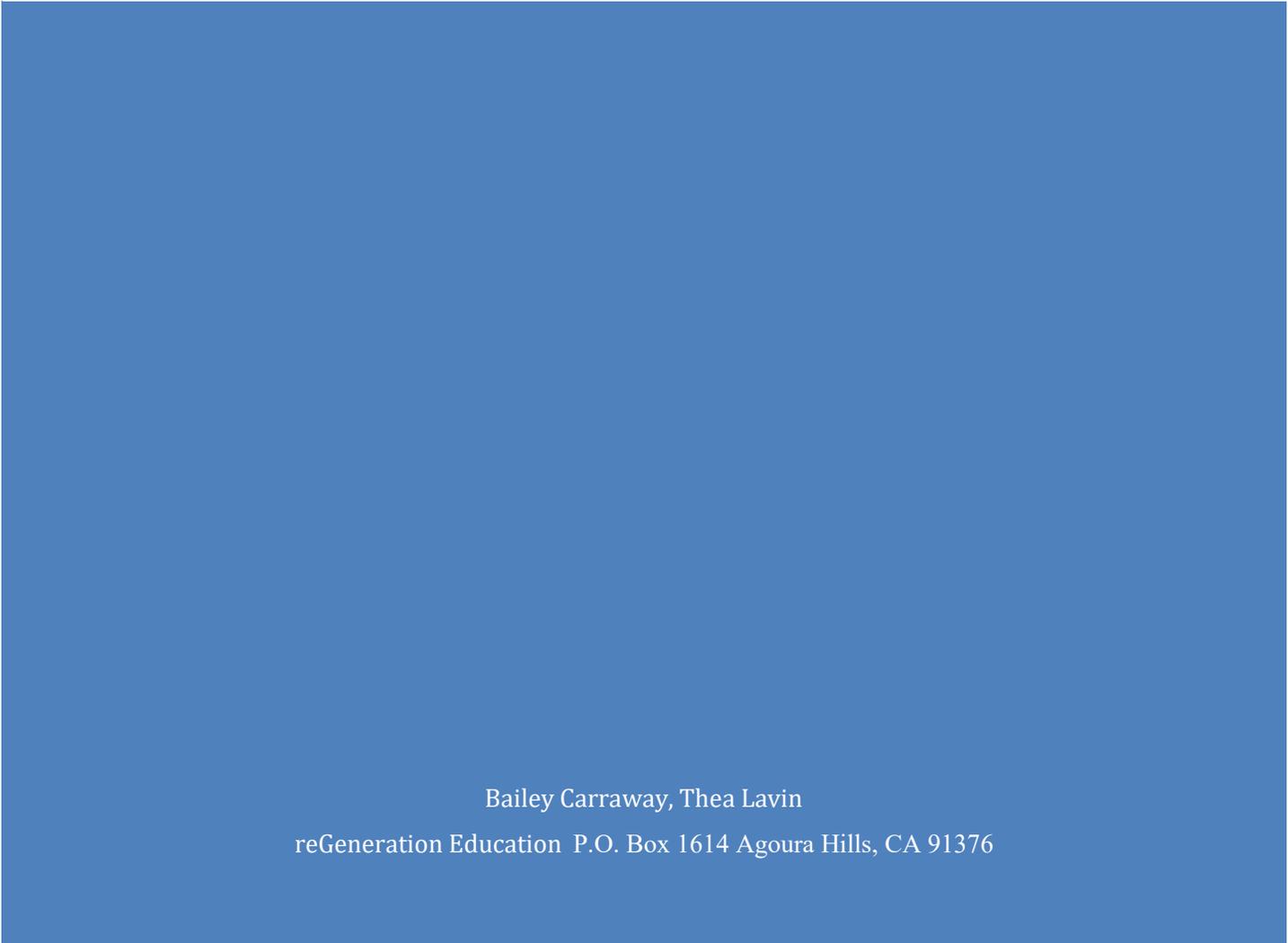




Closing the Gap: Increasing Access to Trauma-Informed  
Education for PCI/Arab Communities in Israel Through  
Waldorf Education



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# Preface

As the Second Intifada ended, residual trauma descended like ashes over the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Every outbreak of violence contributed to a chaotic atmosphere of fear and anxiety. This was devastating, especially for children who thrive on safety and stability. In Los Angeles, a small group of Jewish, Christian, and Palestinian Muslim Americans watched with growing concern. They understood that toxic stress damages the healthy spirit of children but that it can be inoculated through quality early childhood education. Soon after, they opened reGeneration Education, a U.S. non-profit organization founded in 2005 to build peace by increasing access to trauma-informed early childhood education in Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

reGeneration Education's mission is rooted in the aspirations of parents and peace leaders working on the ground to build education-centered solutions to the effects of trauma on childhood development. Since the 1980s, local parental interest coalesced around one pedagogical approach: Waldorf education. Support for Waldorf grew so rapidly that by the 2020s it had become the most popular secular school movement in Israel. Developed in the aftermath of World War I, Waldorf fosters cultures of peace capable of nurturing children traumatized by conflict. In recent decades, Jewish Israeli citizens opened approximately 200 Hebrew Waldorf kindergartens, elementary schools, and high schools and two Waldorf training programs at accredited teacher colleges.<sup>1</sup> The swift and lasting expansion of Waldorf kindergartens and schools alludes to the positive effects of this pedagogical style on children growing up in the unique context of Israel.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite the prevalence of Waldorf schools in Jewish Israeli society and formidable interest from Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCI)/ Arab Israeli parents, Waldorf has struggled to scale in PCI/Arab Israeli communities.<sup>3</sup>

Many PCI/Arab Israelis, Jewish Israelis, and international individuals and organizations have worked diligently to expand access to trauma-informed Waldorf education for PCI/Arab Israeli

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<sup>1</sup> Shepha Vainstein, "A School of Hope in Israel: The Story of Abu Amin and Kibbutz Harduf," in *Waldorf Education: A Family Guide*, ed. Pamela J. Fenner (New Amesbury, MA: Michaelmas Press, 2020), 257-260.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter, the authors will use "school" to signify elementary, middle, and high school equivalents in Israel, while "kindergarten" will exclusively refer to kindergartens. This delineation most closely follows that used by Waldorf teachers and administrators in Israel.

<sup>3</sup> Arab Israelis are Israeli citizens who are Arab. They are Muslim, Christian, or Druze. Many Arab citizens of Israel self-identify as Palestinian and some self-designate themselves as Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCI). According to a 2019 survey by University of Haifa professor Sammy Smooha, "Still Playing by the Rules: Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel 2019," which was conducted in Arabic among 718 Arab adults, 47% of the Arab Israeli population chose Palestinian identities with an Israeli component ("Israeli Palestinian", "Palestinian in Israel", "Palestinian Arab in Israel"), 36% prefers Israeli Arab identities without a Palestinian component ("Israeli", "Arab", "Arab in Israel", "Israeli Arab"), and 15% chose Palestinian identities without an Israeli component ("Palestinian", "Palestinian Arab"). When these two components are presented as competitors, 69% chose exclusive or primary Palestinian identity, compared with 30% who chose exclusive or primary Israeli Arab identity. 66% of the Arab population agreed that "the identity of 'Palestinian Arab in Israel' is appropriate to most Arabs in Israel."

children. reGeneration took the lead in harnessing U.S. support and helped launch numerous flagship Arab Waldorf schools in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The organization also funded scholarships for aspiring PCI/Arab Israeli Waldorf teachers, implemented a sizeable Waldorf teacher training immersion for 120 Palestinian teachers in the West Bank city of Jenin, and co-sponsored numerous conferences on trauma-informed education in Jerusalem.

Despite its prolific track record of investment in Arab Waldorf, reGeneration's Board of Directors watched with surprise as the movement's growth plateaued over the past decade. While many PCI/Arab Israeli parents tried to build Waldorf schools in their communities, few successfully opened. The existing Waldorf schools for PCI/Arab Israelis seeded by reGeneration remained in operation but struggled to grow in proportion to parental demand.

reGeneration formed the Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board to understand the cause of Arab Waldorf's struggle to scale. In 2020, its members undertook 21 months of research to shed light on the obstacles holding the Arab Waldorf school movement back in Israel and identify what support would propel it forward. Their research began with a survey of the literature addressing the sociopolitical context in which Arab education in Israel unfolds. They followed their literature review with a qualitative study that employed semi-structured interviews with Waldorf teachers, parents, and education leaders, as well as experts in Israeli shared society. The Advisory Board's qualitative research illuminated the obstacles that Arab Waldorf schools face in vivid detail. Waldorf teachers, parents, and leaders shared that when they attempted to open more Arab Waldorf schools, they struggled to navigate bureaucratic obstacles and systemic discrimination. They also had difficulty finding trained teachers to replenish and grow their staff, which many leaders of Arab Waldorf attribute to the lack of affordable, culturally relevant, and language-accessible teacher training at accredited Waldorf teachers' colleges in Israel. PCI/Arab Israeli parents who wanted to learn more about Waldorf also struggled to do so, as there are very few Waldorf resources available in their native language.

Throughout numerous interviews, Waldorf leaders detailed strategies they believe will successfully support the movement's growth in PCI/Arab Israeli communities. The Advisory Board's findings are detailed in this paper, along with its recommendations for sustaining Arab Waldorf movement growth and advancing educational equity in Israel.

The following six sections seek to convey the need for Waldorf education within PCI/Arab Israeli communities and the challenges that hinder the growth of this movement. In the first two sections, the authors seek to explain the uniquely detrimental environment in which PCI/Arab Israeli children grow and how trauma-informed education can support healthy socioemotional development. The following two sections outline the predominant educational options within PCI/Arab Israeli communities and how Arab Waldorf was born from this. Finally, relying on the testimonies of Arab Waldorf practitioners and interested parties, the authors outline persistent

obstacles that prevent the Arab Waldorf movement from flourishing before concluding the report with the Arab Waldorf Growth Platform, a series of recommendations that will propel the movement forward.

The Arab Waldorf Growth Platform is meant as a series of recommendations to advocate for more child-centered education, with an increased focus on children's socioemotional development in traumatic circumstances. The authors conceptualize the advancement of Waldorf as a necessary first step in supporting the complex needs of trauma-affected children, and we invite the newly formed Israeli government to engage actively with this incredibly pressing need. While neither author of this report is Arab or Israeli, the analysis and recommendations outlined in this paper are grounded in the testimonies and experiences of PCI/Arab Israeli and Jewish Israeli leaders in the Waldorf movement.

### **On Language and National Identity**

The reGeneration Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board conducted English, Hebrew, and Arabic interviews. The participants were Christian, Muslim, Druze, and Jewish citizens of Israel. They represented a broad spectrum of national identity, including individuals who prefer to be called Jewish Israeli, Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCI), Arab Israeli, and Palestinian Arab. Individuals identified as Arab Israeli were of Bedouin, Palestinian and Druze heritage. In this paper, reGeneration will refer to the members of communities seeking Arab Waldorf as both Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCI) and Arab Israelis.

However, when referring to the education movement they are building, the authors simply refer to it as Arab Waldorf. This is not intended to erase the vibrant and distinct heritages of Arabic-speaking Waldorf students, teachers, and parents. Instead, it is in consideration of nascent Waldorf school communities in surrounding Arab countries, who, over time, will likely reflect more Arab ethnoreligious identities than those found in Israel.

# Growing Up Stressed: PCI/ Arab Israeli Childhoods and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Many aspects of life in Israel can generate toxic stress for PCI/Arab Israeli children: the blare of missile alarm systems as rockets from Lebanon or Gaza hurdle overhead, the pop of gunfire in an Arab town in the throes of a crime surge, or the feeling of unease and fear when speaking Arabic on a public bus alongside unknown Jewish passengers.

While Jewish Israeli children also experience real hardships, most notably intergenerational trauma, compulsory military service in combat zones, and the persistent threat of missile attacks from hostile neighboring countries, a confluence of stressors merge in uniquely damaging ways for PCI/Arab Israeli children.

These experiences affect the day-to-day life of PCI/Arab Israeli children and their long-term psychosocial development. In this section, we will first outline the everyday stressors that are prevalent among PCI/Arab Israeli children and then explain how, when children experience these stressors over a long period, they can amount to Adverse Childhood Experiences, before ultimately explaining the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences and toxic stress. These sections will show that PCI/Arab Israeli children are at high risk for experiencing damaged development processes due to the stressors of their environments.

## Everyday Stressors

“I know how hard it is to be Arab in Palestine and in Israel. It’s very, very difficult,” said Laban Abu Aulfat Altouree, a Muslim Palestinian Bedouin woman living in Israel and co-founder of Seeds/Boudur Bilingual Waldorf Training Institute.<sup>4</sup>

As the ethnic minority within the Jewish State, PCI/Arab Israeli children officially have equal rights compared to their Jewish neighbors. However, as described below, PCI/Arab Israelis have higher exposure to poverty, violence, and discrimination. These stressors place PCI/Arab Israeli children at a developmental disadvantage with far-reaching implications for personal and communal well-being in later years.

“Everything you do in Arab society is a struggle. You wake up in the morning, and you are in a battle...It is a lot of struggle. It is the struggle of being Arabs in Israel,” said Tally Bat Zahor, senior advisor at Tamrat El Zeitoun, the first and only Arab Waldorf kindergarten and elementary school in Israel.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Laban Abu Aulfat Altouree, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, September 10, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Tally Bat Zahor, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, June 11, 2020.

## Localized Violence

A constellation of challenges plays out in the lives of PCI/Arab Israelis. A cornerstone stressor is violence from crime, which has plagued PCI/Arab society in recent years. “In four words: shooting in the streets. Arab villages used to be very safe places. No longer. People don’t walk on the street, and they don’t go out after dark. Mothers wait next to the schools to pick up their children,” said Samah Salaime, a social worker and founder of Na’am/Arab Women in the Center, and director of a project to combat violence and crime in Arab society for Sikkuy, the Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality.<sup>6</sup>

In 2020, 113 PCI/Arab Israelis died in violent incidents, 17 of whom were women. Recent murder rates represent the highest number in at least 20 years and an increase of more than 20 percent from the 94 murders in 2019; the murder rate in 2020 was nearly double that of 2015.<sup>7</sup> PCI/Arab Israeli civil society leaders point to a need for adequate law enforcement as the<sup>8</sup> underlying factor driving the violence.

“In Arab communities, there is either over-policing or under-policing. Either they seal off the neighborhood and use force so that the residents themselves put pressure on the criminals, or they don’t do anything – ‘Let them kill each other,’ they say,” said Salaime.<sup>9</sup>

## Communal Poverty

Much of the crime-related violence in Arab communities is connected to high poverty levels. Every second PCI/Arab Israeli child is poor, according to findings of a recent study by Hebrew University School of Social Work on children and adolescents in Arab society.<sup>10</sup> When asked why crime-related violence is decreasing in Jewish society but increasing in Arab Society, Salaime answered, “Poverty. Unequivocally....The social and economic gaps are intimately connected with the level of crime and with the feeling of personal security. Where there’s poverty, there’s crime.”<sup>11</sup>

While poverty rates in Israel decreased over the last decade, PCI/Arab Israelis, who comprise about 21 percent of the Israeli population, still experience disproportionately high poverty rates.

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<sup>6</sup> Ayelett Shani, “Domestic Violence Is a Major Threat for Israeli Arab Women. Why Won't the Police Intervene?” *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv, Israel), June 11, 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-gunfire-within-israeli-arab-areas-rises-police-stand-by-1.5393771>.

<sup>7</sup> “Violent Crime Continues to Rise | Arab Society Awaiting Government Plan,” *Interagency Task on Israeli Arab Issues*, January 26, 2021, <https://www.iataskforce.org/activities/view/1119>.

<sup>8</sup> “Israel's Annual Poverty Report: Little Change Seen in 2018,” Inter-Agency Task Force, March 20, 2020, <https://www.iataskforce.org/activities/view/995>.

<sup>9</sup> Shani, “Domestic Violence Is a Major Threat for Israeli Arab Women.”

<sup>10</sup> David Regev, “More Than Half of Arab Children Poor,” *Ynet News*, June 16, 2006, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3263663,00.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Israel has one of the highest poverty rates among countries within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with 17.1% of families being classified as “poor” according to government reports. This poverty is disproportionately concentrated in PCI/Arab Israeli communities: in a report released the OECD in 2020, nearly 90% of PCI/Arab Israeli communities are classified as “poor” compared to less than 20% of non-Ultra-Orthodox, or non-Haredi, communities.<sup>12</sup> Within these communities, 35.5% of PCI/Arab Israeli families live in poverty, according to the Israel National Insurance Institute’s annual poverty report.<sup>13</sup> This statistic rises when focusing on poverty among children: According to a report published by the Israel National Council for the Child in 2020, 30% of Israeli children live in poverty – but this statistic rises to 57.8% of Arab Israeli children, a number that is only surpassed by children in the Haredi community.<sup>14</sup> This communal and household poverty is a compounding stressor in the lives of PCI/ Arab Israeli children.

### **Regional Instability**

In addition to communal poverty and localized violence, regional instability also impacts the mental health of PCI/Arab Israeli children. Despite peace efforts, Jewish Israelis and PCI/Arab Israelis have endured decades of sporadic terrorist violence, both widespread and localized.<sup>15</sup> During the Al Aqsa Intifada between September 2000 and 2006, approximately 1000 Israeli citizens died in terrorist attacks.<sup>16</sup> Proportional to the size of the population, this is equivalent to approximately ten September 11ths.<sup>17</sup> During this same period, it is estimated that 3,000 Palestinians living in the Palestinian Territories were killed.<sup>18</sup> While terrorism has decreased in recent years, in the most recent Gaza-Israel conflict in May 2021, over 4,000 rockets were fired towards Israel by Hamas, while Israel deployed aircraft, tanks, and artillery fire into the densely packed Gaza Strip.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Reducing socio-economic differences between different municipalities,” in *OECD Economic Surveys: Israel 2020* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020) <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/95e50fce-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/95e50fce-en>

<sup>13</sup> Abigail Adler, tran., “About Two Million Israelis Live below the Poverty Line - Report,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Jerusalem, Israel), January 22, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israel-report-about-two-million-people-live-below-the-poverty-line-656317>.

<sup>14</sup> Stuart Winer, “Nearly a third of Israel’s children live below the poverty line – report,” *Times of Israel* (Jerusalem, Israel), January 14, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/nearly-a-third-of-israels-children-live-below-the-poverty-line-report/>.

<sup>15</sup> Lynsay Ayer, Brinda Venkatesh, Robert Stewart, Daniel Mandel, Bradley Stein, and Michael Schoenbaum. “Psychological Aspects of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: A Systematic Review,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 18, no. 3 (2017): 322–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015613774>.

<sup>16</sup> “Middle East | Intifada Toll 2000-2005,” BBC News, BBC, February 8, 2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3694350.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3694350.stm).

<sup>17</sup> Stevan E Hobfoll, Daphna Canetti-Nisim, and Robert J Johnson, “Exposure to Terrorism, Stress-Related Mental Health Symptoms, and Defensive Coping Among Jews and Arabs in Israel,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 74, no. (2) (2006): 207-18.

<sup>18</sup> “Middle East | Intifada Toll 2000-2005.”

<sup>19</sup> Nidal Al-Mughrabi and Stephen Farrell, “Israel pounds Gaza to curb Palestinian militants but rockets still fly,” Reuters, Reuters News Agency, May 14, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-fires-artillery-into-gaza-amid-persistent-palestinian-rocket-attacks-2021-05-13/>

The stress of terrorism affects Jewish Israelis and PCI/Arab Israelis differently. After terrorist attacks, PCI/Arab Israelis are more likely to form more significant post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depressive symptoms than Jewish Israelis.<sup>20</sup> Children and adolescents are often hardest hit, as they typically exhibit higher levels of psychological distress than adults. According to a 2003 study conducted during the Second Intifada, over 50 percent of PCI/Arab Israeli children have PTSD.<sup>21</sup> However, although there have been few definitive research studies specifically on PTSD since then, there is no reason to doubt that PCI/Arab Israeli children continue to suffer after subsequent waves of violence.

Many factors contribute to the heightened emotional damage PCI/Arab Israeli communities experience after terrorist events. In a 2013 study regarding incidences of PTSD in PCI/Arab Israeli communities after the 2006 Lebanon War, the authors wrote, “Perhaps, as a discriminated minority, Arab children come from homes with lower levels of education and income, under-funded schools, and poorer access to healthcare and education resources. Fewer resources represent a reduced capability to buffer further losses.”<sup>22</sup> The study found that the incidence of PTSD in PCI/Arab Israeli populations was higher than that found in Jewish Israeli populations, consistent with previous research.

### **Acculturation and Discrimination**

Another cause of mental distress amongst PCI/Arab Israelis is the burden of acculturating to a Jewish-dominant society and often feeling unwelcome. Acculturation is a phenomenon that occurs when groups of individuals from different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, subsequently challenging their cultural understanding of how to live.

The acculturation process can lead to positive results, improving one’s life chances in a new culture, but it can also serve as an additional stressor. The immense cultural distance between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority may impose stress on PCI/Arab Israelis who are adapting to Jewish cultural and social expectations.<sup>23</sup> In 2020, a study reported that acculturative stress causes anxiety, depression, and feelings of alienation and discrimination among PCI/Arab Israeli students.<sup>24</sup> Many PCI/Arab Israelis may also doubt the readiness of the Jewish majority to accept

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<sup>20</sup> Hobfoll et al., “Exposure to Terrorism, Stress-Related Mental Health Symptoms, and Defensive Coping Among Jews and Arabs in Israel,” 207- 218.

<sup>21</sup> Sam Tyano, “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Israeli Children,” *International psychiatry: Bulletin of the Board of International Affairs of the Royal College of Psychiatrists* 1, no. 2 (2003): 7-8.

<sup>22</sup> Leo Wolmer, Daniel Hamiel, Michelle Slone, Maya Faians, Meyrav Picker, Tal Adiv, and Nathaniel Laor, “Post-Traumatic Reaction of Israeli Jewish and Arab Children Exposed to Rocket Attacks Before and After Teacher-Delivered Intervention,” *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* 50, no. 3 (2016): 165–172.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Abu-Kaf, and Enas Khalaf, "Acculturative Stress among Arab Students in Israel: The Roles of Sense of Coherence and Coping Strategies," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 14 (2020): 5106. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17145106>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

them, and some studies show that less acculturated PCI/Arab Israelis experience higher levels of PTSD after terrorist attacks.<sup>25,26</sup>

The stress of acculturation is heightened by the chronic discrimination that PCI/Arab Israelis suffer. For decades, PCI/Arab Israelis have reported employment discrimination; a study conducted on this phenomenon in 2015 found that Jewish Israeli lawyers were more than twice as likely to have their job application acknowledged by employers and four times as likely to be called in for an interview than PCI/Arab Israeli lawyers with identical qualifications.<sup>27</sup>

Discriminatory governmental laws also compound acculturative stress. In 2018, after passing the Nation-State Law, Arabic was downgraded from an official language to “one with a ‘special status’”;<sup>28</sup> an Israeli magistrate court cited this law in 2020 as the judge denied two Palestinian boys’ request to be reimbursed for their travel expenses to an Arabic language school outside of the city of Karmiel, where no such school existed.<sup>29</sup> The Israeli government routinely denies building permits for PCI/Arab Israelis, arbitrarily designating large swaths of land in Palestinian towns as “agricultural” where no residential building is permitted; in 2018, the Arab Center for Alternative Planning estimated that 80,000 PCI/Arab Israeli homes were at risk of demolition due to lack of permits.<sup>30</sup> This bureaucratic abuse is complemented by outright violence committed against PCI/Arab Israelis in the form of police misconduct, either through arbitrary arrests or excessive force.<sup>31</sup>

These aforementioned societal stressors — localized violence, communal poverty, regional instability, acculturation, and discrimination — affect the everyday mental state of PCI/Arab Israeli children and, if left unaddressed, can also hinder their long-term social-emotional development. In the following sections, we will address how the prevalence of these stressors harms the development of PCI/Arab Israeli children.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Wolmer et al., “Post-Traumatic Reaction of Israeli Jewish and Arab Children Exposed to Rocket Attacks Before and After Teacher-Delivered Intervention,” 165–172.

<sup>27</sup> Ariel Barak, Illanit Tobby-Alimi, Irit Cohen, Mazal Ben Ezra, Yafa Cohen and Gabriela Sosinski, “Ethnic and Racial Employment Discrimination in Low-Wage and High-Wage Markets: Randomized Controlled Trials Using Correspondence Tests in Israel,” *Law and Ethics of Human Rights* 9, no. 1 (2015):135.

<sup>28</sup> David M. Halbfinger and Isabel Kershner, “Israeli Law Declares the Country the ‘Nation-State of the Jewish People,’” *The New York Times* (New York City, New York), July 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/19/world/middleeast/israel-law-jews-arabic.html>.

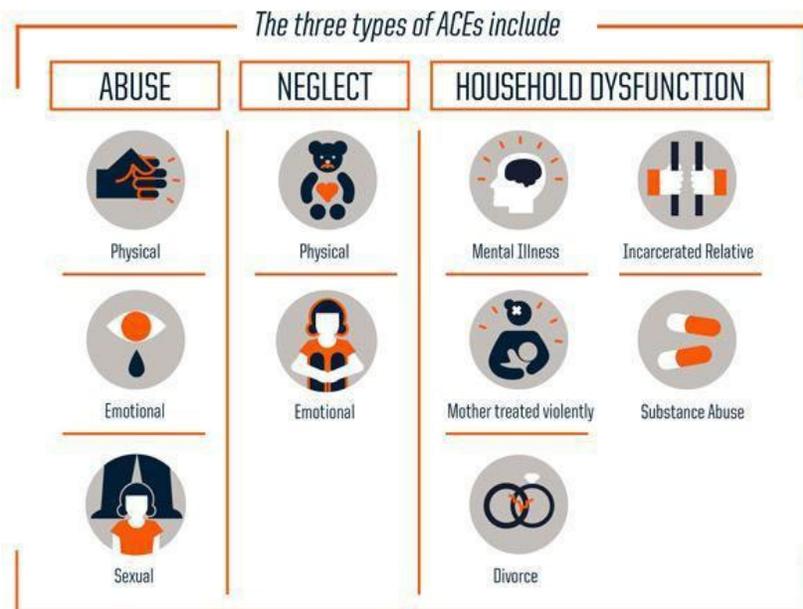
<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, (United States: Human Rights Watch, 2021) 150.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 152, 153.

<sup>31</sup> “Israeli police targeted Palestinians with discriminatory arrests, torture and unlawful arrests,” Amnesty International, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/israeli-police-targeted-palestinians-with-discriminatory-arrests-torture-and-unlawful-force/>.

## Measuring Stressors as Adverse Childhood Experiences

The global health community began to view childhood adversity through the lens of the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) framework after a groundbreaking U.S. study conducted in 1995 by the Centers for Disease Control and the Kaiser Permanente health care organization in California. In their study, researchers found a robust, persistent correlation between ACEs and poor outcomes later in life, including dramatically increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, depression, substance abuse, smoking, poor academic achievement, time out of work and early death.<sup>32</sup>



*“Adverse Childhood Experiences” from the National Conference of States Legislatures<sup>33</sup>*

In the original study, the researchers focused on ACEs related to household abuse, particularly physical or sexual abuse, but the definition of ACEs has expanded over time to address other risk factors that relate to the holistic development of the child — namely, environmental risk factors outside of the home.<sup>34</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) currently defines Adverse Childhood Experiences broadly as intensive and frequently occurring sources of stress that children may suffer early in life. WHO researchers wrote that “Such experiences include

<sup>32</sup> “About the CDC-KAISER ACE Study | violence Prevention| Injury Center| CDC,” Centers for Disease Control, accessed April 6, 2021, [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Fabout.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Fabout.html)

<sup>33</sup> “Adverse Childhood Experiences,” National Conference of States Legislatures, February 2, 2021, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces.aspx>.

<sup>34</sup> Vincent J. Felitti, Robert F. Anda, Dale Nordenberg, David F. Williamson, Alison M. Spitz, Valerie Edwards, Mary P. Koss, and James S. Marks, “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Deaths in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,” *The American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (1998): 246.

multiple types of abuse; neglect; violence between parents or caregivers; other kinds of serious household dysfunction such as alcohol and substance abuse; and peer, community and collective violence.”<sup>35</sup>

Recently, studies have begun to assert that structural and systemic racism should factor as an indicator of an ACE, expanding from the traditionally home-bound indicators to include community-level adverse experiences. In the article, “Making the ‘C-ACE’ for a culturally-informed Adverse Childhood Experiences framework to understand the pervasive mental health impact of racism on Black youth,” the authors argue that racism should be understood as a causal mechanism behind the increased exposure of Black youth to potentially traumatic events, or PTEs.<sup>36</sup> This assertion has been put forth by other scholars recently; referencing the relationship between racism and childhood mental health difficulties, Kaiser Permanente has recently put out a press release, outlining their commitment to support 13 organizations “whose work focuses on ending the generational cycles of trauma caused by structural racism and injustice experienced by Black Americans and other communities of color.”<sup>37,38</sup>

The Adverse Childhood Experiences framework is now the international gold standard for measuring the impact of childhood hardships on later-life health and well-being. The WHO recommends all nations determine their population’s Adverse Childhood Experiences exposure with the ACE International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ).<sup>39</sup> Despite this recommendation, Israel has declined to implement this questionnaire.

Regardless of the absence of ACE survey results in Israel, the well-documented stressors experienced by PCI/Arab Israeli children undoubtedly qualify as ACEs given the criteria outlined by leading health organizations. Given this, PCI/Arab Israeli children’s environment and documented exposure to violence and poverty likely correspond to high ACE scores.

## **Causal Relationship Between ACEs and Toxic Stress**

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<sup>35</sup> “Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire,” World Health Organization, accessed June 21, 2021, [www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/activities/adverse\\_childhood\\_experiences/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/activities/adverse_childhood_experiences/en/).

<sup>36</sup> DL Bernard, CD Calhoun, DE Banks, CA Halliday, C Hughes-Halbert, and CK Danielson, “Making the ‘C-ACE’ for a Culturally-Informed Adverse Childhood Experiences Framework to Understand the Pervasive Mental Health Impact of Racism on Black Youth,” *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, vol.14, 2 (2020): 233-247.

<sup>37</sup> Laura A. Voith, Katie Russell, Hyunjune Lee, and Raeann E. Anderson, “Adverse Childhood Experiences, Trauma Symptoms, Mindfulness, and Intimate Partner Violence: Therapeutic Implications for Marginalized Men,” *Family Process* 56 (2020): 1588-1607 and Renee M. Johnson, Ashley V. Hill, Vanya C. Jones, Terrinieka W. Powell, Lorraine T. Dean, and Tamika D. Gilreath, “Racial/Ethnic Inequalities in Adverse Childhood Experiences and Selected Health-Related Behavior Problems Among Maryland Adolescents,” *Health Promotion Practice* (2020) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/15248399211008238>. These articles further articulate the relationship between racism and ACEs.

<sup>38</sup> “Press Release: Systemic racism and trauma spur action for healing,” Kaiser Permanente, April 28, 2021, <https://about.kaiserpermanente.org/community-health/news/systemic-racism-and-trauma-spur-action-for-healing>.

<sup>39</sup> “Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire,” World Health Organization.

The high incidence of ACEs in PCI/Arab Israeli children’s lives is harmful not only in the moment but also potentially long-term. ACE events are significantly detrimental to children for three key reasons: they are traumatic, often chronic, and typically signal an unstable environment. When someone experiences a traumatic event, it triggers a stress response in their bodies — and, in the case of ACEs, this stress often turns toxic. In PCI/Arab Israeli communities, one of the most harmful byproducts of ACEs is the toxic stress they inject into PCI/ Arab Israeli children’s lives.<sup>40</sup>

The stress response is a normal part of human physiological development. However, while positive stress is moderate and short-lived — allowing for the stress system to return to baseline levels once the stress event is concluded — toxic stress is prolonged, severe, or chronic and can cause significant problems with health and development. According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, stress becomes toxic when “the stress response is extreme and long-lasting, and buffering relationships [such as supportive relationships with adults] are unavailable.”<sup>41</sup>

Research shows that toxic stress from ACEs most critically interferes with children’s executive brain function, which governs cognitive processes that include attentional control, working memory, inhibition, and problem-solving.<sup>42</sup> “Scientists now know that chronic, unrelenting stress in early childhood, caused by extreme poverty, repeated abuse, or severe maternal depression, for example, can be toxic to the developing brain,” wrote researchers at the Harvard University Center for the Developing Child.<sup>43</sup> Because most brain formation occurs during a child’s early years when the brain is most “plastic,” toxic stress in childhood can derail healthy development with long-term consequences for physical and mental health.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the bleak prognosis for healthy childhood development in atmospheres of persistent toxic stress, children experiencing significant ACE exposure are not irreparably damaged. A spectrum of potential responses to ACEs can help children recover. While the ideal approach to ACEs *prevents* the need for all levels of services, supporting responsive relationships with a

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<sup>40</sup> “American Academy of Pediatrics. Early Brain and Child Development: The Science,” American Academy of Pediatrics, accessed May 11, 2021, <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/EBCD/Pages/The-Science.aspx>

<sup>41</sup> “Toxic Stress,” Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>

<sup>42</sup> “Executive Function & Self-Regulation,” Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, accessed June 21, 2021, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>.

<sup>43</sup> “In Brief | The Science Of Early Childhood Development,” Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, accessed May 6, 2021, <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/03/InBrief-The-Science-of-Early-Childhood-Development2.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Maura McInerney and Amy McKlindon, “Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools,” Education Law Center, December 2014, <https://www.elc-pa.org/resource/unlocking-the-door-to-learning-trauma-informed-classrooms-and-transformational-schools/>.

parent or teacher can also buffer the effects of toxic stress and strengthen the building blocks of resilience.<sup>45</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It is largely uncontested that PCI/Arab Israeli children experience high levels of stress in their everyday lives; the stressors referenced above were mentioned in interviews conducted by reGeneration Education and in numerous reports published by organizations such as Interagency Task on Israeli Arab Issues and Amnesty International.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, while relatively new, the science of Adverse Childhood Experiences is not contested, and, in the abstract, the fact that the stressors outlined earlier constitute such experiences is accepted.

However, the risk of PCI/Arab Israeli children experiencing these developmental difficulties caused by Adverse Childhood Experiences has not been adequately addressed in earlier literature — and there is no concerted, consistent effort in Israel to mitigate the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences and toxic stress in this population.

When addressing the reality of PCI/Arab Israeli children, it becomes clear that an intervention to mitigate the stress that characterizes PCI/ Arab Israeli childhoods is urgently needed.

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<sup>45</sup> “ACEs and Toxic Stress: Frequently Asked Questions,” Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, October 30, 2020, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/>.

<sup>46</sup> Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2020/21: The state of the world’s human rights* (London: Amnesty International, 2021); Human Rights Watch, *A Threshold Crossed: Israel Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Oppression*. These sources provide additional context on the state of human rights for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and for PCI/Arab Israelis within the state of Israel.

# Adverse Childhood Experiences and School-Based Mitigation Strategies

There is an urgent need to properly support and empower PCI/Arab Israeli children who experience ACEs and toxic stress, but few dedicated social programs exist to meet this particular need. Time is of the essence: when left unaddressed, ACEs calcify into toxic stress, which in turn has been linked to negative social outcomes for children and, later in life, adults. The CDC, for example, conducted a study that linked ACEs and toxic stress to numerous chronic issues, such as unstable work histories and difficulties forming healthy relationships into adulthood.<sup>47</sup> When a large demographic is affected, it can have detrimental consequences not just for a single community but for the country as a whole.<sup>48</sup>

In places where there are few avenues for direct intervention — such as in PCI/Arab Israeli communities — education has the potential to act as an entry point to the trauma-informed response. But, just as likely, if pedagogy and curriculum are maladapted to the developmental difficulties for trauma-affected children, the school environment can act as a trigger for further trauma and stress. This section will explain how ACE events and toxic stress impact classroom and classroom-based mitigation strategies before comparing these pedagogical practices with those currently employed in the predominant school options for PCI/Arab Israeli children.

## Addressing Toxic Stress through Trauma-Informed Education

The negative effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences and toxic stress are apparent in many aspects of a child’s life, particularly in the classroom setting, which may require behavior that is developmentally inappropriate for a trauma-affected child. When a child cannot meet these behavioral expectations, it is common for a child to act out. Often, this chronic misbehavior is misdiagnosed as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or a child can be labeled a ‘trouble-maker for causing frequent disruptions in class. While the classroom may cause specific symptoms of toxic stress to come to light, the educational setting can also provide an opportunity to support a child who has experienced ACEs before it calcifies into toxic stress.

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<sup>47</sup> “Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences,” Center for Disease Control, April 6, 2021, [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Facedstudy%2Ffastfact.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Facedstudy%2Ffastfact.html)

<sup>48</sup> James J. Heckman, “The Economics of Inequality: The Value of Early Childhood Education,” *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review* 77, no.4 (2011): 31-35. The effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences can be mitigated if addressed strategically in childhood — and, in fact, are economically advantageous for the country. Nobel Laureate economic professor, James J. Heckman, and other prominent researchers report that investing in early childhood education provides massive social and economic returns, both at the individual and national level.

## Trauma-Affected Children in the Traditional Classroom

Children who have experienced multiple ACEs or currently suffer from toxic stress can be triggered by a traditional educational model, which requires behaviors ill-suited for their current socioemotional developmental stages, such as prolonged sitting at a desk and memorization tasks. Failing to meet expectations of this nature can result in poor educational performance, difficulties in verbal expression, and behavioral issues, affecting long-term self-esteem in an educational setting.

### *Educational Performance Challenges Caused by Trauma*

Trauma-affected children often perform academically at a lower level than their non-trauma-affected peers. Trauma-affected children often face difficulties remembering lessons: Trauma can disrupt the development in the lower part of the brain, which “dramatically affects the regulatory capacities of the higher regions employed for the integration and memory of cognitive content.”<sup>49</sup> More simply, trauma negatively affects the parts of the brain that allow humans to remember information. When this system is damaged, trauma-affected children have an exceptionally more difficult time internalizing new information presented in the classroom.

Additionally, when children experience ACEs between 3 to 6 years of age – when the brain's left hemisphere, which governs language production, is in crucial stages of development – they can experience greater difficulties expressing themselves later on in life.<sup>50</sup> These children will also have difficulties understanding logic and sequencing tasks, impacting their ability to follow directions or understand key subjects such as math or science.<sup>51</sup>

### *Behavioral Challenges Caused by Trauma*

Trauma-affected children might also exhibit a variety of behavioral issues. Exposure to trauma – particularly complex trauma caused by a series of traumatic events over a long period – affects the levels of certain stress hormones in the brain related to attention span. While non-trauma-affected children will experience a normal ebb and flow of stress hormones which dissipate at certain times of day, trauma-affected children experience consistently elevated levels of stress hormones throughout the day, which causes challenges in inattention span and concentration.<sup>52</sup> Trauma-affected children might be labeled as ‘problem students’ because of their limited attention spans or disruptive outbursts in class.<sup>53,54</sup> This perception of trauma-affected children

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<sup>49</sup> Tom Brunzell, Helen Stokes, and Lea Waters, “Trauma-Informed Positive Education: Using Positive Psychology to Strengthen Vulnerable Students,” *Contemporary School Psychology* 20 (2016): 65.

<sup>50</sup> “Making SPACE for Learning: Trauma Informed Practice in Schools,” Australian Childhood Foundation, accessed June 21, 2021, [www.childhood.org.au](http://www.childhood.org.au)

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Aaron A. Gubi, Julia Strait, Kirby Wycoff, Vanessa Vega, Bracha Brauser, and Yael Osman, “Trauma-Informed Knowledge and Practices in School Psychology: A Pilot Study and Review,” *Journal of Applied School Psychology* 35, no. 2 (2019): 3.

within the classroom might make them “appear hostile or oppositional, belying their vulnerability.”<sup>55</sup>

These patterns of misbehavior in traditional school environments are often attributed solely to the student's conduct, without examining the pedagogical practices that prompt this misbehavior. By placing the onus solely on the trauma-affected child to change their behavior, it prompts an additional stress response as children are placed in an untenable position of trying to adapt their behavior for a model that is ill-suited to their reality. Not only does this set trauma-affected children in opposition to school, an environment that should support their development, but it also can affect how they view their intelligence and self-worth.

Nevertheless, schools can be a safe place for trauma-affected children and serve as a neutral starting point for repairing and empowering trauma-affected children to become healthy adults. The key question is how to best frame the educational experience to achieve these important outcomes.

### **Supporting and Empowering Children Through Trauma-Informed Education**

Despite the likelihood of traditional education models to further traumatize trauma-affected children, educational institutions can serve as a neutral starting point to support and empower trauma-affected children. The critical question is how to best reform the educational experience to equip vulnerable children with the psychological resources to become successful, healthy adults. This question, and the pursuit of its answer, is the starting point of trauma-informed education.

Trauma-informed education, in essence, seeks to repair the developmental processes disrupted due to ACEs and toxic stress and can further build the strengths of the trauma-affected child. This is a burgeoning field within the academic study of education. To frame the discussion of trauma-informed education, we selected a paper from key discussants titled “Trauma-Informed Positive Education: using Positive Psychology to Strengthen Vulnerable Students,” written by Tom Brunzell, Helen Stokes, and Lea Waters of the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education.<sup>56,57</sup> As a recent addition to the field of trauma-informed education, the paper discusses traditional mitigation strategies aimed at repairing disrupted development processes,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Brunzell et al, “Trauma-Informed Positive Education,” 63.

<sup>57</sup> M. Shelley Thomas, Shantel Crosby, and Judi Vanderhaar, “Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools Across Two Decades: An Interdisciplinary Review of Research,” *Review of Research in Education* 43 (2019):422-452; Mathew White and Margaret L. Kern, “Positive education: Learning and teaching for wellbeing and academic mastery,” *International Journal of Wellbeing* 8, no. 1 (2018): 1-17; Brian Cavanaugh, “Trauma-Informed Classrooms and Schools,” *Beyond Behavior* 25, no. 2 (2016): 41-46; Basel El-Khodary and Muthanna Samara, “Effectiveness of a School-Based Intervention on the Students’ Mental Health After Exposure to War-Related Trauma,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 10 (2020) <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2019.01031/full>. These are other key articles in the field of trauma-informed education.

described as a “deficit perspective,”<sup>58</sup> before proposing an additional method, strengths-based trauma-informed education, based on positive psychology. It describes the best approaches to trauma-informed education strategies in three categories: repairing regulatory abilities, repairing disrupted attachment, and increasing psychological resources.<sup>59</sup>

From the traditional deficit perspective, the “repairing regulatory abilities” and “repairing disrupted attachment” strategies aim to support the behavioral development of trauma-affected children disrupted by one or a series of ACE events. If executed effectively, the deficit repairing methods listed below allow trauma-affected children to more productively engage in school and society.

#### *Trauma-Informed Education Strategy #1: Repairing Regulatory Abilities*

Regulatory abilities allow children to manage their own emotions and responses to different stimuli; because of this, a trauma-affected child with underdeveloped regulatory abilities will have difficulties in practicing self-control – both in the classroom and outside of it. To mitigate these challenges, Brunzell et al. posit that activities that focus on “sensory integration, self-regulation, rhythm and repetition, and mindfulness applications to learning tasks” can allow a child to develop these abilities further.<sup>60</sup> When children have difficulties understanding their own emotions, sensory integration and self-regulation activities teach them to identify “the somatosensory cues in their body (e.g., pressure or temperature) and learn to recognize these bodily sensations as being indicators of certain emotional states.”<sup>61</sup> Activities that incorporate mindfulness further build upon this skill by teaching children, after identifying their own emotions, to remove themselves from “their emotional (limbic) centers and [bring themselves] back to thinking (cortex)—which readies the brain for learning.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, rhythm and repetition in the classroom allow trauma-affected children to gain a sense of control and stability within the classroom. These activities soothe trauma-affected children while teaching them skills to engage positively with their own emotions and the world around them.

#### *Trauma-Informed Education Strategy #2: Repairing Disrupted Attachment*

Similarly, repairing disrupted attachment — aiding children in creating positive relationships with their peers and adults — is a crucial component to trauma-informed education, which is based not only on the activities implemented in the class itself but also on the enduring relationships built between students and with teachers that create a school community. Activities that focus on positive play allow trauma-affected children to “build enduring resources such as the ability for insight, problem-solving, coping, and learning”; a classroom environment that

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<sup>58</sup> Brunzell et al., “Trauma-Informed Positive Education,” 63.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 71, 75, 76.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

incorporates fun activities also builds a bond between teacher and student.<sup>63</sup> These activities make school more enjoyable and allow trauma-affected children to take learning risks in the classroom and develop their creativity while supporting the development of critical parts of their brains.<sup>64</sup>

### *Trauma-Informed Education Strategy #3: Increasing Psychological Resources*

The strategies mentioned above are based on the goal of repairing developmental processes so that trauma-affected children may act on a level playing field with non-trauma-affected children. Still, Brunzell et al. propose an additional strategy for trauma-informed education to build upon the existing strengths of trauma-affected children. The paper terms this “increasing psychological resources.”<sup>65</sup> These activities focus on building a “resilient mindset” through activities that teach children to hold on to positive emotions in times of distress; identify messages and characters that exemplify resilience in classroom materials; and develop their strengths through classroom activities.<sup>66</sup>

All three strategies are designed to support a child who has experienced one or more ACE events and may suffer from toxic stress. While the three strategies are distinct, they can work in concert in a classroom setting to support a trauma-affected child's healthy, positive development and empower them for a successful future.

## **Evaluating Education Options for PCI/Arab Israeli Children**

Although the concept has existed for more than 100 years, trauma-informed education as a defined pedagogical strategy is a relatively recent development in mainstream education, and the implementation of these pedagogical models around the world is largely piecemeal and highly localized to conflict zones or rich countries, where need or resources are most concentrated.<sup>67 68.</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Despite the well-understood stressors that mark the everyday life of PCI/Arab Israeli children,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> CD Bethel, MB Davis, N. Gombojav, S. Stumbo, and K. Powers, “Issue Brief: A national and across state profile on adverse childhood experiences among children and possibilities to heal and thrive,” *Johns Hopkins School of Public Health* (October 2017) 1-8; Lisa Weed Phifer and Robert Hull, “Helping Students Heal: Observations of Trauma-Informed Practices in the Schools,” *School Health Journal* 8, no. 1 (2016) 201- 205; and National Council of State Education Associations, *Addressing the Epidemic of Trauma in Schools* (United States: National Council of State Education Associations, 2019) 1-28. These sources explain the current state of trauma-informed education in the United States, by state.

<sup>68</sup> “About Thrive,” Thrive (Institute of Child Education and Psychology Europe), accessed June 8, 2021, <https://www.thriveresearch.eu/about-thrive/>; and “Youth and Education Working Group (RAN Y&E),” Migration and Home Affairs - European Commission, December 6, 2016, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/topics-and-working-groups/ran-y-and-e\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/topics-and-working-groups/ran-y-and-e_en). These sources explain the current state of trauma-informed education in the European Union.

<sup>69</sup> “Commitment to Action: Healing Classrooms Initiative: Commitment by International Rescue Committee,” Clinton Global Initiative - Clinton Foundation, accessed June 21, 2021, <https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton->

trauma-informed pedagogy has made few inroads into the prevailing educational models available in Israel; both state-run “recognized and official” schools and privately-run “recognized but unofficial” institutions for PCI/Arab Israeli children in Israel do not consistently implement trauma-informed education practices and, at worst, compound societal stressors.

### “Recognized and Official” Israeli Schools

Over two-thirds of Israeli youth attend the “recognized and official” schools overseen directly by the Ministry of Education. Although these schools are attractive to students and families because they are free to all Israelis, the majority consistently neglect to implement trauma-informed education practices and, at times, instead exacerbate societal stressors for PCI/Arab Israeli students. School discipline is strict, with students’ behavior grades included on their *bagrut* or matriculation certificate, but ineffective as 77% of the public report dissatisfaction with the success of school discipline policies, pointing to the high incidence of violence and drug use, while Israeli students themselves often feel that teachers’ disciplinary measures are unjustified.<sup>70,71</sup> These issues affect Jewish and PCI/Arab Israelis alike, but in the latter case, they compound existing societal inequalities and stressors that affect their educational achievement and social-emotional development.

While the standard official schools are divided between Hebrew and Arab sector schools — theoretically to provide more culturally relevant lessons — this division, in fact, intensifies inequality while failing to make meaningful changes to the core curriculum. Although the schools are allowed to teach in Arabic, the curriculum itself is not adapted sufficiently to be culturally respectful to PCI/Arab Israeli students: for example, Arabic sector schools must use an Arabic-language version of the official civics textbook, which consistently refers to PCI/Arab Israelis as “inhabitants” instead of citizens, and discrimination is dismissed as mere “claims,” while also justifying any unequal treatment by accusing the claimant of disloyalty to the state.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, a disparity in funding — which has yet to be rectified, despite legislation passed in 2016 to that effect — results in Arab sector schools receiving half funding per student in

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[global-initiative/commitments/healing-classrooms-initiative](#); “Creating Healing Classrooms: A Multimedia Teacher Training Resource,” International Rescue Committee, August 2011, <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/creating-healing-classrooms>; “3EA: Education in Emergencies Evidence for Action,” International Rescue Committee, February 2021; “Healing and Education Through the Arts (HEART),” Save the Children, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/protection/healing-and-education-through-the-arts>. These sources explain how trauma-informed education is being used by various aid organizations, such as Save the Children and International Rescue Committee, to address the needs of trauma-affected children in conflict zones.

<sup>70</sup> Yossi Shavit and Carmel Blank, “School Discipline and Achievement in Israel,” in *Improving Learning Environments: School Discipline and Student Achievement in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Richard Arum and Melissa Verez (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012) 106, 107.

<sup>71</sup> Ramon Lewis, Shlomo Romi, Yaacov J. Katz, and Xing Qui, “Students’ reaction to classroom discipline in Australia, Israel, and China,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 24, (2008): 720.

<sup>72</sup> Halleli Pinson, “The new civics curriculum for high schools in Israel: The discursive construction of Palestinian identities and narratives,” *Education, Citizenship, and Social Justice* 15, no. 1 (2019): 27, 30.

comparison to Hebrew sector schools.<sup>73</sup> This pushes Arab schools to devote the majority of their funding strictly to academic programs at the expense of other activities which could support trauma-affected students, such as art or music. In a 2019 study, researchers found that the few extracurricular activities in Arab sector schools were overwhelmingly academic, with few artistic courses.<sup>74</sup>

For these reasons, official schools provide little regarding trauma-informed education and, in fact, often exacerbate the existing societal structures that create ACEs in PCI/Arab Israeli children.

### **“Recognized but Unofficial” Israeli Schools**

The remaining children in Israel, between a third and a quarter of the school-aged population, attend “recognized but unofficial” institutions, which occupy a gray area of government oversight and pedagogical freedom coupled with a sliding scale of monetary government support. These institutions fare little better when evaluated on the provision of trauma-informed education. “Recognized but unofficial” schools are founded by groups of parents, associations, or religious institutions as an alternative to official schools and are allowed to implement altered versions of the official curriculum.<sup>75</sup> This means that, in a positive sense, curricula tend to be more culturally appropriate for a PCI/Arab Israeli audience. However, while fewer “recognized but unofficial” schools retraumatize children, most do not provide adequate support for those who have experienced ACEs or toxic stress. The extremity of the pedagogical maladaptation for trauma-affected children is varied: religious schools, particularly Christian schools, typically implement a traditional and rigid pedagogical model, while the more modern Arab democratic schools often provide supplementary courses like art or music that can have positive effects for trauma-affected children.<sup>76,77</sup> As each “recognized but unofficial” school offers a different pedagogy, it is difficult to make a general statement regarding the effects of their curricula or pedagogy on trauma-affected children — but, despite whatever positive effects certain models may have on trauma-affected children, these are incidental outcomes not rooted in a conscientious approach to supporting trauma-affected children.

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<sup>73</sup> Afif Abu Much, “Are Israeli-Arab high school students neglected?” *Al Monitor*, December 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/12/israel-education-jews-arabs-oecd-pisa-gaps-economy-taxes.html>

<sup>74</sup> Wissam Magadley, Muhammad Amara, and Yousef Jabareen, “Alternative education in Palestinian-PCI/ Arab society in Israel: Rationale and characteristics,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 67 (2019): 85-93. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0738059318307892>.

<sup>75</sup> Lotem Perry-Hazan, “Court-led educational reforms in political third rails: lessons from the litigation over ultrareligious Jewish schools in Israel,” *Journal of Education Policy* 30, no. 5 (2014): 737; Nizar Halloun, “Christian Schools Demonstrate at the Israeli Ministry of Education,” Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land, July 1, 2015, <https://ffhl.org/holy-land-franciscan-terra-santa-christian-schools-demonstrate-at-the-israeli-ministry-of-education/>; Shavit and Blank, “School Discipline and Achievement in Israel,” 111.

<sup>76</sup> Fadi Suidan, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, April 16, 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Magadley et al., “Alternative education in Palestinian-Arab society in Israel: Rationale and characteristics,” 85-93.

Although PCI/Arab Israeli parents have a choice as to where they send their children for school — or the illusion of choice, as the supplementary parent fees necessary to compensate for partial governmental funding put “recognized but unofficial” schools out of the reach of many PCI/Arab Israeli families — none of the prevailing options provide the trauma-informed response necessary to mitigate the effects of ACEs and toxic stress effectively.

## **Conclusion**

Although the field is relatively new — or at least, newly implemented in varying contexts — trauma-informed education presents a compelling response to the needs of trauma-affected children in PCI/Arab Israeli communities; these interventions are needed not only to protect the health and development of individual children but for the community and country as a whole. However, upon examination, the prevailing educational options for this vulnerable community neglect to consistently implement trauma-informed practices. This deficiency in the education system is particularly problematic as schools often act as a child’s access point to government support, and the lack of trauma-informed education means that children are unable to take that first step in the healing process. Given this educational lack and PCI/Arab Israeli children’s enduring Adverse Childhood Experience exposure, we assert that there is an urgent need to implement such a pedagogical model.

# The Rise of the Arab Waldorf Movement

As Israeli parents have searched for educational alternatives to meet their children's academic needs and their socioemotional development, the Waldorf education movement in Israel came into being. By the 1990s, Jewish Israeli parental interest coalesced around Waldorf education, which would soon become an educational aspiration of some PCI/Arab Israeli parents, who lacked other options for holistic education.

The success of Waldorf education in Israel is not happenstance, but instead due to the unique pedagogical style that nurtures academic and socioemotional childhood development. In contrast to the traditional curriculum of state schools, Waldorf pedagogy is distinctly holistic; Waldorf was developed by the European thinker and educator Rudolf Steiner in the wake of World War I to create cultures of peace capable of healing children traumatized by war. By addressing the child's holistic needs, it allows for a school or kindergarten to nurture their intelligence and socioemotional well-being.

However, while Jewish Israeli parents have successfully established approximately 200 Waldorf kindergartens, elementary schools, and high schools in the past four decades, PCI/Arab Israeli parents have experienced markedly less success. There are only three currently operational Arabic or bilingual Waldorf kindergartens and just one Arabic Waldorf school for PCI/Arab Israelis in Israel.<sup>78</sup>

To understand this phenomenon, this section will first outline the benefits of Waldorf education from a trauma-informed perspective before examining the foundations of the Jewish Israeli Waldorf movement and then contrasting that with the experience of PCI/Arab Israelis attempting to accomplish the same feat. What will become apparent is that, while Waldorf education can be tremendously beneficial for PCI/Arab Israeli children, societal and systemic obstacles prevent this pedagogy from taking root in PCI/Arab Israeli communities.

## **The Benefits of Waldorf Education for Trauma-Affected Students**

Parents in Israel recognize the potential of Waldorf education to produce intelligent, curious students, despite Waldorf's seemingly relaxed pedagogical style. In contrast to the traditional curricular style in schools "obsessed with college and career readiness," as a Stanford University study put it, "Waldorf schools are devoted to life readiness."<sup>79</sup> The success of Waldorf education around the world can be attributed in part to its focus on holistic education, which addresses the emotional, social, ethical, and academic needs of students in an integrated learning format.

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<sup>78</sup> Vainstein, "A School of Hope in Israel," 257-260.

<sup>79</sup> Diane Friedlaender, Kyle Beckham, Xinhua Zheng, and Linda Darling-Hammond, *Growing a Waldorf-Inspired Approach in a Public School District* (Stanford, California: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, 2015) 9.

Waldorf educators have also made notable scholarly and pedagogical contributions to educating trauma-affected children. In his landmark book, “*Educating Traumatized Children: Waldorf Education in Crisis Intervention*,” Waldorf scholar Bernd Ruf argues that Waldorf is a valuable pedagogical tool for teaching trauma-affected children.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Friends of Waldorf Education, headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, conducts pedagogical interventions based on Waldorf in areas affected by war, famine and natural catastrophes and serves as an advisor to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).<sup>81</sup> In the United States, Waldorf educators have opened schools designed to support trauma-affected students. In Oakland, where police records document high rates of violent crimes,<sup>82</sup> the Community School of Creative Education (CSCE) utilizes the Waldorf approach to serve students with high exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences. In 2022, approximately 46 percent of the CSCE student body were not native speakers of English and approximately 87 percent were considered socioeconomically disadvantaged.<sup>83</sup> CSCE Executive Director and Founder Dr. Ida Oberman attributes the students’ progress in reading and math compared to similar student populations under stress to Waldorf’s alignment with the framework for trauma-informed education outlined by Brunzell et al.<sup>84 85</sup>

But in Israel, can some of the successful growth of the Waldorf movement in Jewish communities be attributed to how Waldorf’s pedagogy and curriculum nurture trauma-affected children? Jewish Israeli Waldorf graduates are seen as academically prepared for the future, and the authors of this report posit that this is not only because Waldorf schools present information in a cognitively effective fashion but also because Waldorf pedagogy employs strategies that nurture disrupted developmental processes in trauma-affected children, which would otherwise impede their academic achievement and socioemotional health. Although the experiences of PCI/Arab Israeli children have been emphasized in previous sections of this paper, many Jewish Israeli children suffer from similar, if not as extreme, psychological distress due to the overarching conditions surrounding childhood in Israel. While a study of PCI/Arab-Israeli children in 2003 showed that 50% had PTSD, a similar study showed that 55% of all Israeli

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<sup>80</sup> Ruf, Bernd. *Educating Traumatized Children: Waldorf Education in Crisis Intervention*. Great Barrington, Massachusetts: Lindisfarne Books, 2013. 1 - 220

<sup>81</sup> “Organization and Intervention Manual for Emergency Pedagogical Interventions in War and Catastrophe Regions.” Freunde-Waldorf Friends of Rudolf Steiner/ Freundeder Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiner. 2016 [https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/Notfallpaedagogik/Publikationen/15\\_10\\_2015\\_NFP\\_Leitfaden\\_E\\_online.pdf](https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Notfallpaedagogik/Publikationen/15_10_2015_NFP_Leitfaden_E_online.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> Wittner, Michael. “See California’s Safest, Most Dangerous Cities In 2022: Safewise.” Patch.com March 18, 2022. <https://patch.com/california/across-ca/see-californias-safest-most-dangerous-cities-2022-safewise>

<sup>83</sup> California Department of Education. California School Dashboard. School Performance Overview for California School for Creative Education Summary. 2020.

<https://www.caschooldashboard.org/reports/01100170123968/2020> . March 26, 2022

<sup>84</sup> Oberman, Ida. Interview by Shepha Vainstein. Zoom. Online. January 5, 2022.

<sup>85</sup> Brunzell et al., “Trauma-Informed Positive Education,” 63.

citizens throughout the country, regardless of age, exhibited at least one symptom of the same psychological disorder.<sup>86</sup> This is not to say that the experiences of stress among all Israelis are equal — the earlier section discusses stressors, such as the societal pressure to acculturate and discrimination, which Jewish Israelis would not have to grapple with — but instead to note that Jewish Israeli children do experience trauma that would have behavioral consequences.

As outlined earlier, children who experience trauma have difficulties in the classroom that impact their academic performance. Brunzell et al. outlined a series of strategies to repair disrupted development processes while empowering the trauma-affected child. In this section, Waldorf educational practices are examined in relation to the strategies developed by Brunzell et al. to mitigate the effects of trauma on education — by repairing regulatory abilities, restoring disrupted attachment, and increasing psychological resources — to answer the question: Can Waldorf education be trauma-informed?

### **Waldorf for Repairing Regulatory Abilities**

As Brunzell et al. explained, children who suffer from toxic stress due to exposure to ACEs often experience disrupted development of their regulatory abilities, leading to difficulties in self-control and knowing how to deal with their own emotions. Brunzell et al. recommend that trauma-informed education incorporate activities such as sensory integration, rhythm, repetition, and mindfulness activities, amongst others that rebuild these regulatory abilities.

Waldorf education incorporates these strategies and emphasizes them as crucial curriculum components. Waldorf classes are designed with a natural rhythm in mind: “The school day and the school year are structured in an organic way, which establishes a healthy balance of experience between concentration and relaxation.... Each lesson should contain a balance between the engagement of the child’s thinking, their feeling and their willing.”<sup>87</sup> The daily lesson plans are designed to emphasize “the regular patterns of activities both within the day and over each week.”<sup>88</sup> Parents are encouraged to continue this rhythm when children are home during the weekend or over breaks.<sup>89</sup>

Children familiarize themselves with new material through thoughtful rhythm and repetition that organically builds cognitive capacity. For example, verse recitation is a key component of instruction for pre-literate children in Waldorf classrooms, focusing on breath regulation and enunciation.<sup>90</sup> The same stories are told throughout the year, deepening students’ understanding

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<sup>86</sup> Tyano, “Post-traumatic stress disorder in Israeli children,” 7.

<sup>87</sup> Kevin Avison and Martyn Rawson, *The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum*, trans. Johanna Collis (Edinburgh, UK: Floris Books, 2019) 31.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>89</sup> Phillip Gelitz, “The breathing day of the small child,” *Erziehungskunst: Waldorf Education Today*, January 2013, <https://www.erziehungskunst.de/en/article/early-childhood/the-breathing-day-of-the-small-child/>.

<sup>90</sup> Friedlaender et al., *Growing a Waldorf-Inspired Approach in a Public School District*, 28.

as they familiarize themselves with the tales.<sup>91</sup> Another Waldorf activity that utilizes rhythm as a pedagogical tool is a subject called eurythmy, or the artistic, physical interpretation of language; while there are designated movements for each sound, the choice of which movement to employ is up to the student; this artistic interpretation “creat[es] a harmonious relationship between the soul-spiritual element and the body.”<sup>92</sup> Teachers can foster a more impactful, experiential learning environment by using repetition and rhythm.

Waldorf also incorporates mindfulness practices into its activities, particularly in its approach to art, which helps students be aware of what they are sensing and feeling in the moment without interpretation or judgment. Students engage in mindfulness activities through subjects such as handwork through repeated hand motions and focusing on the physical sensations.<sup>93</sup> A Stanford study on Waldorf education in California public schools outlined how a particular school district designed handwork classes to build mindfulness capacities while remaining sensitive to different developmental benchmarks for each grade: kindergarteners engage in finger knitting, while in first and second grade, they graduate to two-needle knitting, before engaging in steadily more complicated tasks, such as crocheting and embroidery, in later grades.<sup>94</sup> The children learn that they have to be mindful or they can drop their stitch while they’re knitting or hammer their thumb while they building a house.<sup>95</sup> Waldorf education fosters a sense of connectedness between the physical and the cognitive by emphasizing the mindfulness aspect of handwork and other artistic subjects.

Sensory integration is an important component of the trauma-informed educational strategy of repairing regulatory abilities. The Waldorf classroom becomes the second teacher as it is set up in an intentional manner to support the child’s senses at myriad levels. Lauren Hickman, former Executive Director of the Waldorf teacher training institute Rudolf Steiner College provides the following overview of how the Waldorf curriculum uses a multi sensorial approach to create a circle of safety for the child. Hickman explained,

The sense of touch is supported by using natural fibers and materials in the classroom instead of plastic toys which do not have the same feeling of weight, warmth, and substance that something from nature possesses. Puppets, dolls, and stuffed animals are available for play and comfort. Modeling clay or beeswax, kneading dough for baking, making mud with water and sand, and sculpting with papier mache are all learning actives involving the sense of touch in a safe and engaged manner. Additionally, the teacher gives supportive touch through high fives, fist bumps and hugs.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>92</sup> Avison and Rawson, *The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum*, 207.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>94</sup> Friedlaender et al., *Growing a Waldorf-Inspired Approach in a Public School District*, 48.

<sup>95</sup> Oberman, Ida. Interview by Shepha Vainstein. Zoom. Online. January 5, 2022.

Movement is a key part of the curriculum with movements built into learning activities that are safe, playful, cooperative, and intentional through dance, circle games, finger games and clapping games. Obstacle courses, balance beam, and games like “Simon Says” or, “Mother May I” help children develop their sense of movement and the ability to stop. To strengthen proprioception and balance skipping rope, cycling, or the circus arts through juggling with balls or doing acrobatics by balancing on stilts, or ropes can be used to bring about healing for sense-related trauma. Hikes and outdoor activities help facilitate a connection with the natural world.

On the visual level the teacher is mindful what types of colors are used in the classroom to create a harmonious mood, paying attention to the art work and images that are displayed. Waldorf educators cultivate the sense of smell and taste by making sure there are good smells in the classroom room by working with different smells, lavender, rosemary, flowers, baking and food preparation. A classroom should always smell warm and inviting to the students. The focus is on preparing foods that are nutritious and comforting, not full of empty calories.<sup>96</sup>

By incorporating rhythm, repetition, and mindfulness into the curriculum, Waldorf pedagogy has the potential to encourage positive growth and the repair of regulatory abilities.

### **Waldorf for Repairing Disrupted Attachment**

Similarly, another area of development disrupted by trauma is the healthy attachment between children, their peers, and trusted adults. Brunzell et al. recommend activities that focus on creating positive and stable relationships with teachers and peers to repair this disrupted area. This process is a vital part of Waldorf pedagogy. Waldorf teachers are trained to be a buffer to toxic stress through creating a safe, connected environment where children can relax and learn. Hickman explained,

The child can feel safe and protected through the teacher’s actions, gestures, and mindful practice. The attitude of the teacher through confidence and care can cultivate a sense a well-being so the child feels that all is well. The teacher projects safety through words and gestures of comfort and protection as the child shifts from a nervous state of fight or flight to a calm, relaxed state of mindfulness. Warmth in human interactions, warmth in the classroom, warm interest in the child increases the sense of wellbeing.<sup>97</sup>

The relationship between teacher and student is actively cultivated through a practice called “looping,” standard in many Waldorf schools; in this practice, teachers are matched with a particular class for years at a time, often for the entire period that the class spends at a particular

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<sup>96</sup> Hickman, Lauren. Interview by Shepha Vainstein. Zoom. Online. March 12, 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

institution.<sup>98</sup> While building relationships with their students, teachers engage with their students both inside and outside of the classroom, facilitating community building between students and teachers and their families.<sup>99</sup> This practice allows teachers and students to build strong, stable relationships; it will enable students to seamlessly transition from grade to grade without the typical transition period where new classroom rules and expectations are set.<sup>100,101</sup> In a looping system, students often report decreased anxiety at the start of the new year. In a study conducted in Florida non-Waldorf public schools, students in a looping scenario tended to perform better on tests and attended class more regularly than their peers, not in a looping class.<sup>102</sup> In this same study, teachers who participated in looping reported that the experience allowed them to build stronger relationships with their students and more effectively individualize their instruction.<sup>103</sup>

Even the Waldorf approach to discipline supports the bond between student and teacher. Waldorf teachers can create a safe, nurturing environment through careful control of their classrooms that prioritizes positive reinforcement over punishment. Waldorf teachers encourage students to stay on task by employing rhythm and repetition in the classroom, as addressed further in the following section, and by engaging students in songs or chants when transitioning between activities.<sup>104</sup> If a student is disruptive in class, Waldorf pedagogy guides teachers to treat it as a more profound issue which will be alleviated by connecting with the disruptive student to understand the problem.<sup>105</sup> This approach to discipline is distinctly holistic and allows teachers to keep students on task while maintaining a positive and supportive classroom environment.

Similarly, the Waldorf emphasis on free play as a component of education builds a robust peer-to-peer community in a supportive environment.<sup>106</sup> Free play allows children to build essential skill sets such as communication and problem solving while building bonds with their peers.<sup>107</sup> Pediatric doctors published a study in the *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* that outlined the socioemotional benefits of free play: flexibility, self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy.<sup>108</sup> Waldorf develops these play skills, particularly in lower grades, to develop ‘good

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>101</sup> Peter J. Cistone and Aleksandr Shneyderman, “Looping: An Empirical Evaluation,” *International Journal of Educational Policy* 5, no. 1 (2004): 48.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 48, 55.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>104</sup> Friedlaender et al, *Growing a Waldorf Inspired Approach in a Public School District*, 24.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Kenneth R. Ginsburg, “The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds,” *American Academy of Pediatrics* 119, no. 1 (2007): 183.

<sup>107</sup> Hillary L. Burdette and Robert C. Whitaker, “Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children: Looking Beyond Fitness and Fatness to Attention, Affiliation, and Affect,” *Archive of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 159, no. 1 (2005): 48.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

players,’ who “show more empathy toward others, less aggression, and in general more social and emotional adjustment.”<sup>109</sup>

While building relationships with their peers and teachers, Waldorf’s approach to education also prioritizes connecting students to their cultural heritage. Waldorf education prioritizes teaching children in their mother tongue, grounding students in their cultural heritage while building capacities to begin the process of individuation.<sup>110</sup> Particularly in the lower grades, the curriculum incorporates “[l]ocal dialect, regional accents and the whole vernacular tradition of nursery rhymes, skipping chants so on” to create “the child’s feeling of belonging to a particular place.”<sup>111</sup> This feeling of belonging to a particular place and community is strengthened in later years as the curriculum is “supplemented by the rich vocabulary of local place names, legends, and folklore that are usually authentic to the local linguistic culture.”<sup>112</sup> This sense of belonging is particularly powerful to trauma-affected children who have an insecure attachment to their care providers.

These activities allow children who experience trauma to repair their disrupted attachment capabilities within a consistent, safe environment.

### **Waldorf for Increasing Psychological Resources**

Another critical component of trauma-informed education is encouraging the individual child’s strengths. Brunzell et al. recommended activities that promote resilience and build upon existing strengths in students.

Children are encouraged to recognize and build their strengths within the classroom environment in Waldorf classrooms. The founder of Waldorf education, philosopher Rudolf Steiner, wrote, “Waldorf Education is not a pedagogical system but an art – the art of awakening what is actually there within the human being.”<sup>113</sup> Activities in Waldorf schools follow this ethos by encouraging curiosity in students through a varied, rich curriculum and a nurturing classroom environment.<sup>114</sup> Waldorf students report feeling that their curiosity and interests were supported through Waldorf education. Furthermore, the style of Waldorf education encourages resilience by giving students the opportunity for supported, creative problem-solving within a nurturing environment.<sup>115</sup> These activities build children’s self-confidence.

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<sup>109</sup> Avison and Rawson, *The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum*, 52.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 174.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> “Strengths-Based Learning in Waldorf Schools,” *Waldorf Today*, October 2010, <https://www.waldorftoday.com/2015/10/strength-based-learning-in-waldorf-schools/>

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> “6 Waldorf Principles That Can Help Your Family,” *Waldorf Academy*, October 2018, <https://waldorfacademy.org/waldorf-principles-that-can-help-family/>

Waldorf also teaches students certain skills that promote resilience. The curriculum provides children with models of resilience, or “heroes and great people,” by engaging in fables, fairy tales, and historical scenes that show positive problem solving and flexibility in the face of obstacles.<sup>116</sup> Students are also taught to savor the good through “moments of reverence each day,” in which they “experience joy, awe, and wonder.”<sup>117</sup> Teaching children to savor positive emotions allows them to build emotional well-being.

These methods — grounding children in their own culture, examining qualities of heroes and leaders, and teaching children to savor their positive emotions — can profoundly increase emotional resilience in the face of traumatic events.

### **The Benefits at a Glance**

Waldorf education has the potential to support the complex needs of trauma-affected children. The benefits of Waldorf extend beyond the socioemotional benefits with which this paper is chiefly concerned, but also in the academic achievement of marginalized children. Studies have found that Waldorf students from minority groups and low socioeconomic backgrounds perform better than their peers in more traditional schools.<sup>118, 119</sup> Perhaps ironically, these results may be due to Waldorf’s emphasis on education in relation to a child’s unique development path instead of a designated benchmark score.<sup>120</sup>

Rudolph Steiner developed Waldorf pedagogy and curriculum in 1919 as a response to the trauma experienced by the general population as a result of World War 1; however, in the present day, activities performed as a part of Waldorf education correspond closely to what Brunzell et al. identified as key strategies for supporting trauma-affected children. While this pedagogical style pre-dated the term ‘trauma-informed education,’ the core of Waldorf pedagogy closely aligns with this current pedagogical movement.

### **The Foundation of Waldorf in Israel**

The Waldorf Movement in Israel emerged into secular society during the burgeoning private schools' movement in the 1980s, but the foundations of this movement were allied in the 1930s when the first Jewish Europeans arrived in what was then Mandatory Palestine, controlled by the British.

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<sup>116</sup> Joan Armon, “The Waldorf Curriculum as a Framework for Moral Education: One Dimension of a Fourfold System,” paper presented at *The Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997*, 12.

<sup>117</sup> Avison and Rawson, *The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum*, 51.

<sup>118</sup> Ryan McDermott, Mary E. Henry, Cynthia Dillard, Paul Byers, Freda Easton, Ida Oberman, and Bruce Uhrmacher, “Waldorf Education in an Inner-City Public School,” *The Urban Review* 28, no. 2 (1996): 135.

<sup>119</sup> Jennifer Schieffer and Randy T. Busse, “Low SES Minority Fourth-Graders’ Achievement from an Urban Public Waldorf and Comparison School,” *Waldorf Education Research Institute Research Bulletin* 6 (2001): 23-24.

<sup>120</sup> Friedlaender et al., *Growing a Waldorf-Inspired Approach in a Public School District*, 27.

Eyal Bloch, a co-founder of the Institute of Education for Sustainability and Social Entrepreneurship at David Yellin Academic College of Education in Jerusalem, outlined the naissance of the movement: “The first Jewish German came to Jerusalem and started to have study groups.... Over 30 years, until the 60s, there were study groups. In the 60s, they start[ed] to translate and publish [Waldorf training] books. So, they lay the foundation, the roots.... [There has been] almost 90 years of anthroposophy and Waldorf in Israel.”<sup>121</sup>

The first Waldorf school was opened in 1989 in Harduf Kibbutz, and dedicated groups of Jewish parents soon opened dozens more Waldorf schools in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, and around the country.<sup>122,123</sup> By the 1990s, Jewish parental interest coalesced around Waldorf as the preferred alternative pedagogy for private schools, and middle- and upper-class parents began to send their children to these newly established schools.

“Waldorf education has really grown [in Israel]. There are much more people who want their kids to be enrolled in Waldorf than there are teachers,” said Noa Leshem-Gradus, a co-founder of Seeds/Boudur Bilingual Waldorf Training Institute and a Jewish Israeli.<sup>124</sup>

In Israel, Waldorf has adapted to community needs while maintaining its essence. Local Waldorf schools advertise that their curriculum incorporates Jewish holidays while maintaining the central philosophy of Waldorf: emphasizing the holistic development of the child while de-emphasizing rote learning of facts or figures.<sup>125,126</sup> Waldorf also satisfies the desire of Israeli parents, “who want a ‘spiritual education’ for their children without the religion.”<sup>127</sup>

“Waldorf education connects our teaching to real life. It is real. It is not a dry lesson that we teach. It is a real process going on there. I provide my pupils and kids to help them be successful human beings and to be free. We teach them how to be free in this life, not to do something that someone forced you to do. It's a different way of living,” said Laila Husein, a Palestinian Citizen of Israel and teacher at Tamrat El Zeitoun Arab Waldorf school in Shfar'am.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Eyal Bloch, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, September 3, 2020.

<sup>122</sup> “Shalaam-Shalom: Teaching children in the Middle East pathways to peace,” Waldorf Today, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.waldorftoday.com/2011/02/445/>

<sup>123</sup> “Israel,” Freunde Waldorf (Foundation of Rudolph Steiner's Art of Education), accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/en/waldorf-worldwide/organisations-worldwide/asia/israel/>.

<sup>124</sup> Noa Leshem-Gradus, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, September 10, 2020.

<sup>125</sup> “About — English,” *Oded Schools*, accessed June 30, 2021, <http://www.odedschool.org/doc/English>

<sup>126</sup> Nathan Jeffay, “Israelis back Steiner Schools,” *The Jewish Chronicle* (London, UK), March 19, 2021, <https://www.thejc.com/news/israel/israelis-back-steiner-schools-1.16561>

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Laila Husein, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, May 28, 2020.

Today, there are more than 150 Hebrew Waldorf kindergartens, 32 Hebrew Waldorf elementary schools, and 8 Hebrew Waldorf high schools attended by thousands of children and recognized by the Israeli government.<sup>129</sup> If given the option, Israeli Jewish parents send their children to Waldorf schools because, despite deemphasizing the importance of test scores, this type of pedagogy is seen as effective for academic and holistic development.<sup>130</sup>

## **The Birth of Arab Waldorf in Israel**

Given Waldorf education's distinct academic and holistic benefits compared to the pedagogy and curriculum offered at state schools and other private institutions, PCI/Arab Israeli parents' interest mirrored that of their Jewish Israeli peers. Although the process of building a private school from the ground up is a daunting task, groups of PCI/Arab Israeli parents have repeatedly taken on the task of attempting to start Waldorf schools that prioritize their children's learning and their own culture.

As Arab Waldorf emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s, obstacles that impeded the movement's growth emerged. Today, after extensive negotiations between the Waldorf Association of Israel and the Ministry of Education, all Waldorf schools are considered "recognized and official" as of 2017, with full Ministry funding while retaining pedagogical autonomy; Waldorf kindergartens retain their "recognized but unofficial" status. This section will outline the growth of five different Waldorf institutions in Israel: Tamrat El-Zeitoun, The Orchard of Abraham's Children, Ein Bustan, Alsyndian - Tarshiha Waldorf Kindergarten, and Sonbulat Waldorf School, as well as one Waldorf institution in the Palestinian Territories.

### **Tamrat El-Zeitoun**

The first Arab Waldorf School in Israel, Tamrat El Zeitoun was opened in 2004 in Shfar'am, a city of over 30,000 Muslim, Christian, and Druze inhabitants living approximately one-hour east Haifa.<sup>131</sup> Tamrat El Zeitoun's longevity and size make it a cornerstone of holistic alternative education for PCI/Arab Israelis.

Connections between the local Arab, Bedouin, and Jewish communities laid the foundation for Tamrat El Zeitoun. In the late 1980s, while PCI/ Arab Israeli leaders continued to send their children to the traditional Arab schools near their village, the residents of the Jewish Kibbutz

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<sup>129</sup> Vainstein, "A School of Hope in Israel," 257-260.

<sup>130</sup> Jeffay, "Israelis back Steiner schools."

<sup>131</sup> "Pioneers: Unique Role Models in Israel," Tamrat El Zeitoun, accessed July 8, 2021, <http://www.tamratelzeitoun.org/about>

Harduf were establishing the first Waldorf school, the Harduf Waldorf School.<sup>132</sup> Soon, a teacher in the Arab school, Mazen Ayoub, became inspired by the pedagogy; to support his passion, Harduf Waldorf School provided a scholarship for Mazen Ayoub to attend a Waldorf teacher training college, supporting his family financially while he was abroad.<sup>133</sup> When he returned, Mazen Ayoub opened Tamrat El Zeitoun, the first Arab Waldorf school in Israel, with the help of two recently trained teachers: Amina Swaed and Aida Awad.<sup>134,135</sup>

Tamrat El Zeitoun continues to be strengthened by its mutually beneficial relationship with the Harduf Waldorf School — but Tamrat El Zeitoun has clearly defined itself as a distinct entity.<sup>136</sup> While Harduf Waldorf School offered to work together to institute a bilingual Waldorf School, Tamrat El Zeitoun saw a benefit in providing a holistic, Arab Waldorf experience for its students. Gilad Goldschmidt, a founder of Harduf and the Israel National Waldorf Education Forum, recalled, “I said to him, Mazen. Why don’t you come to our school? And we will make [an] Arab and Jewish school together?...And he said to me, ‘No, the Arabic children must have their own identity, and we must create an Arabic school. They must have an Arabic school until high school, and then in high school, they can go to Harduf, no problem.’”<sup>137</sup>

Since its inception, Tamrat El Zeitoun has been a trailblazer in Arab Waldorf. After opening the first Arabic Waldorf kindergarten in 2004, Tamrat El Zeitoun expanded in 2009 with the help of Lana Nasrallah, their first primary school teacher, to include a school. Nearing its twentieth year, this institution teaches over 300 Muslim, Christian, and Druze children from kindergarten to ninth grade.<sup>138</sup> This success sets Tamrat El Zeitoun apart from other Arab Waldorf institutions in Israel and Arab Waldorf institutions throughout the Arab world.

Diab Akareia, a PCI/Arab Israeli who first worked as a counselor at Harduf before becoming Tamrat El Zeitoun’s principal in 2016, said,

Tamrat El Zeitoun wants to spread Arab Waldorf all over Shfar’am, the Arab society, and all over the world. We have contacts in Jordan and have connected with people in Egypt. So even though we are tiny and local, we are already in a position where we can give to

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<sup>132</sup> “Harduf,” Freunde Waldorf (Foundation of Rudolph Steiner's Art of Education), accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/en/waldorf-worldwide/organisations-worldwide/asia/israel/harduf>

<sup>133</sup> Vainstein, “A School of Hope in Israel,” 259.

<sup>134</sup> “Learning for Peace,” Freunde Waldorf (Foundation of Rudolph Steiner's Art of Education), accessed July 8, 2021, <https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/en/waldorf-worldwide/organisations-worldwide/asia/israel/shfaram/>

<sup>135</sup> Vainstein, “School of Hope,” 259.

<sup>136</sup> “Pioneers: Unique Role Models in Israel,” Tamrat El Zeitoun.

<sup>137</sup> Gilad Goldschmidt, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, July 23, 2020.

<sup>138</sup> “Waldorf School of Shfar’am,” Tamrat El Zeitoun, accessed July 8, 2021, <http://www.tamratelzeitoun.org/>

others. We are already abundant because we have more experience than others in the Arab world about Waldorf.<sup>139</sup>

### **Ein Bustan**

A year after Tamrat El Zeitoun opened, Ein Bustan Waldorf School opened its doors in 2005 in Hilf, a Bedouin village near Kiryat Tiv'on in northern Israel.

The impetus behind the school came from a man named Amir Shlomian. He had studied Waldorf education in London and returned in 2000 to teach in Waldorf schools in Israel. As a Waldorf teacher, Amir was deeply invested in the pedagogy, but he also wanted to find a school for his son that would prepare him to live in a multicultural society. In 2005, Amir Schlomian founded the Ein Bustan Association for Bilingual Education, and later that year, the association opened the Ein Bustan Waldorf kindergarten.<sup>140</sup> While maintaining the distinct holistic nature of Waldorf pedagogy, the Ein Bustan curriculum incorporates Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions and heritage to enrich the classroom; classes are taught in Hebrew and Arabic.<sup>141</sup> Children come from the surrounding towns — Kiryat Tiv'on, a Jewish town, and Hilf and Basmat Tiv'on, Arab Bedouin villages — to attend.

While Ein Bustan has successfully operated a Waldorf kindergarten and nursery since 2005, the school experienced issues when it tried to expand to a primary school in 2011. Opened initially under a homeschool provision overseen by the local municipality, the Ein Bustan primary school struggled to obtain Ministry of Education approval — first, due to challenges with bureaucracy, and later due to the lack of funds. The school brought in Beni Mosenson, the President of Ein Bustan's current *amuta* or association, Maayan Babustan Association, to oversee the process.

Beni Mosenson outlined the difficulties in dealing with the Ministry of Education registration process: "...they are very confused about this situation. Because when you have to fill in all the forms, they ask you, 'Are you Jewish or Arabic? What can I tell you about our school?' Especially that we are anthroposophic [Waldorf] too."<sup>142</sup>

After three years of operating under the home school provision, the Ministry of Education returned their decision on the Ein Bustan primary school: their application was rejected. Ein

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<sup>139</sup> Diab Akareia, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, June 11, 2020.

<sup>140</sup> "Bread and Salt — Friendship and Peace," Freunde Waldorf (Foundation of Rudolph Steiner's Art of Education), accessed June 27, 2021, <https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/en/waldorf-worldwide/organisations-worldwide/asia/israel/tivon/>

<sup>141</sup> "Ein Bustan," reGeneration Education, February 16, 2021, <https://regenerationeducation.org/wherewework/middle-east-programs/ein-bustan>

<sup>142</sup> Beni Mosenson, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, February 3, 2021.

Bustan closed the primary school and focused its energy on maintaining its existing kindergarten and nursery classes.

With no other Waldorf options, parents whose children graduated from Ein Bustan's kindergarten are stuck with an impossible choice: to send their children to the traditional Arab state school or to send them further afield, to Hebrew Waldorf schools in nearby Haifa or Kiryat Tiv'on, or to Tamrat El Zeitoun in Shfar'am, which is nearly an hour's drive away. By sending their children to schools farther afield, parents ensure a strong Waldorf education but sacrifice the opportunity to further foster cross-cultural linkages between the communities of Kiryat Tiv'on, Hilf, and Basmat Tiv'on.

### **The Orchard of Abraham's Children**

The Orchard of Abraham's Children was opened in 2011 by husband-and-wife duo, Ihab and Ora Balha. A Jewish and Muslim couple, they wanted to find a bicultural and bilingual school for their children, which also prioritized their social-emotional growth.

Located in Jaffa, a city near Tel Aviv with sizable Jewish and Arab populations, The Orchard of Abraham's Children offers bilingual, bicultural education for ages one through six, taught by teachers from both Jewish and PCI/ Arab communities. While the school initially experienced issues enrolling from the Arab population due to unfamiliarity with Waldorf principles and financial difficulties in paying tuition, now Arab children make up roughly 35-40% of students enrolled.

Ora Balha outlined the considered approach to recruiting and training Arab Waldorf teachers: "...[The Arab teachers] had no experience... in education and never heard about this Steiner education, but we took a decision to train them... [T]hey got the education through... work with Jewish teachers who worked with them and kind of inspire[d] them and gave them instructions." Arab teachers receive continuing education through partnerships with other Waldorf schools in Israel, particularly Ein Bustan and Harduf Waldorf Schools.<sup>143</sup>

In The Orchard's curriculum, community building is a key component. While Yaffa is multicultural, Jewish and Arab communities remain largely separate due to language barriers and different educational systems, despite sometimes living next door to one another. The curriculum follows Waldorf principles while incorporating Jewish and Arab traditions and culture.<sup>144</sup>

The Orchard of Abraham's Children has seen tremendous interest from parents in the community. The school operates six classes in Yaffa and two classes in a second location in the

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<sup>143</sup> Ora Balha, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, October 22, 2020.

<sup>144</sup> "The Orchard of Abraham's Children," The Orchard of Abraham's Children, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.bismilla.org/>

Galilee; approximately 120 children attend, and there is a long waiting list of parents hoping to enroll their children.<sup>145</sup>

### **Alsyndian - Tarshiha Waldorf Kindergarten**

In 2020, Raheel Shehadi Meiki and her husband Rani Meiki opened the Alsyndian - Tarshiha Waldorf Kindergarten in Ma'a lot-Tarshiha. Located approximately sixteen kilometers from the Lebanon border, the Alsyndian - Tarshiha Waldorf Kindergarten offers Arabic language Waldorf education for children ages three through six.

Raheel opened the kindergarten after finding the available options for her children's Arabic schooling lacking in inspired pedagogy. "And I can say that I [was] look[ing] for my kids to put them in stuff, in kindergarten and I didn't have any other options in this region... we have the kindergarten here, the regular one. And I was heartbroken, I couldn't live in these schools anymore. I don't want him to be in this cognitive direction from very young," she explained.<sup>146</sup>

Raheel learned about Waldorf from a nearby Jewish Israeli community opening a Hebrew Waldorf kindergarten. Inspired by Waldorf's holistic approach, she enrolled in Shaked School, an unaccredited Waldorf early childhood education teacher training program in the lower Galilee. Soon after, she opened her Waldorf kindergarten for PCI/ Arab Israeli children in her area.

Raheel leveraged the expertise of veteran PCI/ Arab Israeli Waldorf teachers Aida Awad and Lana Nasrallah and Shaked School President Stefanie Alon to effectively gather enough local parental interest to petition the Ministry of Education for a new kindergarten.

Despite successfully raising funds and enrolling over a dozen students to form a classroom, Raheel and her husband Rani experienced difficulty navigating compounding requirements from the Ministry of Education. "The problem, that they can't find something real to close us..... When you finish the first year to go to the second year, you have to reissue [with the Ministry of Education]. And it was related to the last two inspections. And now we see that in these two last inspections, they're bringing up new things that were not talked about in the first report," said Rani Meiki.<sup>147</sup>

The shifting nature of the Ministry of Education policies put the kindergarten's ability to remain in operation at risk. For example, the Ministry of Education recently informed Raheel that she

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<sup>145</sup> "Human First Education," The Orchard of Abraham's Children, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.bismilla.org/human-first-education>

<sup>146</sup> Raheel Shehadi Meiki, Interview by authors, Zoom, online, September 23, 2021.

<sup>147</sup> Rani Meiki, Interview by authors, Zoom, online, September 30, 2021.

could no longer work in the classroom while her youngest son remained enrolled as a student, despite her role as the lead Waldorf teacher in the kindergarten for the last two years.

Raheel and Rani believe the Ministry of Education's requirements are fluctuating and subjective by design in order to make it difficult for the school to remain open. They believe that the Ministry of Education is concerned that Alsyndian - Tarshiha Waldorf Kindergarten will recruit children from state-run schools and reduce their per-student state funding. Raheel explained, "With what we do in the kindergarten, with what we give our kids, then they [the Ministry of Education] will maybe try to close us because they will have fear that kids from other kindergartens will come to us."<sup>148</sup>

Despite the series of challenges imposed by the Ministry of Education, Raheel and Rani are committed to remaining open and providing educational choices for local PCI/ Arab Israeli parents living near the Lebanon border.

### **Sonbulat Waldorf Kindergarten**

In 2017, Fadi Souidan and Hadeel Younis began the Sonbulat Waldorf Association to open the first Arab Waldorf school in Haifa. Both were struck by the lack of educational options for Haifa's Arab children, while the Jewish children were presented with five or six pedagogical choices. As Hadeel Younis was studying Waldorf education, Hadeel and Fadi Souidan selected the pedagogy for their project and set out to open an Arab Waldorf school.

After initially meeting with the mayor and the local Ministry of Education official who rejected their request to open a school, the Sonbulat Waldorf Association began to hold parent interest meetings to explain the benefits of Waldorf education. These meetings, which outlined a culturally sensitive curriculum and the holistic Waldorf pedagogy, reached over 300 parents.

Fifty of these parents registered their children to attend the Sonbulat Waldorf kindergarten, which was to be opened in the 2020-2021 school year. In January 2020, the school rented a house with a garden in the Arab section of Haifa and began renovations with the help of a community of engaged parents. The vision was to first build the kindergarten enrollment and then ask for the elementary school; the Sonbulat Waldorf Association submitted registration papers to the municipality to begin the process in early 2020.

The municipality rejected their application, asserting that their new kindergarten would cause municipal kindergartens to close due to under-enrollment. When the Sonbulat Waldorf Association pivoted their plans to open a nursery school instead, hoping to open a kindergarten for the 2021-2022 school year, COVID-19 hit Israel, causing a restrictive nationwide lockdown.

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<sup>148</sup> Raheel Shehadi Meiki, Interview by authors, Zoom, online, September 30, 2021.

In light of Israel's series of lockdowns, local infections, and lack of funds, Sonbulat Waldorf Association closed its nursery school in late 2020.

### **House of Hope Vision Kindergarten**

Across the Green Line, one Waldorf school has opened; House of Hope Vision School was founded in 2008 to engender sustainable development through summer school and after-school education and empowerment programs for children and youth. In 2014, House of Hope Co-Founders Milad Vosgueritchian and Manar Wahhab opened House of Hope kindergarten and elementary school for approximately 60 students enrolled in grades K- 5. The school is situated in Al-Eizariya and serves beneficiaries from Al-Eizariya, Abu Dis, Sawahrah a-Sharqiyah, and a-Sheikh Sa'd in Area C of the West Bank. In 2019, the Palestinian Ministry of Education recognized House of Hope Vision Kindergarten as the first and only Waldorf kindergarten in the West Bank.<sup>149</sup>

House of Hope also offers the only Waldorf teacher training in the West Bank. Experienced PCI/Israeli Arab and European Waldorf teachers throughout the year visit the school to train dozens of Palestinian teachers. As Manar Wahhab, the Waldorf Director at House of Hope Vision School, explained, "Our House of Hope Waldorf teacher training program is holistic. At House of Hope, we are almost all women. We are our community's mothers, grandmothers, and wives. So, with the help of Stefanie Alon of Shaked School, I tailored our House of Hope teacher training to be holistic so we can best guide our students' academic, social and emotional learning."<sup>150</sup>

As House of Hope Vision School is not within Israel, it does not experience the same difficulties as other Arab Waldorf institutions in regard to Israeli Ministry of Education and municipality restrictions. However, it does experience more profound funding difficulties: Unlike Arab Waldorf kindergartens and schools in Israel, House of Hope Vision School does not receive any government funding from the Palestinian Authority. Instead, it relies on parent tuition and donations from supporters in the United States and Europe.<sup>151</sup> House of Hope remains the only Waldorf kindergarten in the West Bank.

Although House of Hope does not exist within the same political boundaries as the other Waldorf educational institutions referenced earlier, it is a key part of the greater Arab Waldorf movement in Israel-Palestine.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>149</sup> Thea Lavin, *2019 House of Hope Annual Report* (United States, Supporting Hope: 2020) 2.

<sup>150</sup> Thea Lavin, *Building Palestine One Teacher at a Time. In Focus: House of Hope Teacher Training in 2019*, (United States: Supporting Hope, 2019) 2.

<sup>151</sup> Thea Lavin, *2020 House of Hope Annual Report* (United States: Supporting Hope, 2021) 10.

Waldorf pedagogy and approach to curriculum can heal trauma-affected children by incorporating key restorative strategies: repairing regulatory control and disrupted attachment while increasing psychological resources.

Given the presence of toxic stress in everyday life for Israeli children, it is no surprise that parental interest in holistic education has coalesced around Waldorf pedagogy. Waldorf schools have proliferated around Israel, but with a noticeable disparity between this pedagogy's availability in Jewish versus Arab communities. While there are approximately 200 Hebrew Waldorf kindergartens, elementary schools, and high schools in Israel,<sup>152</sup> there are only three bilingual or Arab Waldorf kindergartens and one Arab Waldorf school, despite strong parental interest.

The consequence is that PCI/Arab Israeli children, who are some of the most vulnerable in Israeli society, cannot adequately engage with the benefits of Waldorf Education.

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<sup>152</sup> Vainstein, "A School of Hope in Israel," 257-260.

# Obstacles to Arab Waldorf Success

Waldorf kindergartens and schools have been enormously successful in Israel over the past three decades, but — as was outlined in the previous section — this success has not extended to Arab Waldorf.

While the stories of each Waldorf educational institution are different, and the particular challenges they face are nuanced in relation to their organizational history and the municipality in which they are located, a series of common threads were identified as persistent roadblocks to Arab Waldorf success.

Through interviews with Arab Waldorf practitioners and invested parties, the authors have isolated five key obstacles that prevent the expansion of Arab Waldorf, which affect every stage of a Waldorf educational institution: from registering with the proper authorities, fundraising to overcome budget deficits, hiring suitable teachers, training interested Arabic speakers to become new Waldorf teachers, to supporting existing staff. As is explained in the following sections, these challenges show the difficulties in expanding holistic education in Israel and expose how the existing systems disproportionately negatively affect PCI/Arab Israeli citizens who attempt to expand educational options for their children.

## **Bureaucratic Nightmare: Systemic and Individual Biases in Registration**

The first step for any new educational institution in Israel is to navigate Israeli governmental bureaucracy and complete the registration process with the necessary authorities. This process diverges between Waldorf kindergartens and Waldorf schools: as most Waldorf kindergartens are “recognized but unofficial,” potential registrants must go directly to the Ministry of Education, while Waldorf schools typically are “recognized and official” schools, which means that they must apply to the individual municipality in which they are to be located. Both processes are littered with obstacles that impede — and at times, prevent — the successful opening of new Waldorf educational institutions, requiring applicants to exhibit acumen in the Israeli bureaucratic system to complete the process successfully.

### *Kindergartens*

The first step for parents interested in opening any new “recognized but unofficial” kindergarten is to be registered as an association, or, in Hebrew, an *amuta*. This entity will act as the operator of the new educational institution. Interested parents must apply to the Registrar of *Amuta* with a list of potential members, typically invested parents, and comply with a series of regulations, such as financial reporting and general compliance with existing regulations.

Once the parents have successfully registered as an association, that association may then apply to the Ministry of Education to open a kindergarten. First, the association will obtain a “symbol”

or registration number unique to the kindergarten and the classes it plans to operate. After this, the association will then attempt to complete the remaining forms, which include information from the number of teachers and assistants that the association will employ, to the days of the week on which the kindergarten will operate, and the long-term lease agreement or ownership documents of the location in which the kindergarten will operate. If the Ministry of Education is satisfied, the kindergarten is allowed to open and receives 60% funding for their work.

However, even if the forms are satisfactorily completed, and the school is allowed to open, the kindergarten must successfully navigate another bureaucratic process with members of their local municipality. Per Interior Ministry guidelines, municipalities are charged with providing services to towns such as urban planning, zoning, the provision of drinking water and emergency services, and education and culture. Municipalities, which may be disincentivized to aid “recognized but unofficial” schools which poach from their local state schools, may make the process harder, and the convoluted process — as the same document must be processed by three, or occasionally four, different entities before being accepted — often results in errors; correcting these inevitable mistakes requires additional time and effort.

The registration process remains an ongoing headache for kindergarten administrations every year. Months before starting the new school year, kindergartens must submit a list of students — first to the municipality, which will then send it to another department, before finally sending it to the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, suppose a kindergarten wishes to offer an additional class or to open another location. In that case, the administration must start the registration process again — every new class requires a new official Ministry of Education registration number.

Beni Mosenson was brought in by his daughter, Gal, to help Ein Bustan navigate the ongoing registration process while his granddaughter attended the school. He explained,

... [A]fter six seven [years] I know [how] I'll deal with it, Just today, I got the letter... [where] the signature down there in the fifth page, wasn't clear enough of them, even though the name of the guy who checked everything was on top of every one of the pages. Just today, they didn't accept one of the documents that [the school has] to provide for the next year. But [the school knows] how to deal with it, ‘Okay, you want another one? We'll make sure that next time it will be drawn with ink.’<sup>153</sup>

The chief challenge of this bureaucratic process is not necessarily the difficulty of the forms to complete — though they must all be completed online, with forms that allow applicants to often only select a choice from a list of potential responses that often do not accurately reflect the

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<sup>153</sup> Beni Mosenson, Interview, February 3, 2021.

profile of these unique schools — but the bureaucratic insight and the time that it takes to navigate it.

Although the process is completed yearly, the necessary forms often change with little warning, and the Ministry of Education often records information incorrectly. Often the forms themselves change from year to year and, without a communications strategy to liaise with small private schools, administrators often engage in the process of trial-and-error. As Beni Mosenson explained,

Just lately, they asked for a document, and they [knew] that I provided it... We had just been told to sign, the county [official] had to put his stamp on too, and it was so easy. I provided this document and then got it back. It's, 'You're mistaken. It's not the right document.' 'What are you talking about?' That's what they did last year, and I found out that they changed the terms; it's a different document.... But they [forgot] to tell me that they changed... the numbers. It was the numbers that should be 1A instead of P, for example.... You should be expecting changes every year.<sup>154</sup>

In 2020-2021, Ein Bustan was required to get new permissions from different government departments, including safety, security, and health. Once Beni Mosenson submitted the necessary documents, the Ministry of Education contacted him with an error message — they could not locate the school. “[The Ministry of Education] wrote... They told me, ‘Hilf, we don’t know what you are talking about. Where is the kindergarten?’ We told them, ‘...The kindergarten is in Hilf. Hilf is a part of Basmat Tiv’on. The kindergarten [has been] there [for] at least ten years...’ They told me, ‘No, in our registrations, we have [it] in a different place.’”<sup>155</sup>

After nearly seven years of managing this process, Mosenson is somewhat of an expert. “There are lawyer offices which deal with these problems. They make a lot of money, and, as we are struggling all the time with money, after one year that we tried them, I found out that most of the job I was doing for them...”<sup>156</sup> Mosenson also assists another private kindergarten in nearby Tiv’on with their registration process, as they also lack the funds to engage a lawyer for the process.

The process is no different for Jewish, Arab, or bilingual schools, but the system is biased to disfavor PCI/Arab Israeli applicants, particularly those who do not speak, read, or write Hebrew fluently.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Beni Mosenson, Interview by authors, Zoom, online, July 29, 2021.

<sup>156</sup> Beni Mosenson, Interview, February 3, 2021.

When Beni Mosenson began the process with an Ein Bustan employee, a PCI/Arab Israeli accountant with intermediate levels of Hebrew, he found that the Ministry of Education officials were uninterested in communicating with him: “He [the accountant] knew everything. He was great, but his Hebrew wasn’t excellent. . . . And I found that they didn’t have the patience to listen to him. Even though he was bright, he was clever, he knew everything, he could answer everything. So they asked me, I asked him, I explained. . . . There was no reason for that.”<sup>157</sup>

This bias against PCI/Arab Israelis is systemic at every level of the kindergarten registration process. From registering as an association to reporting to the Ministry of Education, every document must be completed in Hebrew. While the Registrar of Amutot at least offers some guidance on form completion in Arabic and English, though one document in either language in comparison to over 40 in Hebrew, the Ministry of Education only offers support in Hebrew.

### *Schools*

The process differs when interested parents attempt to open a new Waldorf school. Due to the previously mentioned agreement between the Association for Waldorf Education in Israel and the Ministry of Education, all Waldorf schools — elementary, middle, and high schools — can be considered state “recognized and official” schools. This entitles Waldorf schools to full funding from the Ministry of Education and the municipality, as well as the provision of a building in which to hold their classes.

However, to register as a “recognized and official” school, interested parents must apply to the municipality directly, showing sufficient parental interest with at least 30 children per class. The chief obstacle then becomes not systemic bias against PCI/Arab Israelis but the individual bias of the municipality officials against new schools that may compete with state schools for budget, PCI/Arab Israelis, bilingual education, or even Waldorf pedagogy itself.

The most basic cause of bias against new Waldorf schools is financial: accepting the application of a new state school would require that municipalities furnish a new school building and provide funding per student. If the new Waldorf school students already attend existing state schools, this means that the municipality must further divide their funding.

As Fadi Suidan of the Sonbulat Waldorf Association explained, this restricts the number of students that a Waldorf school can recruit if they want the municipality to look favorably upon their application. Suidan explained that, when the Sonbulat Waldorf Association recruited parents for the new school, they targeted parents and families who were sending their children to church schools: “... there's no other option. We can't take people from the government school because, if we do so, the government couldn't support us. Why? They said, ‘Look, we have 500 people in the government school. You take from me 50; it's not good. Take from the church

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

school, and I will open for you a school, a new one.”<sup>158</sup> While children from state schools may eventually choose to transfer to a Waldorf state school, new Waldorf schools must show that they are attracting children from outside of the state system in their initial application to not further divide the municipality’s existing funding.

Even if the financial situation is not an issue, applicants must then navigate the individual attitudes towards Waldorf education, as Gilad Goldschmidt explained: “So the problem...is always how to convince the local government, the local cities or the local education department, or the mayor of the city to establish a new school. If the local government want[s] it, we have no problem.”<sup>159</sup>

These individual biases from the municipality often manifest in relation to the power dynamic between PCI/Arab Israelis and Jewish Israelis.

Arab Waldorf practitioners report dismissive attitudes from municipality officials when presenting an application for a new Arab school. When the Sonbulat Waldorf Association attempted to register a new Waldorf elementary school, the Haifa municipality told the PCI/Arab Israeli parents who had wished to send their children to the Sonbulat kindergarten instead to send their children to the nearby Jewish Waldorf kindergarten, called Aliyah — named for the process of Jewish people immigrating to Israel.

Tally Bat Zahour of Tamrat El Zeitoun Waldorf School, who supported the registration process of the Sonbulat Waldorf Association, remarked in response to this suggestion, “There was no respect or consideration for the fact that [the PCI/Arab Israel parents] wanted to have their own school, rooted in their own traditions, in their own language.”<sup>160</sup>

Unfortunately, this dismissive and insensitive attitude towards PCI/Arab Israeli applications for new Waldorf schools is common. It often is a significant obstacle to successful new registrations of Arab Waldorf Schools and other Arab private schools throughout Israel.

Even if a parent association might pivot to apply as a private “recognized but unofficial” school, garner less funding, and circumvent the municipality approval process, the Ministry of Education also takes a more stringent outlook on school applications than they make kindergarten applications.

Ein Bustan, a successful bilingual kindergarten for over 15 years, attempted to open a “recognized but unofficial” elementary school approximately a decade ago. The school operated

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<sup>158</sup> Fadi Suidan, Interview by authors, Zoom, online, August 24, 2021.

<sup>159</sup> Gilad Goldschmidt, Interview by authors, Zoom, online, August 9, 2021.

<sup>160</sup> Bat Zahor, Interview, June 11, 2020.

as a homeschool with the intention to transition to “recognized but unofficial” status before Beni Mosenson was involved; he then completed the necessary forms to register it correctly with the Ministry of Education. Their application was denied.

Beni Mosenson recalled, “It is supposed to be like kindergarten, but everything is even more complicated.... When [the Ein Bustan elementary] school...was started...[the Ministry of Education] told us, ‘Look, there is no reason to open a school because it's Jewish Arabic...’”<sup>161</sup> The Ministry of Education did not recognize the value of opening a bilingual school in an area with no such options, so the Ein Bustan application was denied.

### **Bridging the Gap: Fundraising in the Face of Communal Poverty**

Once properly registered through the Ministry of Education or the municipality, Waldorf kindergartens and schools must then prepare to operate their new educational institutions: the first step of this process is to ensure that they have proper funding. All Waldorf kindergartens and schools immediately confront the inadequacy of state funding to implement their programs. As outlined in the following pages, while the inadequacy of funding for Waldorf schools is a problem throughout Israel, Arab Waldorf schools are uniquely disadvantaged to make up these funding deficits because of pronounced communal poverty and governmental funding disparity.

Once a school or kindergarten is registered correctly, it receives some funding from the Ministry of Education. The amount depends on the classification: around 60%, or two-thirds, for “recognized but unofficial” kindergartens and 100% for “recognized and official” schools. “Recognized and official” Waldorf schools may be eligible for additional funding by implementing supplementary programs, but these programs are mainly cultural programs solely for Jewish Israeli students. These percentages are in relation to the base-level of funding provided by the Ministry of Education for schools to operate; in reality, many Jewish Israeli state schools receive funding above that 100% base-level funding.

The Israeli government was meant to repair this disparity as part of a five-year plan to invest five billion shekels (\$1.46 billion) in bolstering Arab education from 2016 to 2020. But as the funds were squandered, and only 30% of the allocated funds were released, the effects have been minimal.<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, other earmarked programs perpetuate the inequality: “...there are special project budget fundings that are only available for Jews,” Tally Bat Zahor explained.<sup>163</sup> “Projects for Zionism and going to the oldest settlements. Once you get down to the reality in Israel, you see that there is a huge gap between Jews and Arabs.”

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<sup>161</sup> Beni Mosenson, Interview, July 29, 2021.

<sup>162</sup> Danny Zaken, “Push to revamp education funding falls flat in Israel,” Al-Monitor, July 20, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/07/israel-benjamin-netanyahu-pisa-PCI/Arab-education-system-oecd.html#ixzz6qEN6Sxkf>

<sup>163</sup> Bat Zahor, Interview, June 11, 2020.

This clarification is important because the actual costs of Waldorf schools and kindergartens far exceed even the total base-level state funding.

This is due to a variety of reasons, and these reasons are tied intrinsically to the essence of Waldorf. Waldorf kindergartens and schools often require materials that are not common in other state schools, such as varied art products — including felt, wood, and musical instruments — and the curriculum requires additional teachers for specialized courses such as eurythmy. Even outside of these specialized courses, Waldorf schools and kindergartens require more teachers than a typical state school because they operate at far lower teacher-to-student ratios, as each teacher focuses considerable energy on individual student development; the Ministry of Education will fund one teacher’s salary for every 30 children, which far exceeds the recommended student-teacher ratio for Waldorf institutions.

This creates a problem for Waldorf kindergartens and schools, which are not allowed to charge tuition or fees to parents: for kindergartens, they are not permitted because kindergarten is a mandatory school for parents, and for Waldorf schools, they are not allowed to because they are technically state-run schools. State-run schools in Israel are only allowed to charge for particular extra expenses, and the total must be below 1000 NIS a year.

To circumvent these regulations, Waldorf schools and kindergartens must operate an association or *amuta*. As referenced in the previous section, kindergartens must belong to an *amuta* before they can be registered, but this step is not necessary when applying to the municipality to open a “recognized and official” Waldorf school; for many schools, creating an association is an additional, supplementary step solely for funding purposes.

This is the only way kindergartens and schools can make up the funding differential between the actual costs of operating a Waldorf institution and the funding that the state provides, but this process of soliciting donations for an educational institution in the categories outlined above is not technically legal. However, as Gilad Goldschmidt of the Waldorf Association admits, “most of the school[s] in Israel need more money. It's not enough...[but] it's not allowed. So it's a bit not legal step to take money from the parents from the association. Everyone do[es] it, everyone does it, everyone do[es] it, but it's not really allowed.”<sup>164</sup>

The need to source additional funds from external sources is not unique to Arab Waldorf — but the difficulty in sourcing sufficient funds disproportionately affects PCI/Arab Israeli communities.

PCI/Arab Israelis, on average, earn significantly less than their Jewish Israeli peers — and recent data shows that this gap is expanding. Of the nearly 2 million Israelis who live in poverty,

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<sup>164</sup> Goldschmidt, Interview, August 9, 2021.

PCI/Arab Israelis account for over 700,000 of those individuals or 35% percent of those in poverty, vastly exceeding their proportion of the general population.<sup>165</sup> Although those in poverty account for 23% of all Israelis and 31.7% of all Israeli children, a much more significant percentage of the PCI/Arab Israeli population lies below the poverty line: 35.8% are in poverty, and over 44% are classified as ‘poor.’<sup>166,167</sup> Despite government programs intended to tackle this societal problem, the gap has only expanded.

This gap encompasses wealth inequality in terms of poverty levels and applies to income earned at every demographic level. In 2018, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics published a study which showed that, on average, PCI/Arab Israeli women made 36% less than Jewish Israeli women, and an even wider gap for PCI/Arab Israeli men, who made 39.1% less than Jewish Israeli men.<sup>168</sup> As of 2019, the average monthly salary in Israel was 11,004 NIS, but this average obfuscates the wealth inequality in Israel — 66.5% of salaried workers in Israel make less than the average, with most of the wealth concentrated in the high tech sector.<sup>169</sup>

An earlier study by the same institution showed that this wealth gap actually widens with greater educational achievement: while PCI/Arab Israeli men with eight years of education or less only made 13.5% less than Jewish Israeli men with similar educational levels, when comparing incomes of PCI/Arab Israeli men and Jewish Israeli men with 16 years of education (the equivalent of completing an undergraduate degree), the gap widened further to 33.8%.<sup>170</sup> This puts Waldorf outside of the means of most Israeli families, but particularly Arab Israeli families who disproportionately live in poverty.

This income gap negatively affects the additional funding Waldorf schools can garner.

Some schools overcome the funding disparity through additional donations from the municipality, which supplements the base level of funding from the Ministry of Education — but this is only possible if the municipality has a strong tax base and possesses surplus funds. Furthermore, the budget is likely to be distributed amongst the schools, not explicitly diverted to

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<sup>165</sup> “About two million Israelis live below the poverty line — report,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Jerusalem, Israel), January 22, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israel-report-about-two-million-people-live-below-the-poverty-line-656317>

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> “1.8 million Israelis — half of them children — live in poverty,” *Times of Israel* (Jerusalem, Israel), December 31, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/1-8-million-israelis-half-of-them-children-live-in-poverty-government/>

<sup>168</sup> Sivan Klingbail and Lior Dattel, “Only 9 Percent of Arab Israeli Men Complete Undergraduate Degrees,” *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv, Israel), December 12, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-only-9-percent-of-israeli-arab-men-complete-undergraduate-degrees-1.8258872>

<sup>169</sup> Luke Tress, “Average Israeli salary rises slightly to NIS 11,004 per month,” *Times of Israel* (Jerusalem, Israel), October 6, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/average-israeli-salary-rises-slightly-to-nis-11004-per-month/>

<sup>170</sup> Moti Bassok, “Wage gap between Israeli Jews and Arab Counterparts Widens,” *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv, Israel) November 23, 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-wage-gap-between-israeli-jews-arabs-widens-1.5465521>

those who incur disproportionately large operating expenses (such as Waldorf schools). As was noted above, the requirement to possess surplus funds from a strong tax base precludes many Arab municipalities from making substantial donations to Waldorf kindergartens or schools, even if they were so inclined.

Waldorf schools must then turn to their associations to solicit additional funds from parents, which again disadvantages PCI/Arab Israeli communities. Hebrew Waldorf schools and kindergartens are well-positioned to solicit donations from parents: students who attend Hebrew Waldorf schools often belong to the most well-off socioeconomic groups in Israel primarily due to tuition fees; for one child to attend, the Oded Waldorf School in Northern Israel charges 1000 NIS per month,<sup>171</sup> while the Janusz Korczak Waldorf School in Southern Israel charges a monthly fee of 770 NIS.<sup>172</sup>

Average private school tuition payments are often outside the means of PCI/Arab Israeli parents. For even some of the most moderately priced Waldorf schools, such as the Janusz Korczak Waldorf School, the published monthly tuition would account for roughly 10% of a PCI/Arab Israeli man's income for just one child; for the average PCI/Arab Israeli family with three children, this would account for 30% of their income, not taking into account any other incidental educational costs.<sup>173</sup>

This is a problem that the most established Arab Waldorf institution, Tamrat El-Zeitoun, experiences. "In Tiv'on, it is a very well-off community. [They can] pay maybe 1000 shekels per month for a child. This is out of the question at Tamrat El Zeitoun. When it comes to the economy, it's not even comparable. I am not even talking about Waldorf schools that have a strong parent community that can raise money. My metaphor for Tamrat El Zeitoun is that it is a sardine that is swimming against Niagara Falls," said Tally Bat Zahor.<sup>174</sup>

Another teacher at Tamrat El Zeitoun echoed that sentiment: "We have financial problems. Not all parents can pay the tuition. ...Compared to a traditional school in Israel, the parents at Tamrat El Zeitoun pay more. We have a lot of challenges; it's not easy for us."<sup>175</sup>

Given these factors, Tamrat El Zeitoun charges parents less than half of the tuition other Waldorf schools in Israel charge, at only 300 NIS a month.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> "Oded Waldorf School," Nefesh B'Nefesh, March 2020, accessed July 27, 2021, <https://www.nbn.org.il/aliyahpedia/education-ulpan/school-profiles/oded-waldorf-school/>

<sup>172</sup> "Janusz Korczak School," Nefesh B'Nefesh, February 2015, accessed July 27, 2021, <https://www.nbn.org.il/aliyahpedia/education-ulpan/school-profiles/he-janusz-korczak-school-waldorf/>

<sup>173</sup> "Media Release 047/2021," State of Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, February 10, 2021, [https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2021/047/11\\_21\\_047e.pdf](https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2021/047/11_21_047e.pdf)

<sup>174</sup> Bat Zahor, Interview, June 11, 2020.

<sup>175</sup> Husein, Interview, May 28, 2020.

<sup>176</sup> Thea Lavin, *2020 Middle East Programs Report* (Agoura Hills, CA: reGeneration Education, 2020) 6.

This funding disparity can be attributed to a variety of societal factors — including factors previously alluded to in this paper, such as employment discrimination and educational inequity — but it has particular effects on the success of Waldorf, as private schools must source some amount of their funds from parent contributions. For Arab Waldorf to flourish in PCI/Arab Israeli communities, the vast majority of whom are composed solely of PCI/Arab Israeli residents, there must be another source of support. The current funding structure that relies on municipality contributions reinforces systems of inequality that disproportionately affect the PCI/Arab Israelis and entrenches systemic educational disparities.

### **The Endless Line: Hiring Difficulties for PCI/Arab Israeli Teachers**

Once a school or kindergarten is officially registered and has secured enough funding to operate a Waldorf institution, the administration or association must now find appropriate teachers. However, as with the other steps outlined above, this process presents a series of obstacles for new Waldorf institutions that disproportionately affect Arab Waldorf schools.

#### *Kindergartens*

As “recognized but unofficial” schools, Waldorf kindergartens operate in a particular niche that allows them certain hiring freedoms. For decades, there were virtually no restrictions on hiring in terms of teacher qualifications; when hiring requirements were added around seven years ago, the Ministry of Education required that a kindergarten have one “head teacher” with a bachelor of arts in education. Although funds from the Ministry of Education pay for the other teachers' salaries, the ministry does not impose education or certification requirements for additional hires.

This did present a problem for Waldorf kindergartens at the time, as many of their teachers had received training from unaccredited Waldorf teacher training institutions. In the case of Ein Bustan, they were required to hire a new teacher to meet the Ministry of Education’s new requirements.

#### *Schools*

However, as “recognized but unofficial” schools, Arab Waldorf kindergartens escape the more stringent requirements that are in place for hiring new teachers at Arab Waldorf schools.

As “recognized and official” schools, Waldorf schools must follow stricter hiring guidelines from the Ministry of Education than the “recognized but unofficial” Waldorf kindergartens. These guidelines pertain to the qualifications necessary for an individual to be hired and the hiring process itself.

The standard way a “recognized and official” Arab school may hire new teachers is directly through the Ministry of Education by drawing from a long waitlist of eligible PCI/Arab Israeli teachers, called ‘The Line.’ Tally Bat Zahour of Tamrat El Zeitoun explained,

Why are there so many teachers? Because so many of them can’t get jobs, either in high tech or government positions or in other positions simply because they are discriminated against. They simply couldn’t get the jobs. So instead, they do a teacher certificate and become teachers. We have teachers in our schools who are engineers because they just couldn't get the job as engineers or architects. Many of our teachers are educated to be something that every Jewish mother would be very proud of. But they just can't do their jobs, so they become teachers because there are a lot of Arab schools, so you can get a job there.<sup>177</sup>

Over 14,000 PCI/Arab Israelis are currently in line to become teachers. The number of individuals seeking a teaching position in Arab schools vastly outpaces the number of vacancies. This led to the creation of ‘The Line’, a line of potential teachers with teaching certificates overseen by the Ministry of Education. The Line is arranged chronologically: you will come to the front of the line by order of when you registered interest in teaching positions.

This phenomenon is related to rampant employment discrimination, outlined briefly in the earlier section; this discrimination affects the type of jobs that PCI/Arab Israelis occupy and their level of pay, and how often these individuals are hired at all. The current unemployment rate for PCI/Arab Israeli men is twice that of Jewish Israeli men. Women are particularly affected, with the unemployment rate of PCI/Arab Israeli women three times that of Jewish Israeli women.<sup>178</sup> Teaching is seen as a fallback for PCI/Arab Israelis who are unsuccessful in the broader job market.

The phenomenon of The Line exists only in Arab schools run by the Ministry of Education; there is no equivalent in Hebrew sector schools. Gilad Goldschmidt explained,

In the Jewish schools in Israel, we [do not have] enough teachers. In the Arabic sector, we have too many teachers.... And because of that, only for the Arabic schools, there is a line. If you finish [...] the seminar, finish your training as [a] teacher, you have to wait. It can be ten years, 15 years until you have a real job in the Ministry of Education as [an] Arab teacher.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Bat Zahor, Interview, June 11, 2020.

<sup>178</sup> “Arabs of Israel, minority with deep-seated grievances,” France 24, May 13, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210513-arabs-of-israel-minority-with-deep-seated-grievances>

<sup>179</sup> Gilad Goldschmidt, Interview, August 9, 2021.

The main challenge presented by The Line for Arab Waldorf Schools is that it is a hiring *line*, not a hiring pool. When a school hires from The Line, they cannot select a suitable applicant for hire from the group of certificated individuals; instead, schools must hire whoever has waited in line the longest. This means that the individual rarely has any knowledge of Waldorf, much less exposure to its teaching principles, and often has little interest in engaging in the intensive training necessary to form a Waldorf teacher.

There is a second option that allows Arab Waldorf Schools to circumvent The Line, which was negotiated with the Ministry of Education by the Waldorf Association of Israel, an existing institution that supports Waldorf throughout Israel. The negotiated arrangement allows Arab Waldorf schools to hire from outside The Line if the teacher has a bachelor's of education and four years of Waldorf training at an accredited institution; these requirements can be obtained concurrently if at an applicable institution.

Negotiating this second avenue for teacher hiring was a tremendous success by the Waldorf Association of Israel, but the victory is somewhat deceptive. It is rare to find PCI/Arab Israelis who possess this very specialized type of training due to affordability, language barriers, and the cultural competency of teacher training curriculums outlined in the next section.

To circumvent the restrictions caused by the Ministry of Education hiring requirements, Arab Waldorf schools can hire teachers without these qualifications but cannot use funding from the Ministry of Education. These teachers are classified as “association employees,” not school employees, and these are generally small jobs.

The Line affects Waldorf educational institutions and the aspirations of PCI/Arab Israelis who wish to teach Waldorf but cannot afford the four years of additional Waldorf-specific training or wait in line for years as those before them are hired. Other individuals with sufficient Hebrew eschew Arab Waldorf and Arab education entirely and instead teach in Hebrew schools, where there is a teacher shortage: A student in the unaccredited Seeds/Boudur Bilingual Waldorf Training Institute bypassed The Line by teaching literature in a Hebrew school while completing her masters.

Noa Leshem-Gradus, the co-founder of Seeds/Boudur, remarked on how this affects graduates,

We have a student [who has been] waiting for ten years. Aulfat [co-founder of Seeds/Boudur, a PCI/Arab Israeli woman] said she's waiting for an opportunity to jump the line.... [W]e have [another] student [whose turn in line has come]... and now she [is teaching in a] public kindergarten and she's trying to bring in [Waldorf] elements from her studies and the seminar to this public regular kindergarten.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Leshem-Gradus, Interview, September 10, 2020.

### **Inaccessible and Culturally Irrelevant Teacher Training**

Given the relationship between hiring requirements and teacher certifications, teacher training programs are key to expanding Arab Waldorf kindergartens and schools. The lack of affordable and culturally relevant Waldorf teacher training programs in Israel is a significant challenge to the Arab Waldorf movement.

“[At Tamrat El-Zeitoun, w]e cannot just take a good emerging Waldorf teacher, and say train yourself,” Bat Zahor explained. “This is what the Jewish Waldorf schools can do.”<sup>181</sup>

Arab Waldorf schools and kindergartens are challenged no matter how they hire their teachers: if they hire a teacher with a bachelor’s of education through The Line, the school must arrange for sufficient Waldorf training after the teacher’s hiring; if a school wishes to take advantage of the second hiring pathway, they must locate a teacher with not only Waldorf training but from an accredited university which the Ministry of Education will accept.

Both challenges highlight a particular obstacle for the Arab Waldorf movement: a lack of suitable teacher training courses.

In Israel, there are currently seven Waldorf training institutions. Only two are accredited: David Yellin College of Education and Oranim Academic College, both offer Waldorf training in conjunction with their bachelor of education program. The other five — Urim School in Ramat Hasharon, Somer School in Ramat Gan, Korzack School in Beer-Sheva, Rimon School in Pardes Hana, and Shaked School in Kiryat Ti’von<sup>182</sup> — are unaccredited, which means that while a teacher might be able to gain foundational knowledge about Waldorf through their training programs, the Ministry of Education will not accept any certification from these institutions to skip The Line.

The utility of these different Waldorf teacher training programs — accredited versus unaccredited — differs between Waldorf kindergartens and Waldorf schools.

As was outlined earlier, Waldorf kindergartens have very few hiring requirements once they hire a single teacher with a bachelor’s of education; because these teachers are not required to possess Waldorf training before they are hired, any additional training is seen as supplemental, and therefore they can attend either accredited or unaccredited Waldorf teacher training programs for professional development purposes. However, these programs are taught in Hebrew; the only

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<sup>181</sup> Bat Zahor, Interview, June 11, 2020.

<sup>182</sup> Shaked School is unaccredited, but also works in conjunction with Oranim Academic College to provide their Waldorf coursework. This means that Shaked, while unaccredited, offers two tracks: the unaccredited track with once weekly meetings for current teachers and the accredited track, which is taken at Shaked but through Oranim Academic College as part of their bachelor’s of education program.

unaccredited bilingual Waldorf teacher training program, Seeds/Boudur, closed during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Furthermore, while the schedule may accommodate a working teacher's commitments, these programs are often more expensive than accredited ones.

To be hired by an Arab or bilingual Waldorf school and skip The Line of waiting certified PCI/Arab Israeli teachers, an individual must receive training from an accredited Waldorf teacher training institution. The programs at David Yellin College of Education and Oranim Academic College are more rigorous and respected than programs offered at unaccredited institutions and often cost less. However, the time commitment to attend a regular four-year university far from home is a challenge for many PCI/Arab Israelis, who remove themselves from the job market and eschew the possibility to help ease familial financial burdens in the short term, which is often quite a heavy burden, as many PCI/Arab Israeli families live near to poverty. Furthermore, even with its reduced cost compared to unaccredited institutions, university fees present a challenge as well: Oranim charges 12,500 NIS per year for the four-year degree, along with an additional 2000 NIS a year for a Waldorf training program for the last three years. This is near twice the average monthly salary of PCI/Arab Israeli workers.<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, even if an aspiring PCI/Arab Israeli Waldorf teacher was able to attend these programs, there are no culturally relevant Waldorf teacher training programs in Israel. There are no Waldorf teacher training programs in Arabic.

This is a point of contention between Jewish and Arab Waldorf practitioners in Israel. Leaders in the Jewish Waldorf movement do not believe Hebrew-only Waldorf institutions pose an inherent obstacle to the growth of Waldorf in PCI/Arab Israeli communities. The founder and current Chairman of the Association for Waldorf Education, Gilad Goldschmidt, remains adamant that Hebrew is the only suitable language for teacher training: "...[T]he best solution in my eyes is what we have now in Oranim [College, which offers Waldorf teacher training]... we have a group of about 25 students and a third [of them] are Arab students. Now we speak Hebrew. The book and the reviews are [in] Hebrew or English, okay, because it's the academic language... and it's an effort for [the] Arab students, but it's very, very good. And sometimes, they speak Arabic among them. It's also good. So I think that's the best solution."<sup>184</sup>

Furthermore, Goldschmidt asserts that all Waldorf instruction should be in Hebrew and English, regardless of age or demographic: "...[T]he academic language in Israel is Hebrew, English, and Hebrew.... [I]n my experience, it's very Tavoron good for the students, for the young students,

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<sup>183</sup> Klingbail and Dattel, "Only 9 percent of Israeli Arab Men Complete Undergraduate Degrees."

<sup>184</sup> Goldschmidt, Interview, July 23, 2020.

Arabic students, to study with Jewish students in Hebrew.... I mean, I don't know if it's good or bad. But it's the language of Israel.”<sup>185</sup>

However, PCI/Arab Israeli Waldorf practitioners push back against that interpretation.

After studying Waldorf in Hebrew at David Yellin College of Education, Lana Nasrallah of Tamrat El-Zeitoun emphasizes the irony of the lack of Arabic instruction: “Steiner said that if you want to teach something, it must be [a]live. It must be real. So our language must [bring its] own values to the music, to the words....” As a student, Lana related to Arabic music from Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, that she felt embodied Waldorf ideology and was connected to Arab culture, but the Waldorf curriculum for teacher training abstained from including Arabic influences while incorporating other cultural influences from Africa and Asia. “Why [can] I sing in English and in Hebrew, and they don’t bring anything in Arabic? In David Yellin, they don’t. [They used] an African song and [a] German [song, but] they don't bring in Arabic. Why?”<sup>186</sup>

Nasrallah emphasizes the effect of Hebrew-only instruction: it subjugates the Arabic language and the culture of PCI/Arab Israelis. By not incorporating Arabic into instruction, mainstream Waldorf instruction in Israel also ignores Arab culture.

“I know that David Yellin [College of Education] has a lot of things....” Nasrallah explained. “I am not against David Yellin. But they don’t bring my voice. They don’t bring my voice.”<sup>187</sup>

Tamrat El Zeitoun’s Arabic collegium teacher training and Seeds/Boudur Bilingual Waldorf Teacher Training Institute have sought to fill this gap by providing Arabic language training for new or prospective Waldorf educators in the form of professional development sessions held after school or on the weekend, but these programs are labor-intensive for providers, who often are full-time Waldorf teachers themselves. Additionally, neither teacher training program is accredited by the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, they provide a vital stopgap measure for Arab Waldorf institutions who need their teachers to understand the basics of Waldorf pedagogy in their native tongue.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Lana Nasrallah, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, July 9, 2020.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

As a Jewish Israeli who has worked with PCI/Arab Israeli Waldorf practitioners, Noa Leshem-Gradus emphasizes the importance of Arabic instruction in Waldorf: “There's a complexity that it's not just foreign language...because there is a political complexity [as] well. Of being a minority, or of a culture that is disappearing that is so rich. And [it is] so important to not disappear.”<sup>188</sup>

### **Pressures at School and Home: High Risk of Teacher Burnout**

For teachers in both Arab Waldorf schools and kindergartens, the confluence of these obstacles to successfully operating a Waldorf educational institution can have severe consequences on their mental health. The deficit in funding and the lack of culturally appropriate teacher training programs for Arab Waldorf means that teachers in Arab Waldorf have the daunting task of trying to bridge the gap themselves: by doing the work of multiple teachers while also preparing culturally relevant Waldorf material for their students.

It is common for even experienced teachers to lean on resources that facilitate instruction in teaching. Common examples of such resources include teacher training manuals, teacher workbooks, and sample lesson plans from other educators in similar grades and areas of instruction. It can also include sample games or songs that can enrich the learning experience.

There is a glaring lack of readily available Waldorf resources in Arabic. There are currently only two books that can be used as instructional resources for Waldorf, which have been translated into Arabic: *The World of Childhood* by Gilad Goldschmidt and *Spelling Characters in the Land of Happiness* by Lana Nasrallah.<sup>189,190</sup> Both books were published less than two years before this report. While there are other Waldorf schools in the Arab world — notably in the Gulf States and even directly east, in Jordan — these schools administer the Waldorf curriculum in English. There are no readily available Waldorf teacher workbooks, sample lesson plans, or even songs and games in Arabic.

The onus to bridge this gap in resource availability falls onto the shoulders of existing Arab Waldorf educators, who are required to translate existing Waldorf resources from Hebrew into Arabic and to adjust it to incorporate PCI/Arab Israeli culture. The act of translation is loaded with nuance, as Eyal Bloch of David Yellin College of Education explains, “...it's not simple to translate because in Arabic you have the spoken language and you have the written language.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Leshem-Gradus, Interview, September 10, 2020.

<sup>189</sup> Gilad Goldschmidt, *The World of Childhood*, trans. Markuz Halabi. (Haifa, Israel: Harduf Press, 2020).

<sup>190</sup> Lana Nasrallah, *Spelling Characters in the Land of Happiness*, trans Markuz Halabi. (self-pub., <https://www.lanasrallah.com/>: 2020).

<sup>191</sup> Clive Holes, *Modern Arabic: Structures, Functions, and Varieties* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004) 3-5. Arabic is commonly divided into three large subgroups: Quranic Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, and dialectal Arabic. Modern Standard Arabic is often used in television, newspapers, and books, while dialectal Arabic instead is used in everyday conversations; the difference between “written Arabic” (Modern Standard) and “spoken language” (dialectal Arabic) can be vast in terms of vocabulary and grammatical rules.

Maybe you translate it beautifully from German to the written language, how many people can understand it? Because it's not only the language, it's the philosophy. It's many, many things. It's not [a] simple translation.”<sup>192</sup>

The difficulty surrounding translation is rooted in the dialect and other nuances within the Arabic language and the nuance of Waldorf pedagogy, which is loaded with concepts and terms that are difficult for a layperson to grasp. Concepts such as anthroposophy and eurythmy have no easy translation into any language for a translator or an audience that is not already knowledgeable about the ideas.

The need for more resources was repeated in numerous stakeholder interviews, from David Yellin College of Education to Tamrat El Zeitoun and Ein Bustan Waldorf School. The lack of resources makes teaching Waldorf — which itself is often an immersive experience — that much more effort-intensive for the Arab Waldorf teachers, as the responsibility for translation and curriculum creation falls on to the teachers themselves.

Additionally, these teachers — many of whom have not received formal Waldorf training — must continue to pursue niche skills that are necessary for a Waldorf classroom, such as handicrafts, eurythmy, and the playing of musical instruments. Different teachers may take on these roles in other schools, but due to budget constraints and hiring difficulties, one teacher will often assume all of these responsibilities. Laila Husein, a teacher at Tamrat El Zeitoun, described an average day:

We run from lesson to lesson. Every teacher in this country gets their salary from the Ministry of Education, but we in Waldorf work double [the hours in comparison to non-Waldorf teachers]. Today, I got home at 5 pm, because we had collegium. Twice a week we have collegium [after school Waldorf teacher training] where we stay late to get our training. It's not easy. All of us, the women who work at Tamrat El Zeitoun, are superwomen.<sup>193</sup>

Laila Husein added, “I compare myself to other teachers in a regular school. In the afternoon, they are free. I have a lot to do. Like before I taught 3rd grade, I had to spend the entire summer translating a book so that I can teach it for one period. For me, it takes a lot of effort.”<sup>194</sup>

The pressures of the classroom — taking on the roles of multiple teachers while also building culturally and linguistically appropriate lessons — combined with societal pressures on Arab

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<sup>192</sup> Bloch, Interview, September 3, 2020.

<sup>193</sup> Husein, Interview, May 28, 2020.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

Waldorf teachers to create a highly stressful environment. Most Arab Waldorf teachers are women, and while PCI/Arab Israeli culture is slowly changing, they are expected to observe family customs and the female role in the house-hold, including care of the children and older adults, once they are finished with their day jobs.<sup>195</sup> This leaves female Arab Waldorf teachers in an untenable position.

As PCI/Arab society slowly changes, Arab Waldorf schools' mostly female teaching staff often encounter conflicts between their role as family caretakers and professional educators. While on the one hand, Laila Husein reflected, she felt the pressure to be an excellent Waldorf teacher, but “[o]n the other hand, I need to be a good mom to help my kids, be a good mom, cook, and clean the house. I have decided for next year, I cannot be a main teacher, because I am so tired. I have no more energy, and I cannot go to the classroom with no preparation.”<sup>196</sup>

Lana Nasrallah, one of the founding teachers of Tamrat El-Zeitoun, left the school because of this constant struggle. She now works as a Waldorf teacher trainer for PCI/ Arab Israelis and Arabic teacher in Hebrew Waldorf schools.

## **Conclusion**

The obstacles outlined above affect Waldorf educational institutions throughout their proverbial life as an organization, from establishing a new school or kindergarten to expanding an existing educational institution to reach more children. These obstacles affect Waldorf schools and kindergartens of all sorts, from the most established Arab Waldorf school in Israel, Tamrat El Zeitoun, to what would have been the newest, Sonbulat Waldorf School, which was never opened.

The effects of this are not limited to stymying the professional ambition amongst potential Waldorf administrators and teachers — though this is also of grave concern, given high unemployment and communal poverty in PCI/Arab Israeli communities — but perhaps more seriously, these pervasive challenges prevent PCI/Arab Israeli children from accessing the type of education they need to address their persistent trauma.

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<sup>195</sup> Adi Vitman-Schorr and Liat Ayalon, "The Changing Status of Israeli Arab Women as Reflected in Their Role as Main Caregivers," *Journal of Family Issues*, 41, no. 11 (2020): 2203-2222.

<sup>196</sup> Husein, Interview, May 28, 2020.

# The Arab Waldorf Growth Platform

To address the obstacles which impede the growth of Arab Waldorf in Israel, reGeneration Education proposes the Arab Waldorf Growth Platform, a multifaceted response rooted in the expertise and testimonies of existing PCI/Arab Israeli and Jewish Israeli Waldorf practitioners.

The Arab Waldorf Growth Platform outlined below, and the proposed networks which will implement it are based on the extensive interviews conducted by reGeneration Education's advisory board from March 2020 until September 2021. Subjects were selected because of their role within Arab Waldorf and Waldorf in Israel; they were selected either from personal contacts with reGeneration Education personnel or through recommendations from other interviewees. Certain individuals were asked for a second interview to expand upon subjects addressed in their first interview or clarify particular statements. The authors centralized the interviewees' perspectives and visions when outlining the recommended tasks and the implementation method. From these interviews, the report's authors have selected specific, actionable tasks mentioned by numerous participants that would facilitate the growth of Arab Waldorf in Israel.

The implementation of the Arab Waldorf Growth Platform will rely on a network approach, both to utilize extant knowledge and to strengthen connections between Waldorf teachers and leaders — between those in the Arab and bilingual Waldorf communities, and between those groups and the Jewish Waldorf practitioners — which will galvanize future growth for the Arab Waldorf movement. Each task will be assigned to a network of educators, administrators, or parties implicated in the success of Arab Waldorf. Furthermore, this network approach implicates all related parties in the movement's success. In a society shared between Jewish Israelis and PCI/Arab Israelis, it is necessary to empower every citizen to take ownership of their unique position in the ongoing educational inequality between fellow citizens of Israel. Articulating networks and roles for Jewish and PCI/Arab Israelis to support Arab Waldorf provides tangible opportunities for individuals to take an active role in the success of this movement. Ultimately, we believe that the greatest progress for Arab Waldorf will be achieved when Waldorf practitioners in the state of Israel, be they Jewish or Arab, work together.

In this section, we will present our recommendations in two ways. First, we will outline the tangible actions that should be taken to further Arab Waldorf in Israel, both by sustaining existing institutions and by preparing for the expansion of Arab Waldorf in additional communities. Second, we will devise a strategy of implementing these changes, dividing tasks between networks of those implicated in the growth of Arab Waldorf.

## **Seven Actionable Opportunities for Arab Waldorf Growth**

The Arab Waldorf Growth Platform contains seven actionable opportunities derived from the needs expressed through the interviews conducted by reGeneration Education from March 2020

to September 2021. We assert that these actions represent compelling avenues for growth in the Arab Waldorf movement and will lay a strong foundation for scaling Waldorf in Arab communities in Israel and throughout the Arab World.

*Action 1: Translate Waldorf Materials*

This was an obstacle highlighted in nearly every interview. The lack of comprehensive Waldorf materials in Arabic creates a disconnect between the extensive Waldorf scholarship — including teacher training manuals, parent engagement strategies, and teaching materials, amongst others — and the Arab and bilingual institutions in Israel, with Waldorf institutions throughout the Arab World when the need arrives. This need was outlined eloquently by Tally Bat Zahor, formerly of Tamrat El Zeitoun: “We need to translate Anthroposophy to Arabic. If we do this, it will spread Anthroposophy and Waldorf to the Arab World. I think that you can see through this need for translation, the vision. Even though we are struggling with our little school, we have this vision to spread this good to so many other places [in the Arab World].”<sup>197</sup>

In the words of Laban Abu Aulfat Altouree, translated by Noa Leshem-Gradus, formerly of Seeds/Boudur, this is not just to meet the need for a transactional exchange of information, but also to inspire inner reflection and emotional growth; there is an intangible quality that Waldorf teachers receive when accessing materials in their language: “... the difference, she say[s], [is] between the head and the heart, so she can understand it, but it's still... it's like one of the students told us this example that, ‘I understand Hebrew, but when I hear it in Arabic, I feel it in my blood.’”<sup>198</sup>

More Waldorf materials translated into Arabic will support the growth of Waldorf in PCI/Arab Israeli communities and lessen the workload of PCI/Arab Israeli teachers.

*Action 2: Offer Culturally Relevant Professional Development*

The lack of material and training to centralize or integrate the Arabic language and Palestinian culture creates an additional burden on Arab Waldorf teachers, as they are then tasked with creating new activities or adapting existing practices to meet the cultural needs of their students. This need is not currently being met by the existing teacher training institutions in Israel. For many Waldorf teachers who have already received Waldorf training, this supplementary support will be best provided through professional development opportunities to supplement their existing training.

Two Arab Waldorf institutions — the school, Tamrat El Zeitoun, and the kindergarten, The Orchard of Abraham’s Children — currently offer supplementary training for their staffs, but the

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<sup>197</sup> Bat Zahor, Interview, June 11, 2020.

<sup>198</sup> Abu Aulfat Altouree, Interview, September 10, 2020.

need surpasses available teacher training resources as the only dedicated bilingual Waldorf teacher training institution, Seeds/Boudur, closed in 2020.

Implementing additional professional development for PCI/Arab Israeli teachers about the intersection between Waldorf and Palestinian culture will allow teachers to learn new skills and provide them with the opportunity to collaborate between schools and kindergartens. This will ultimately provide greater institutional knowledge around Arab culture in Waldorf and lessen teacher workload.

### *Action 3: Expand School Fundraising Capacity*

Another consistent need that was outlined was the inadequacy of existing funding to meet Waldorf schools' personnel and material needs. This is a need outlined by nearly all Waldorf schools in Israel, as Waldorf schools often need more specialized materials and a lower student-to-teacher ratio. Still, Jewish Waldorf schools can more effectively fundraise to overcome the gap in funds from parents of enrolled students.

Given the pervasive poverty in PCI/Arab Israeli communities, Arabic-language and bilingual Waldorf schools will need to devise a strategy to ensure financial support from the community. This effort also requires a reframing of fundraising in relation to schools; Beni Mosenson of Ein Bustan shared his realization: “It was really very difficult for me to accept the idea that you have to go in such a way to cover the expenses. We are not stealing money. It's for the kindergarten.”<sup>199</sup> reGeneration Education also believes that this fundraising strategy should reach beyond the traditional fundraising base of Waldorf institutions — parents — to other funding sources, such as philanthropic institutions in Israel or abroad.

### *Action 4: Engage New PCI/Arab Israeli Parents*

For Arab Waldorf to truly flourish in Israel, it is necessary to nurture existing Arab Waldorf institutions and to create the foundation for future schools and kindergartens to be formed; there is nothing more critical to this goal than the engagement of new PCI/Arab Israeli parents, who make the educated decision to enroll their children in Waldorf schools and kindergartens. More effective engagement by Waldorf with PCI/Arab Israeli parents will serve two purposes: to raise interest in creating new Arab Waldorf schools and kindergartens and correct pervasive misunderstandings of what Waldorf is.

A compelling new parent engagement model will raise interest in Waldorf through a comprehensive understanding of Waldorf education and its positive effects on children. Numerous individuals we interviewed reported strong PCI/Arab Israeli parent interest in new types of education for their children. Fadi Suidan of Sonbulat Waldorf Association explained, “People here, the Arabs especially, are searching for a new education method, or a new education

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<sup>199</sup> Beni Mosenson, Interview, July 29, 2021.

style. They are tired [of] the conventional education, like the churches and the Ministry of Education. They are tired [of] this system. They want new things.”<sup>200</sup>

However, this desire for new types of education is tempered by many parents’ fear of the unknown. In her discussions with parents, Itaf Awad of reGeneration Education reflected, “I hear some parents say, what they will get from Waldorf education. They just believe in getting academic marks. For our community, they build skills to be in a good situation and society. There has been a lot of violence in our communities. Waldorf education builds the human. It builds humanity so that people can solve their problems in a peaceful way.”<sup>201</sup>

A more comprehensive and effective parent engagement model would allow parents to more conscientiously engage with Waldorf; this strategy would assuage their fears that their children will not achieve conventional success by showing past success stories and conveying the intangible personal development that is a benefit of this type of pedagogy.

Additionally, this strategy would ensure that children enrolled in Waldorf education are best suited to benefit from this type of pedagogy. From our interviews, it seems to be a common misconception that Waldorf is a school for special needs children, particularly when schools or kindergartens are first opened; Tally Bat Zahour reported this in Tamrat El Zeitoun and Raheel in the Tarshiha kindergarten. Raheel reflected that “I had ...a couple of kids that, they came to our kindergarten because they had a lot of difficulties with the other kindergartens. They needed special education... it wasn't appropriate.”<sup>202</sup> This misconception of Waldorf stops parents from considering it as a serious academic institution for their children. It also causes PCI/Arab Israeli parents to mistakenly enroll their children with special needs into institutions that cannot adequately support them.

#### *Action 5: Create an Arab Waldorf Leadership Incubator*

Additionally, we recommend the creation of a leadership incubator curriculum to grow the capacity of the greater Arab Waldorf movement.

This incubator will aid interested individuals in assuming new leadership opportunities within Arab Waldorf. Participants may be teachers interested in taking on new administration tasks, existing administrators interested in further professional development, or individuals who wish to create new Arab Waldorf institutions.

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<sup>200</sup> Suidan, Interview, August 24, 2021.

<sup>201</sup> Itaf Awad, Interview by reGeneration Education Waldorf Arab Education Advisory Board, Zoom, online, May 28, 2020.

<sup>202</sup> Raheel Shehadi Meiki, Interview, September 30, 2021.

Gilad Goldschmidt of the Waldorf Association of Israel expressed the need for more conscientious leadership to grow the Arab Waldorf movement; while there are many individual leaders within the movement, “the leaders normally don't have good relationships between them....There are some leaders, but no one can really, you know, take [the lead], and that's a huge problem.”<sup>203</sup>

Our vision for the Arab Waldorf Leadership Incubator develops individual strengths and talents and teaches essential coworking skills that will allow for leaders in Arab Waldorf to more effectively grow the movement together. Fadi Suidan expressed, “To succeed, there is a need for a good initiative team. The teams that believe that it's possible, the teams that believe that the change is not something that you magic, like you do like this, it's something you should work for it, and it will succeed.”<sup>204</sup> The Leadership Incubator will nurture young leaders to understand the important balance between visionary goals and everyday tasks that ensure long-term success by preparing a new generation of Arab Waldorf leaders to assume leadership positions in their respective institutions or to create new Waldorf schools and kindergarten. This incremental team-based approach to leading the Arab Waldorf movement is what has made the existing school and kindergartens successful, and we believe that if the essence of this is instilled into the new leadership incubator model, it will foster additional growth in the Arab Waldorf movement.

We believe that these incubators will allow for PCI/Arab Israelis to more effectively engage with each other on the growth of Arab Waldorf and more effectively collaborate with Jewish Israeli Waldorf practitioners throughout Israel.

#### *Action 6: Engage Proactively with Municipal and Ministry of Education Authorities*

This recommendation derives from PCI/Arab Israelis' obstacles when engaging with municipality authorities to open new Waldorf schools and kindergartens. Many municipality and Ministry of Education officials are resistant to new Waldorf institutions, including those from Jewish Israelis.

This obstacle was addressed in numerous interviews, but it was cited as a key issue when schools or kindergartens failed to open or were forced to close. Gal Mosenson of the Ein Bustan kindergarten, which attempted to open a complementary elementary school, expressed, “This is like when you want to try and bring something new into bureaucracy.... my experience was for [this] to have worked out, we needed to have more strength, more people who really wanted it to happen, more financial power and more people who understand bureaucracy.”<sup>205</sup> Fadi Suidan of the Sonbulat Waldorf Association, which tried to open a school and later a kindergarten in Haifa,

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<sup>203</sup> Goldschmidt, Interview, July 23, 2020.

<sup>204</sup> Suidan, Interview, August 24, 2021.

<sup>205</sup> Gal Mosenson, Interview by authors, Zoom, online, July 29, 2021.

expressed similar sentiments and added that, although he received help from the Waldorf Association of Israel, “nothing helped because the municipality was very closed-minded.”<sup>206</sup>

We believe that this challenge can be ameliorated by more proactive and consistent engagement through meetings with municipality authorities in cities and towns — and that this engagement should not begin with the application to start a new school or kindergarten but months earlier to lay an effective groundwork.

#### *Action 7: Scholarships for PCI/Arab Israelis to be Trained in Waldorf*

Our final recommendation for new opportunities for growth in Arab Waldorf is to create new scholarships for PCI/Arab Israelis to engage in formal Waldorf teacher training education in accredited institutions.

The dearth of Waldorf-trained PCI/Arab Israeli teachers presents a significant challenge for sustaining existing Waldorf institutions and the growth of the larger Arab Waldorf movement, as outlined above. This scarcity is tied to many factors, but an actionable item that the authors of this report isolated was the lack of funding for Waldorf university studies. As Laila Husein explained, “We need help for some teachers to be trained in Waldorf. But they have to pay a lot of money....Our teachers want to get the three-year degree, but they cannot afford it.”<sup>207</sup> Creating additional scholarships for PCI/Arab Israelis to be trained as Waldorf teachers presents an essential opportunity for growth.

We assert that creating scholarships or a scholarship fund for PCI/Arab Israelis to study Waldorf at accredited universities will allow for the more significant Arab Waldorf movement to expand to meet the needs of this community.

#### **A Network Approach to Implementation**

While isolating obstacles and opportunities for further growth in Arab Waldorf, the authors of this report were continually struck by the vision and expertise of existing practitioners of Waldorf in Israel, both Arab and Jewish. However, our interviews pointed to inconsistent engagement between these practitioners. For these reasons, reGeneration Education’s recommendation for implementing the Arab Waldorf Growth Platform outlined in the previous section is based on a network approach. This type of approach will both centralize local expertise and vision in the solution process and will also foster more enduring relationships between Waldorf practitioners in a context of collaboration and vision for the future of Arab Waldorf.

Below, the authors will outline the division of responsibility of task implementation between four different entities, two of which must be created to foster continued growth in Arab Waldorf.

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<sup>206</sup> Suidan, Interview, August 24, 2021.

<sup>207</sup> Husein, Interview, May 28, 2020.

Both the Platform itself and this new avenue of collaboration will allow Arab Waldorf to grow in line with the needs of its constituent communities.

### *The Shared Society Waldorf Leadership Task Force*

In our interviews with teachers, trainers, and administrators who currently work in Arab Waldorf in Israel, reGeneration Education was continually impressed by their vision and knowledge — and for these reasons, we believe that it is essential to connect these leaders for the specific purpose of advancing Arab Waldorf. This Task Force will be composed of around a dozen PCI/Arab Israeli and Jewish Israeli leaders within the Arab Waldorf community, including Arabic-language and bilingual institutions. We think that the small size of this Task Force will allow the leaders to engage more effectively on the recommendations assigned to them, which are mainly strategic.

Our recommended actions for the Shared Society Waldorf Leadership Task Force are outlined below, in order of expected implementation:

- **Determine translation needs**  
This will include selecting materials to be translated as a priority to advance all Waldorf schools and the triaging of additional materials — including activities, sample lesson plans, and teacher manuals — that will advance Arab Waldorf and lessen the pressure placed on current Arabic-language Waldorf teachers.
- **Create curriculum for supplementary culturally relevant Arab Waldorf training**  
This curriculum will be designed as additional professional development opportunities for Waldorf teachers to integrate Palestinian language and culture into the fabric of Waldorf in Israel. This curriculum should include sessions addressing Arabic songs, traditional Palestinian handicrafts, and folktales to supplement existing Waldorf materials.
- **Determining fundraising strategy**  
The Shared Society Waldorf Leader Task Force is best situated to devise a comprehensive fundraising blueprint for the broader Arab Waldorf movement. Each leader has their own experience in bridging this funding gap to run their school or kindergarten effectively. This strategy should address potential fundraising avenues beyond parents, including foundations and government sources.
- **Create a new parent engagement model**  
This model will address the two challenges to engaging new parents and children in Arab Waldorf: fears that Waldorf will not guarantee their children's success as conventionally defined with test scores and the misconception that Waldorf is designed for special education. The model should envision engagement patterns and materials furnished to parents to increase their understanding of Waldorf.

- Create curriculum for Arab Waldorf leadership incubator  
This curriculum will foster a new generation of leaders in Arab Waldorf. The incubator should foster skill sets that allow participants to gain both traditional leadership skills and those innately tied to Waldorf, such as empathy and collaboration.

These tasks are critical to Arab Waldorf but will require a substantial time commitment; for this reason, the expected timeline of task completion is fluid regarding the time these Arab Waldorf leaders can commit in a given period. However, despite the substantial time commitment involved to complete these actions, the authors assert that these tasks represent critical actions necessary for the growth of Arab Waldorf.

#### *The Shared Society Waldorf Community Forum*

The Shared Society Waldorf Community Forum will have a broader membership base than the Shared Society Waldorf Leadership Task Force. It will be composed of any who work in or wish to support Arab Waldorf, including Arabic-language and bilingual Waldorf institutions; we envision that there may be shared members between this forum and the Shared Society Waldorf Leader Task Force outlined above. The purpose of this additional forum is twofold: to instigate the implementation of the programs and strategies devised by the Shared Society Waldorf Leader Task Force and act as a source of community and support for those who practice Waldorf in the PCI/Arab Israeli context.

While incidental to the implementation tasks outlined below, the effect of providing mutual support through this forum is an important dimension — and will foster the health of the larger movement. Comparing the infrastructure of Waldorf in Jewish Israeli versus PCI/Arab Israeli, Eyal Bloch of David Yellin Academic College asserted, “You have to change the mindset to ...a different way that is more holistic... [PCI/Arab Israeli teachers] can get training here and there, but after they're trained, who [is] going to support? As we know, most of them maybe get trained for two, three, four years, but then they're working for 30, 40 years.”<sup>208</sup> We envision that the Shared Society Waldorf Community Forum can grow to fill this gap.

The tasks are based on the strategies devised by the Shared Society Waldorf Leadership Task Force and are likewise organized in order of expected implementation:

- Participate in culturally relevant professional development  
These workshops will follow part or all of the supplementary Arab Waldorf training curriculum outlined by the Shared Society Waldorf Leadership Task Force. It will also facilitate collaboration between current Arab Waldorf teachers, who will share their knowledge and work together to build the existing materials which integrate Palestinian culture and heritage into Waldorf activities. We envision that these workshops will be

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<sup>208</sup> Bloch, Interview, September 3, 2020.

implemented in the summer because of Waldorf teachers' increased free time in this period.

- Implement fundraising strategy  
The Forum will use the fundraising strategy outlined by the Shared Society Waldorf Leadership Task Force to engage additional funding sources for Waldorf schools and kindergartens. While institutions may choose to use this strategy individually, we believe that implementing the fundraising strategy by the Forum will allow Arab Waldorf to pursue larger sources of funding and implement programs that benefit all Arab Waldorf institutions. This may include funds to support the summer workshops or translation needs that benefit all Arab Waldorf institutions.
- Launch parent engagement campaign  
This campaign will allow existing Waldorf practitioners to engage new parents and new students in the Waldorf ethos; this is an important step in sustaining existing institutions and fostering a favorable environment for new Waldorf institutions.
- Participate in Arab Waldorf Leadership Incubator  
This incubator will aid interested individuals in assuming new leadership opportunities within Arab Waldorf. Participants may be teachers interested in taking on new administration tasks, existing administrators interested in further professional development, or individuals who wish to create new Arab Waldorf institutions.

The authors chose to assign these tasks to the Shared Society Waldorf Community Forum because we believe it is important to involve the larger Arab Waldorf community in implementing these important tasks. This will foster leadership skills among Forum members and ensure that the voices and visions of Arab Waldorf teachers and administrators are taken into account when new programs are launched.

#### *The Waldorf Association of Israel*

The Waldorf Association of Israel is an integral source of support for new and existing Arab Waldorf institutions. The special dispensation for Arab Waldorf teachers to skip 'The Line' of unemployed PCI/Arab Israeli teachers and acknowledgment by the Ministry of Education of Waldorf schools as "recognized and official" is due solely to the lobbying efforts of this Association with the Ministry of Education.

We have chosen to assign actionable items to the Waldorf Association of Israel partly because of their history of advocating for Arab Waldorf and their interest in its success, and their position of power within Israeli society.

The tasks assigned to the Waldorf Association of Israel are largely long-term actions that will not yield results in the near future. Still, we assert that the work for those long-term goals should begin in the near future to foster continued growth in Arab Waldorf in Israel.

As with the tasks outlined in the previous two subsections, the following tasks are outlined in order of expected implementation:

- Recruit representation from Arab Waldorf  
As the leadership capacity of Arab Waldorf expands, it is vital that leaders from Arab Waldorf are integrated into the Waldorf Association of Israel, particularly within the leadership of this influential association. We believe that the Waldorf Association of Israel should proactively recruit more representation from Arab Waldorf and invite leaders to join the Board of the association. This will allow PCI/Arab Israelis to bring the perspective and vision of Arab Waldorf to an entirely Jewish Israeli association so that both may work together to further the growth of Waldorf throughout Israel.
- Raise awareness of Waldorf among municipality officials  
Given the experience of the Waldorf Association of Israel in working with the Ministry of Education to adjust regulations for Waldorf institutions throughout Israel, we believe that this organization has the experience and drive to proactively raise awareness among officials in municipalities where Waldorf may expand. Building relationships before the formal application to launch a Waldorf school or kindergarten is essential to build institutional buy-in for Waldorf pedagogy. This will benefit not only Arab Waldorf but also Waldorf throughout Israel as municipality bias is a challenge for Arab and Jewish Waldorf alike.
- Lobby accredited Waldorf teacher training institutions for PCI/Arab Israeli scholarships  
The authors believe that the Waldorf Association of Israel is best suited to this task because of the existing relationship between the two accredited Waldorf teacher training institutions — David Yellin Academic College and Oranim Academic College — and the Association's leadership and membership bodies. The Waldorf Association of Israel may draw upon their previous experience in successfully lobbying these two universities to include Waldorf-training tracks within their bachelor of education course.

These recommended tasks assigned to the Waldorf Association of Israel represent long-term goals for the further growth of the Waldorf movement in Israel, focusing on actions that would ameliorate the existing challenges for the Arab Waldorf movement in Israel.

### *reGeneration Education*

As the organization which has supported the compilation of this report, reGeneration Education has chosen to concern itself with the success of Arab Waldorf in Israel and seeks to act as a source of support for Arab Waldorf practitioners and institutions.

The tasks outlined below are predicated on a continued relationship between reGeneration Education and Arab Waldorf practitioners. They frame reGeneration Education's efforts as supporting initiatives undertaken by the Shared Society Waldorf Leadership Task Force, Shared Society Waldorf Community Forum, and the Waldorf Association of Israel. Unlike in previous sections, the tasks are not outlined in the expected order of implementation. reGeneration Education will act as their support is requested by the three previously mentioned networks. The authors assign to reGeneration Education the following tasks to support the work instigated by local actors in Israel:

- Provide consultant support as requested  
Many of the actions outlined above require a cohesive vision and strong technical expertise for effective implementation. reGeneration Education can best support these initiatives by acting as a source of support to the different networks as they seek to implement these tasks by providing consultant support either in person or virtually while continuing to centralize the vision of local actors.
- Conduct international fundraising and awareness-raising for Arab Waldorf in Israel  
As an international organization dedicated to the support of Arab Waldorf, reGeneration Education is in a strong position to advocate for increased engagement between Arab Waldorf in Israel and international actors, such as the German Waldorf association Freunde der Erziehungskunst. Furthermore, reGeneration Education will proactively engage with international donors, including both private and public entities, to provide funding support to different Arab Waldorf initiatives, such as training, translation support, or a legal fund for schools to engage with authorities.
- Implement monitoring and evaluation for Waldorf as trauma-informed education  
reGeneration Education is prepared with the expertise and personnel capacity to conduct comprehensive monitoring and evaluation across multiple schools and kindergartens as required. By taking ownership of this task, reGeneration Education will ensure consistent data collection and prevent another responsibility from being assigned to oversubscribed schools and kindergartners. Effective monitoring and evaluation will allow practitioners to advocate for Arab Waldorf more effectively with data points that support central premises about the positive effects of this pedagogy on childhood development.

The authors believe that these actions will allow for reGeneration Education to most effectively and conscientiously provide support for the initiatives and tasks undertaken by the Shared

Society Waldorf Leadership Task Force, the Shared Society Waldorf Community Forum, and the Waldorf Association of Israel.

## **Final Thoughts**

The Arab Waldorf Growth Platform and responsible networks outlined above are recommendations from the authors; the actual implementation of either is dependent upon the current political and pandemic conditions within Israel in the coming months and years. Nevertheless, we assert that the Platform represents the most compelling opportunities for growth of the Arab Waldorf movement in Israel and can allow for growth of the nascent Arabic-language Waldorf movement throughout the Arab World.

Since the first Arab Waldorf kindergarten, Tamrat El Zeitoun, was opened in 2004, the Arab Waldorf movement has overcome enormous obstacles to impact the lives of PCI/Arab Israeli children and the broader communities in which these children live. As awareness of Waldorf has grown over the past two decades, more and more parental initiatives to start Arab Waldorf kindergartens and schools have started because these parents recognized the benefits Waldorf will have for their children. This was why Rani Meiki started the Alsyndian - Tarshiha Waldorf Kindergarten; even though he currently funds the entire kindergarten himself, he says, “For me, it is worth it... And the one reason is because my children got into this place, and they're getting this education. And this is more important than the money.”<sup>209</sup> The Arab Waldorf movement has grown so far because of the commitment and resolve of the parents and educators who want the best for their children.

However, in light of continued difficulties with government ministries, municipalities, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the movement is currently at a plateau, and without timely intervention, it will stagnate.

Arab Waldorf has made considerable strides in the past two decades, but even as interest in Waldorf continues to grow in PCI/Arab Israeli communities, the number of Arab Waldorf institutions has not kept pace with the rising demand. Existing Arab Waldorf educational institutions struggle to accommodate new students, retain veteran teachers at their breaking point, and secure necessary funds. Prospective Arab Waldorf schools and kindergartens consistently encounter the same obstacles — institutional biases impeding successful registration, difficulties raising adequate funds, lack of readily available teacher training resources — that many are unable to surmount.

As the Arab Waldorf movement stands at this crossroads — to either surmount these obstacles to expand the movement or begin to lose momentum as the movement rests in an uncomfortable

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<sup>209</sup> Rani Meiki, Interview by authors, Zoom, online, September 23, 2021.

holding pattern — Israeli and international society has renewed its interest in shared society and peacebuilding initiatives in the region. This interest sparked in light of the planned Sheikh Jarrah evictions and protests and came to a head in the May 2021 Israel-Gaza conflict, which killed 243 people in Gaza and 12 people in Israel over 11 days.<sup>210</sup> While international interest in the region is not new, the recent monetary support for peacebuilding is unprecedented: In December 2020, the United States Congress passed a resolution to infuse \$250 million into shared society and peacebuilding initiatives in Israel-Palestine over the next five years; this is the single largest peacebuilding investment in the conflict’s history.<sup>211</sup>

With the eyes of the world upon Israel-Palestine, there has not been as much expectation or support for nascent shared society and peacebuilding programming since the Oslo Accords in 1995.

If properly mobilized, the Arab Waldorf movement is well suited to capitalize on the renewed interests and available funds. Although just the first step in supporting the complex needs of trauma-affected students, a strong Arab Waldorf movement will not only build bridges between parents and educators across Jewish Israeli and PCI/Arab Israeli communities but will also impact the children in these communities who will determine the long-term success of any shared society initiative in the years to come.

The extensive research conducted for this report has shown the commitment and ingenuity of PCI/Arab Israeli parents and their Jewish Israeli counterparts to build a better society in which all children are equitably supported. This spirit of cooperation is also seen in Israel’s newly formed government, and we invite them to engage in this cross-cultural initiative to support trauma-informed education.

In light of the current situation, it is now more vital than ever to build upon this foundation to support and expand Arab Waldorf to protect the socioemotional development of the greatest number of children in Israel-Palestine.

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<sup>210</sup> “Gaza-Israel Conflict in Pictures: 11 Days of Destruction,” BBC News, BBC, May 21, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57205968>.

<sup>211</sup> “Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act,” Alliance for Middle East Peace, November 4, 2021, <https://www.allmep.org/our-work/meppa/>.

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