show conclusively that an AV education is more effective at preparing young people with hearing loss for life in the hearing world- at a fraction of the cost the government pays today to sustain the old models of education for the deaf. We are in the process of preparing the questionnaire in conjunction with the Ministry of Welfare and Bituach Leumi. We will be collecting information on 100 AV graduates from over the years. The hope of Bituach Leumi and of AVIsrael is that the results will encourage policy makers to think again and allocate funding more equitably.

Fund for Disadvantaged Families

Since September, we have received many applications from our families for assistance from the Fund that we have created thanks to donations from abroad. The committee has come up with guidelines for assistance- mostly focusing on supporting services that AVIsrael offers. The inclusion of our social worker as an active member of the committee has given parents the opportunity to receive counseling at no cost, as part of the service we provide. We are supporting 15 families in our program through the Fund for Disadvantaged families.

As you can see, we are at an extremely critical junction in the life of our organization. And through all of this, we continue to hear the music of deaf children learning to speak! At present, we are dependent on the generosity of supporters around the world to be able to continue our program.

We are making every effort to secure government funding, but it is a struggle, and we are up against some large and deeply rooted organizations that see AVIsrael as a red blanket. Already we are reading of the difficulties facing some of the older organizations. As the needs of children with hearing loss in 2016 change, priorities and allocations should change as well. We are trying to make that happen.

I want to thank you for your support that helps us fulfill our vision for children with hearing loss in Israel. PEF has been central to our being able to provide the state of the art services that we do and achieve amazing results for our children!

I take this opportunity to wish you and yours a very Happy Passover. !חג שמח

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Elaine Yarden Tal-SI'.

Elaine