

State of Israel
Ministry of Social Welfare
Service for Girls in Distress - Israel

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Ministry of Social Welfare

Service for Girls in Distress

Social service agencies are confronted by the problem of adolescent girls who find difficulty in carrying out the accepted functions of girls in their age bracket and who are also unable to establish stable relationships with their surroundings and with existing service agencies. As a result, they drop out of their studies and jobs, and, as a result of their distress, are exposed to strong family and social pressures. These pressures exacerbate the problems faced by these girls and accelerate the process of their being pushed to the outer fringes of society and beyond, to the state of absolute deterioration. The Service for Girls in Distress was set up in order to cope with the problems these girls face and in order to help these girls emerge from their state of distress. The service is part of the Department of Correctional Services, within the framework of the Service for Youth in Distress.

A. Population

The population receiving the care of the service comprises girls between the ages of 14 and 21 years; these girls can be classed under the following categories:

- girls who have not yet become juvenile delinquents, but who are in danger of going astray and reaching a stage of deterioration

- girls who are vagrants, who suffer from sexual neglect, who stay away from home for various periods, or who have dropped out of their studies or their jobs; this category also includes unmarried mothers and attempted suicides

- girls engaging in prostitution, who are motivated towards changing their situation and who have the ability and emotional strength to achieve this change and to rehabilitate themselves

B. Objectives of care

The care provided ^{for} girls in distress aims at effecting changes in their normative behaviour patterns and in their negative self-image, and at helping the girl in distress to cope with her social surroundings in a co-ordinated fashion. In order to achieve these objectives, the care provided the girl in distress concentrates on developing her ability to establish lasting inter-personal relationships and contacts with the various service agencies and local authorities engaged in furthering her rehabilitation.

The Ministry of Social Welfare works towards achieving these objectives through the use of local staff workers engaged in the care of girls in distress; these staff workers cope with the girl's problem within her natural environment, by reducing the conflict she has with her family, by dealing with her problems and by rehabilitating her within the framework of society.

These aims are achieved by locating these girls in the community through the reaching-out method, by getting to know these girls on a personal basis, thereby establishing a personal relationship with the girl and developing her feeling of trust in the staff worker.

Thus a treatment atmosphere is established, based on social work principles. The guiding principles for work with girls in distress are:

- becoming acquainted with the values, norms, behavior patterns and expectations that these girls have, with the aim of planning suitable care methods
- optimal openness on the part of the service agency, so that the girl can be received under any circumstances on a direct, emotional and physical basis, as she is, and can be given the necessary attention - physical and emotional
- helping the girl understand her situation
- increasing the girl's awareness as to self-evaluation, thereby increasing her ability to cope with the negative self-image she has as a result of society's attitudes towards her
- attaching significance to the girl's natural environment, and using this environment to help in rehabilitation

c. Methods of care

The care provided these girls is given within the framework of individualized casework; within the framework of group care;

in the community; in the girl's natural surroundings; and in various agencies outside the home.

Providing care for the girl in distress requires social or educational work training, or an academic background in psychology, sociology or education.

Supervision within the Service for Girls in Distress is on a national as well as a district basis.

Supervision on the national level consists of providing guidance for district supervisors, receiving feedback and initiating changes in plans and in treatment frameworks, planning supplementary training sessions, and coordination with other service agencies.

Supervision on a district basis deals with providing guidance for the personnel of local authorities, supervising field work, and developing the services provided.

D. Frameworks for care outside the home

The Service for Girls in Distress is helped in its care of girls outside the home by the following aids:

Foster families. These families take in girls who are in need of parental substitutes.

Shelters. These shelters provide an immediate - albeit temporary - solution and a place to sleep for a certain period of time (usually no more than a month). The shelters are aimed at vagrant or abandoned girls who do not live at home or who do not live in any other set framework. The purpose of the shelter is to protect these girls from any immediate danger to their physical or emotional wellbeing.

The underlying principle is that these girls stay in such shelters for limited and brief periods, before being transferred to a set programme for rehabilitation.

The girls reach these shelters in one of the following cases:

- the girl's parents refuse to allow her to remain at home
- she has been threatened with physical injury because of testimony she has given to the police
- she is awaiting placement either with a foster family or in an institution
- she has run away from home and has stayed away for a lengthy period of time, and there is also a danger that her parents will maltreat her, unless a plan of action has been prepared in advance
- the girl is pregnant and awaiting placement outside her home town
- she has run away from home to live elsewhere in the country

While the girl is at the shelter, the social worker in charge of the shelter establishes contact with a person or agency who can take care of the girl. The social worker participates in setting up the girl's rehabilitation programme until it is put into effect, and follows up on the girl's activities for the period of one month after the girl has left the shelter. Volunteers help keep the girls busy while at the shelter.

Total care institutions. These are government institutions that specialize in specific population types and that are equipped with educational, occupational and treatment facilities.

Hostel. An open institution for girls over 18 years.
Population dealt with by hostels - This population comprises girls who no longer need the care provided by total institutions, girls who have a good chance of responding successfully to the required care, but who still lack the knowledge and ability necessary for "standing on their own two feet" and for managing their own affairs in such a manner as to permit them to function independently in the community. These are girls who are in serious conflict with their families and who cannot rely on their families for support and guidance towards independent functioning within a daily framework of work and normal social activity. Some of the girls work and others are in the process of looking for work. They need guidance and encouragement in the proper use and balancing of a budget; all points in this area should be covered, from taking account of all anticipated monthly expenses to learning sensible shopping habits. These girls need permanent figures who will be close to them, who can serve them as an external control system and who will help them adopt norms of independent behaviour.

Purpose of the hostel - The purpose of the hostel is, therefore, to prepare these girls for independent functioning within the community. The hostel accommodates 10-15 girls, the intention being that they will find a job and will contribute part of their salaries to the upkeep of the hostel, e.g. a share in paying for electricity, water, etc. A girl can stay in the hostel for up to one year; she will leave in accordance with her individual ability and the level of her attainments in

the area of independent functioning in the community.

The hostel is an integral part of the community in which it is situated. It is designed both to meet the needs of the girls who live there and to be a centre for interest groups and activities open to the girls in the hostel, as well as to the community at large. Among the areas covered by these interest groups include home economics, interior decoration, charm classes, sewing and gymnastics. The hostel staff includes a housemother, a social worker and youth leaders to serve on night shifts.

An additional aid that serves to help the Service for Girls in Distress is the centre for diagnosis and observation - a government centre that diagnoses girls in distress and decides which of the existing frameworks outside the home is best suited for each girl; this decision is based on a period of observation and on information received concerning the girl in question. The centre also supplies the Service for Youth Protection with data on the nature and types of frameworks that exist outside the home and that are required to meet the needs of the girls that have been diagnosed.

E. Special projects under the auspices of the Service for Girls in Distress

As an integral part of the therapeutic-individualized casework care provided girls within the framework of our service, two specialized aids have been developed for the care and rehabilitation of these girls.

a. "Care clubs." These are aids that serve to solve the problems of adolescence faced by the "marginal teenager," who is on the border between two reference groups and does not belong to either one of them. The clubs also serve to solve problems stemming from overcrowding, lack of privacy for the girl involved, and an unfair distribution of roles in the home (the heavy workload with which the adolescent is burdened prevent her from functioning as a normal teenager). Abnormal marital relations in the home can help develop destructive aggressiveness in the adolescent girl, and she may acquire a negative attitude towards the entire institution of marriage. In the case of broken or one-parent homes, the adolescent girl may develop a feeling that she is incapable of emotion or she may develop a feeling of anger directed towards both or one of her parents.

The objectives of these clubs are:

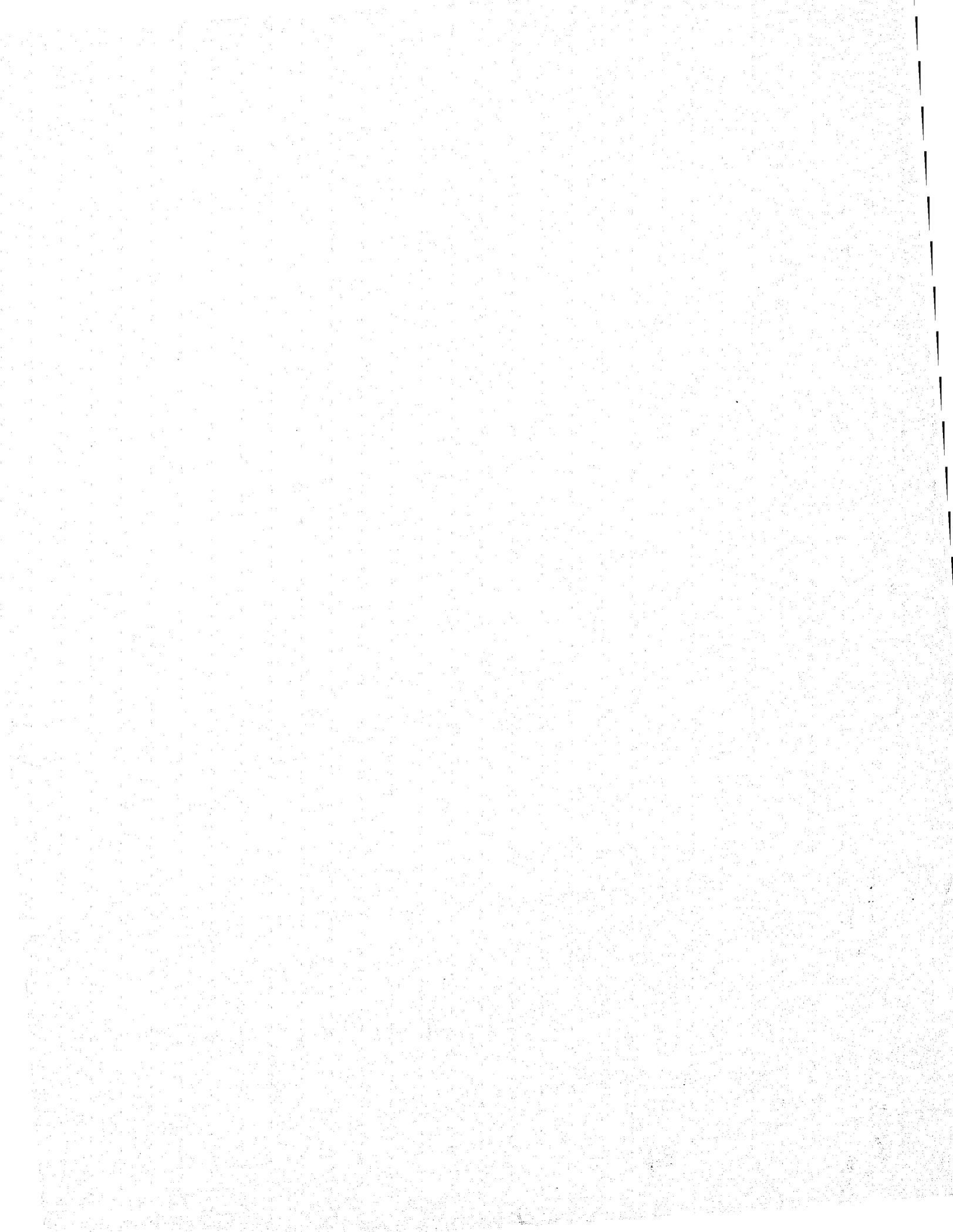
- to prevent the adolescent girl from reaching a deteriorated state, by keeping her away from the streets and by having her properly use her leisure time
- to develop in her a feeling of belonging as far as the club and group are concerned; to develop her ability to be consistent in these relationships, with the aim being that the girl will transfer these relationships to her natural surroundings
- to increase the adolescent girl's feeling of satisfaction, decreasing her bitterness, and raising her low self-image
- to help her to understand her problems, to help her to see that part she plays in her problems, and to awaken the girl's motivation towards changing her approach to her problems

- to change her normative behaviour patterns and to awaken her ability to cope with the problems of her immediate surroundings
- to improve her ability to express herself in a group situation on matters that concern her; through this self-expression, it is hoped that she will find out how to change certain situations and that she will reinforce her capacity for living with situations that cannot be changed
- to supply warmth, attention and adult understanding, so that she can feel that she is important and wanted
- to let her experience doing and achieving things that involve responsibility, so that her self-confidence may be strengthened
- to refer her, when necessary, to community agencies for assistance

These clubs are open in the afternoons and evenings. The club has a worker who specializes in work with girls in distress. Various activities are held at the club, such as interest groups in arts and crafts and drama. Lectures and discussions take place on topics connected with family life, sex and so on. Parties are held and group outings are arranged, such as organized trips and going to the theatre.

b. Socialization. The second project is "Operation Noah" (from the Hebrew abbreviation for "groups of girl friends"),

which is being carried out in Or Yehudah. This project is run in cooperation with the Service for Youth Rehabilitation. The aim of the project is to socially and vocationally rehabilitate a group of about 10 girls who are under the care of a local social worker specializing in the problems of girls in distress and who have developed motivation towards vocational rehabilitation. The girls involved in the project live in an apartment that has been renovated with the girls's help and in accordance with their tastes; this project gives them a feeling of belonging and a feeling of responsibility for managing their home. With the help of a team comprising a coordinator, a social worker specializing in group work and a vocational teacher, the girls receive the desired rehabilitation care. The project aims at raising the girls' low self-image and at helping them to develop a positive attitude towards their surroundings; the girls acquire a life-style, take charm classes and learn a profession - draughtsmanship, secretarial work, etc. - with the help of a vocational teacher. The girls stay in this project no more than 10 months; girls who have acquired a level of professional skill and who are ready, from a social point of view, to go out to work, can leave before the end of 10 months.



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