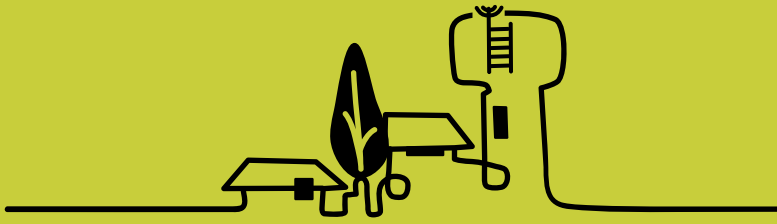




KIBBUTZ KFAR AZA EDUCATION DURING AN EMERGENCY

Research Findings and Insights on the Establishment
and Operation of Education Systems for Ages 0-18
After October 7





“ These were three and a half months of shock, uncertainty, and overwhelming emotional, logistical, and professional challenges, and profound loss. Amid the hardship, we found moments of moments of clarity, a strong focus on what really matters, and relentless and selfless action driven by a focused vision of a better future. We created a safe space for healing, self-discovery, and progress.

Thank You

to everyone who helped in the creation of this report.

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Cover image: A mural painted by the children in their elementary school classroom

Introduction

“ The funerals and education teams were the first to step up. We took charge of our fate.

Ilana Tzuk, Director of Education for Ages 0-18

Three days after October 7, on Wednesday morning, two members of Kibbutz Kfar Aza and a kindergarten teacher from its original education team launched three educational programs at Kibbutz Shefayim. These programs included: a preschool system for children aged 4 months to 6 years; an elementary school system for grades 1 through 6; and an activity-based program for junior high and high school students in grades 7 through 12. What started in improvised spaces with temporary staff gradually developed into organized educational systems, encompassing the following initiatives:

1. **Informal education**, providing a stable and meaningful adult presence for every child.
2. **Formal education**, based on Ministry of Education content.
3. **Formal therapy programs**, involving psychologists and psychiatrists from Schneider Hospital, psychologists from the Educational Psychology Service (Shefa), counselors, resilience specialists from Sha’ar HaNegev, and private professionals.
4. **Informal therapy**, offering long-term individual and group work, including therapeutic surfing, art workshops, connecting with nature through forest days, trips, nature retreats, animal encounters, and music.
5. **Nationwide projects**, led by teenagers.
6. **Weekly afternoon extracurricular activities**.
7. **Camps** during school breaks.

8. Gradual, careful **preparation for reintegration** into Ministry of Education-run schools.

Emergency education programs for early childhood and elementary-aged children initially ran for three hours daily, **helping families ease into short separations from their children while balancing the growing demands of work, caregiving, and rebuilding their lives. Over time, these programs expanded to 5–8 hours a day, five days a week, providing consistent, reliable support for each child throughout the day.**

The approach to secondary education followed the opposite path: as teenagers grew more comfortable spending time apart from their counselors, the system stabilized. Consequently, activity hours were gradually reduced, and a more structured framework was introduced.

By mid-January 2024, the Ministry of Education had established the infrastructure to integrate students and families into local education systems. Elementary students were enrolled at the ADAM Environmental School, while middle and high school students joined Hof HaSharon School. The early childhood education system, which, under normal circumstances, the kibbutz had managed independently, continued to operate separately.

Before it happens > Preparing an emergency education system during normal times

1. Community Ethical Code

A community ethical code is a document that defines the identity of a community or organization. It typically outlines the community's identity, goals, key objectives, core values, and behavioral guidelines that embody its mission and foundational principles. Keeping this code up-to-date and aligned with the community ensures a strong foundation for navigating emergencies.

The more relevant and collaboratively developed the code, the better it can support the community during crises, providing stability when needed most. Developing the code through open communication and writing fosters a shared ethical language that reflects the community's values, which is crucial during challenging times.

2. Acknowledge the Possibility That...

If you live in a border settlement, near a geological fault line, or in a flood-prone urban area, there is a chance that your community may need to evacuate due to political instability or climate-related events. It is important to recognize that evacuation could be necessary and understand the process involved. Contact relevant local authorities and education officials and make them aware of any gaps you perceive in the current emergency plan.

We recommend forming a community group with members from diverse professional backgrounds to discuss the community's needs and how everyone can work together effectively in such situations.

3. Create a Cloud Backup of Up-To-Date Lists

This should perhaps be the first piece of advice – it is simple and can save weeks of confusion during an emergency. Prepare a list of names, roles, key community contacts, and a map of operational institutions within the education system during normal times. Include details like positions, names, numbers, and role descriptions. **Store this up-to-date, detailed record in an online cloud backup.**

If your online education folder is password-protected, that's great! But think about who has access to the password. Since you cannot predict who will be on duty during an emergency, relying on one person or one device can lead to serious issues. **It is impossible to overemphasize this: Having these lists easily accessible online can make a huge difference during a crisis, saving you time and resources when every minute counts.**



A Few Ideas:

- ✓ Create a quiet WhatsApp group for emergencies.
- ✓ Run practice drills with a red team and a blue team. This can also serve as a shared learning group focused on current education-related events in your community.

Engaging in these activities will help build a solid, practical foundation, giving you a better understanding of the education system, its infrastructure, and key figures. **This knowledge will be invaluable in an emergency.**

Our community is being evacuated > Key things to pay attention to at the designated evacuation site

What Does the Physical Space Enable from an Educational Perspective? The Familiar, the Unfamiliar, and the Experience of Displacement

Get involved in selecting the evacuation site by sending a representative with an “educational perspective” to participate in the decision-making process. If the authorities resist your being involved in this choice, insist that you be allowed to have a say! Within days, you are going to require an education system to accommodate your community’s children, so it is crucial to take a moment to plan, even during these challenging times.

Relevant Points for Selecting an Evacuation Site:

✓ **Where is the evacuation site located geographically?**

Will it be easy or difficult for me to recruit staff there as time passes?
Who will be my partners in the rehabilitation process?

✓ **Is the site like home?**

The relocation of the Kibbutz Kfar Aza community to Kibbutz Shefayim was often highlighted as a key factor in reducing feelings of alienation. The familiar kibbutz environment was comforting and offered a sense of security. This consideration should not be underestimated.

✓ **Are natural spaces accessible without a vehicle?**

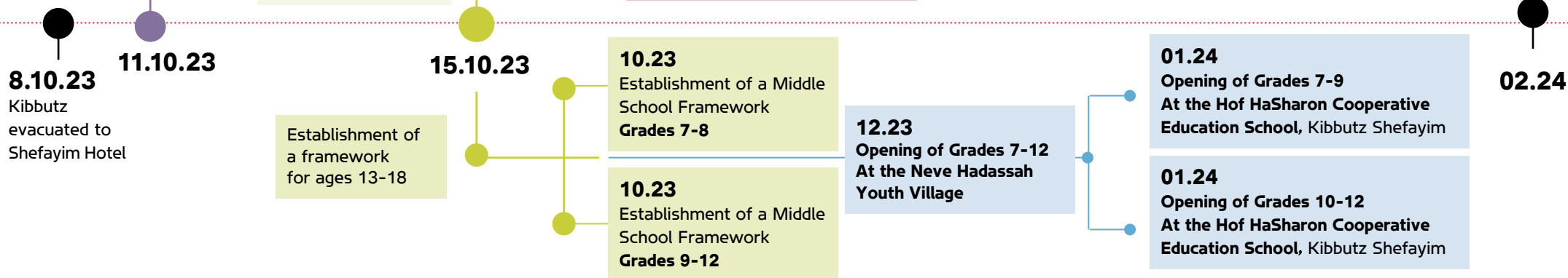
Easily accessible, nearby natural spaces are an invaluable resource for healing. Nature also plays an important role in fostering supportive and meaningful community connections.

Timeline of the Establishment and Stabilization of the Kfar Aza Kibbutz Education System After October 7

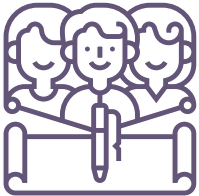
3 daily operating hours 5 daily operating hours 7 daily operating hours

KEY

- Initial Launch Independent Kibbutz Program
- Independent Kibbutz Program led by the Kfar Aza Education Directorate and external educators.
- Integrated Program Independent education together with the Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education framework



The Educational Rationale



The goal of the system is to support children's emotional recovery after trauma, rebuild their confidence and trust in themselves and their surroundings, and lay the foundation for them to become capable adults leading fulfilling and happy lives.

Ilana Tzuk, Emergency Education System Manager 0-18.

The educational rationale can be broken down into several areas that work in parallel:

A.

Therapeutic Rationale

1. The children's well-being is the top priority.
2. Parents play a primary role in the recovery process.
3. The emergency education system serves both therapeutic and educational purposes.
4. Informal education: interpersonal communication is crucial.
5. Formal education is a tool, not the goal.
6. The educational environment is crucial.

C.

Community Rationale

1. Facing resistance: internal and external.
2. Assessing an escalating situation.
3. Engaging in dialogue with the community's immediate reality.
4. Decision-making in emergencies requires a different approach.

B.

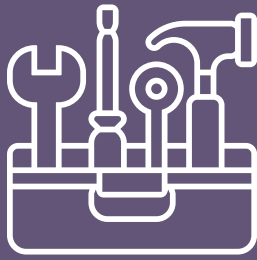
Management Rationale

1. Leadership: respect our right to rehabilitate ourselves.
2. Staff recruitment.
3. Team management: collegiality, friendship, camaraderie, solidarity, and mutual respect.
4. Partners and supporting professionals: No single person has all the answers.
5. Role definitions.
6. Organizational structure.
7. Educational consultant: the importance of support.
8. Operational management: perfection is not achievable during an emergency.

D.

Emergency Education System Rationale

1. Change and transition: everything is gradual.
2. Beware of free gifts.
3. Field staff: identifying their motivations.
4. Burnout in emergencies.



Practical Toolkit

stage 1: (Relative) Stability

Establish a Routine!

Although the situation is uncertain and unstable, establishing a routine is essential. Why?

During routine periods, adrenaline levels drop, which can aid the very important process of allowing complex emotions to rise to the surface in children, the community, and the staff.

For children, this was manifest (for us) as visible signs of trauma. Preschoolers exhibited tantrums, crying, or unusual apathy. In elementary school children, there was an increase in high-risk situations (suicidal thoughts, disordered eating, anger outbursts, violence, etc.). High school students exhibited various forms of rebellion.

What can be done?

- ✔ Revise, organize, and communicate the action protocols and reporting procedures to the educational and therapeutic teams.
- ✔ Equip staff with the knowledge and tools they need, such as how to handle anger outbursts or respond to a child who is expressing suicidal thoughts.
- ✔ Engage parents, ensuring they feel empowered and confident that the system is offering the right support.

Like the children, adults also expressed their trauma. There has been an increase in unusual reactions from parents toward the system. These include disproportionate anger directed at counselors, passive-aggressive comments on WhatsApp, and a general rise in frustration, anger, and rage.

What can be done? This is highly personal and varies depending on the situation and the people involved. However, one thing is certain: the counselors need your support! While they support and guide children in managing interactions with adults, they, too, are vulnerable. It is crucial to give them clear boundaries and the right tools.

- ✔ Open discussions with the counselors about any unusual remarks in WhatsApp groups are important. This helps normalize their experiences and provide context.
- ✔ It is also crucial to discuss specific cases and responses. As a team, agree on key phrases and action steps. For example, we decided that if a counselor feels a boundary has been crossed when dealing with a parent (understanding that boundaries can be subjective), they should respond with: "This is an important conversation – let's continue it with my supervisor present. I'll get back to you to schedule a time."



Practical Toolkit

The team is feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. As adrenaline levels drop, complex emotions start to surface. This period of routine is the ideal time to prioritize the team's well-being. Investing in their growth and development supports the team and benefits the children in their care.

This is a great opportunity to focus on professional growth, both individually and as a team, through meaningful and engaging activities such as:

- ✓ Therapeutic seminars.
- ✓ Group therapy sessions.
- ✓ Meaningful discussions on the team's shared mission, setting personal and collective goals.
- ✓ And, of course, plenty of fun! Plan team-building events, group outings, or activities that allow everyone to relax and enjoy themselves.

Why is it critical to continue recruiting quality staff?

- ✓ The education system is expanding and will continue to grow, requiring more people to support it. During a crisis, the community may temporarily disperse, but as normalcy returns, families will seek familiar routines for their children and will want to join the education system you are building. Children who underwent severe trauma and received personalized care and rehabilitation will be integrated, and parents returning to work will need educational settings for their children, driving the demand for additional staff.

- ✓ Building larger, permanent teams. The initial shock and unity of the first month have faded, and high-risk behaviors have become more prevalent over time. Addressing the different responses to collective and personal trauma requires large teams. To prevent burnout, offer shorter work weeks and ensure staff have time and space for themselves. This requires high mentorship ratios and flexible shift schedules for each team member, making a larger workforce essential.

Hiring during an emergency

Key points to address in interviews and key points for us (the employer) to bear in mind.

- ✓ Arrive at the interviews prepared to clearly present your values, both as individuals and as a system, and ensure there is mutual agreement with candidates.
- ✓ Provide a comprehensive overview of the system, including any areas of uncertainty.
- ✓ Emphasize the routine aspects of the role, such as team meetings, one-on-one discussions, and therapy hours as essential components of the job.

- ✓ Emphasize the need for flexibility and the ability to adapt to an evolving situation.
- ✓ Require a long-term commitment or define the role with a fixed-term tenure.
- ✓ Set a probationary period and be prepared to part ways with team members who are not a good fit.

Maintaining professionalism and preventing exploitation

During times of trauma, children and parents are especially vulnerable. Education system managers must ensure the professionalism of educational and therapeutic teams while remaining alert to any signs of exploitation.



Stage 2: Integration Into Local Education Systems and Transitioning from Evacuation Centers to Education in a New Environment

How do we create a partnership between the evacuated community and the local education system?

When should we start preparing for integration into local education systems?

Who decides where integration will take place?

- ✔ Both the emergency education system and parents must work together to identify needs and priorities, which are then communicated to the local system. Be aware that it might not be possible to find solutions that satisfy every parent.
- ✔ Integration takes time. In our case, it took about three months. The education system in Shefayim helped prepare the children for their transition to local schools.
- ✔ The successful integration of the children into the new education system shows that the preparation was effective. This process is challenging and requires forward planning, clear goals, and managing resistance from the community and parents.

Integrating into an existing (local) education system

- ✔ Successful integration requires strong coordination and collaboration between the evacuating and receiving authorities.
- ✔ In our case, the Hof HaSharon Regional Council (the receiving authority) streamlined bureaucratic processes by allocating resources and quickly addressing needs.
- ✔ Clearly defining the responsibilities between the evacuating and receiving authorities is crucial, including managing educational and administrative budgets and decision-making.
- ✔ Ensuring continuity of personal and therapeutic information among all care providers is vital, especially for children with special needs or those more severely affected, while ensuring strict adherence to ethical standards and privacy regulations.

Stage 3: Professional Advice

How can you tell if the person advising you is truly working for the benefit of your community?

- ✔ Given the unprecedented nature of the situation, the appropriate professional advice will prioritize the well-being of the children and identify with the priorities of the education system.

- ✔ In responding to this unique event, the solution lies not in advice from a single field but in a collaborative effort among a team of diverse experts, working together with mutual respect for each other's expertise and knowledge.

Managing exceptional events during ongoing trauma (e.g., the return of hostages, death)

- ✔ In situations of ongoing trauma, preparation and planning are crucial but have their limits. It is important to remain highly alert and stay prepared for any additional challenging events that may arise.



“ Education is the cornerstone of community healing. When children are supported by a professional system that genuinely prioritizes their well-being, parents can focus on their own needs. The stability of the education system is the driving force behind the community’s recovery.

Summary

Education is the cornerstone of community healing. When children are supported by a professional system that genuinely prioritizes their well-being, parents can focus on their own needs. The stability of the education system is the driving force behind the community’s recovery.

Recognizing the importance of education in emergencies starts with proactive preparation during normal times. When faced with unprecedented trauma, it is crucial to move beyond outdated paradigms and approaches that no longer serve. When defining children’s well-being and the educational goals of the system, adopting an abundance mindset is key. This means prioritizing children’s well-being and long-term educational goals first and then aligning them with available resources.

I would like to thank the children, young people, and parents for their trust in us, the Sha’ar HaNegev and Hof HaSharon councils for providing us with a home, and the care teams who supported us, including Schneider Hospital, Sha’ar HaNegev Welfare, Sha’ar HaNegev Resilience, and the Ministry of Education for their professional and respectful guidance and support.

Thank you to the educational and therapeutic staff for their love and dedication to our children.

Finally, I would like to thank the Kibbutz Kfar Aza leadership for their partnership and solidarity in facing the terrible disaster we endured and for our shared responsibility in nurturing children and young people who will go on to lead full and meaningful lives.

**Ilana Tzuk, Emergency Education
System Manager**



Kibbutz Kfar Aza: Education During an Emergency

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