



February 2010 Newsletter

Although local authorities usually manage to fund part of the needs of primary school age children, we are hearing more and more about older children who have never been identified as having a real learning difficulty and so have been by-passed. Through sheer natural ability, they manage to reach high school when suddenly, at the age of 15 or 16, they are faced by insurmountable barriers. Sensitive subject teachers will give these kids extra help in class and extra time in exams, but at some stage they have to take psycho-educational assessment tests prior to formally requesting that national examinations, such as the Bagrut matriculation exams or driving tests, be taken under special conditions, suited to the student's needs. The tests are administered privately by educational psychologists and cost at least two thousand shekels per child (about £350 or \$500), often more. This is an impossible sum for a one-parent family whose monthly income is two and a half thousand shekels, or where the parents are unemployed or invalids.

That is why a counselor at a girls' school in Or Akiva contacted us recently for urgent financial help for six tenth-grade girls. The school is struggling to raise the academic levels of children from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The stories the counselor told us are shocking.

Sh's mother was diagnosed 3 years ago with muscular dystrophy and is unable to function alone. Sh's father lost his job as he took so much time off work to care for his wife. Sh does all the housework and looks after her younger brother. She wrote to us: "I feel as if I am working as the mother at home, but despite everything I try to study hard and carry on as normal." She knows she has a memory problem and has been advised to take the above-mentioned tests.



N. is the middle child of 5 siblings. The parents are separated. The mother supports the family alone with the help of social services. N. wrote : "Because Mum is the only wage-earner, all her wages go on debts and food. I know I won't be capable of passing my Bagrut exams unless I do the assessment tests which will give me extra time."

K. is one of four school-aged children. Her parents are divorced. Her father has been unemployed for 6 months and so is now unable to support his family and their economic situation is tough. The children live with their mother, a housewife, who receives social security. K. writes: "I know my grades are higher when I am given extra time in exams, but Mum can't afford to pay for the psycho-educational assessment test."

The Talia Trust has now arranged for an educational psychologist to test these girls and hopes to expand this new project in the future.

Marilyn Hyman