

"This is Not a Place" "for Children"

**The Lives of the Children of
Asylum-Seekers in South Tel Aviv**

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This is not a place for children

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All quotes and images in this document were collected with the consent of the children and their parents. The names of the children are confidential in order to protect their privacy.

The Levinsky Garden Library was established on the belief that education and culture constitute basic human rights that can serve as a bridge between communities and as a means of promoting long-term social change. The library is located in the Neve Sha'anani neighbourhood in South Tel Aviv, which suffers from ongoing neglect by the authorities and from the absence of community centers serving all residents of the neighbourhood. The children's center at the Library is among the only community centers currently operating in the neighbourhood for children of immigrants and asylum-seekers. The Center works to promote the children's educational, social and political growth and to increase their confidence by supporting their parents, through the realization of the children's rights, and through advocating on behalf of the children before the welfare and education authorities.

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Introduction

For many years, the Levinsky Library has served as more than just a traditional “library.” It functions as a unique community center, enabling educational and cultural activities for hundreds of children living in South Tel Aviv. Many of the children see the library as a safe, secure place where they find counselors who hear and see them. A space where they can consult with others, receive assistance and or just share with the educational staff if they had a hard day at school or if they received a good grade on a test. A place where they can grow, develop, learn and engage in areas of interest that intrigue them.

Many of the children have been with us at the library for many years. The connections between the educational staff and the children and their families are intimate relationships of partnership and cooperation. This report was also created in partnership with the children and parents who understood its great importance - to share the voices, stories and reality of the lives of the status-less children with whom we have been working in recent years.

The document is based on dozens of in-depth interviews that we conducted last year with children of asylum-seekers between the ages of 11 and 17. We analyzed the interviews and found common themes and narratives in the experiences of the children as they explained it to us. The first theme is “Home” and the meaning of a home in the lives of children who lack status and are denied rights. This section describes the journey some children made from their country of origin to Israel, the dismantled family unit, the many hours their parents work, their living conditions in crowded and partitioned apartments, and the many challenges of maintaining a stable family unit in chaotic and temporary environments.

Another theme that arose in the children’s stories is the reality of life in the Neve Sha’anán neighbourhood. Neglect, lack of social services, unstable

infrastructure, crime, dangerous roads, trafficking in women, anti-immigrant and refugee fanatics, and men coming to the neighbourhood to buy sex all contribute to a feeling of insecurity in public spaces. Each of the children we spoke to testified to the daily violence s/he experienced in the neighbourhood and the lack of protection they feel, or as 12-year-old M. told us: “This neighbourhood is not a place for children.”

The last theme, that we chose to call “Identity and future: from belonging to alienation”, deals with the children’s lack of rights and status and the way this affects their lives. The children described the racism they face, including institutionalized racism, and their great fear of the unknown future stemming from their lack of regularized status in Israel.

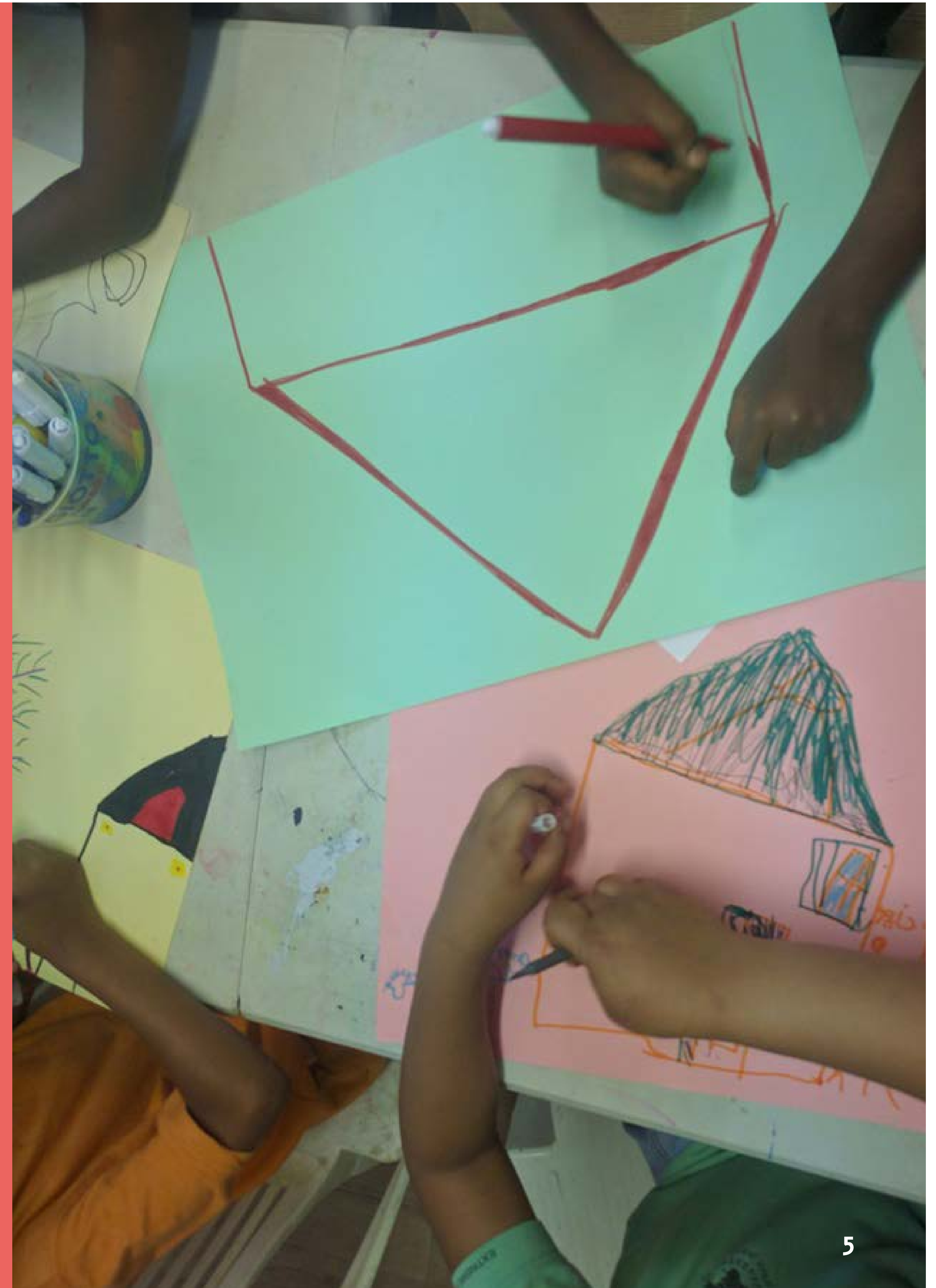
The trauma that accompanies the children from their difficult life in their country of origin, through the dangerous journey to Israel, continues to be present while living in Israel. The community to which they belong suffers from predatory government policies that do not regard them as equal human beings and a government that does everything in its power to make their lives in Israel unbearable.

Today there are approximately 6,500 children without status in Tel Aviv, comprising 12% of the children in Tel Aviv. These children are without social rights, suffer from discrimination and racism and their voices are not heard. This document seeks to introduce the first-hand voices of the children into the discourse about the rights of asylum-seekers in Israel. Their stories can teach us about what is happening in their world, which is also part of our world and reflects the society in which we all live together.

We would like to thank the children for sharing their life experiences and personal stories with us, who rely on us and trust us, and who, despite all the difficulties, do not give up and demand a better future for themselves.

Home

The establishment of a family is a basic need that applies to everyone, including those in situations of extreme poverty and uncertainty about their future. Some of the asylum-seekers came to Israel with their families to give them a better future than they could have hoped for in their country of origin, despite the many dangers along the way. Some formed relationships in Israel and established a family here.





OI

“I saw it with my own eyes”

Memories from the journey and from the country of origin

Children who arrived to Israel at an early age experienced the trauma of the journey to Israel- sometimes through their own memories and sometimes through memories inherited from their parents. There are many cases of children growing up in Israel and experiencing secondary trauma from their parents who have undergone difficult experiences on the way to Israel and that affect their ability to function. We hear stories from parents and children of long and arduous journeys, usually walking at night and sleeping in hiding places during the day; of the shortage of food and water and abandonment of the sick and the dead; of humiliating treatment, abuse, threats and extortion. The children were exposed to terrible horrors at a young age, memories of which accompany them in their daily lives.

“

My dad came to Israel first, me and my mom came after. If they know that someone wants to leave Eritrea, they just come and arrest him and put him in prison, so we didn't tell anyone and we left the house in the evening. We walked all night and a day until we reached Sudan. I was seven years old. When we got to Sudan they kidnapped me and my mom. They lied to my mother and wanted to sell me to one man, but my mom said she was not leaving me. They told my father that if he didn't pay a few thousand in a week we will sell your daughter or kill her and take out her heart. He didn't have enough money so he asked all kinds of people and then he paid and they sent us to Egypt. They kidnapped me there, too, and again he had to pay. There was no food or water on the way. It was like that for a week and some people fainted and some fell. If someone fell they didn't stop they just kept going and left him there. Some died on the way and they just left them there. My mom also fainted there, almost everyone fainted there. Someone said to them: We paid money, why don't we have food or water? So they beat him too. If someone doesn't pay for a month they either beat him or burn him. And it hurts a bit. I saw it with my own eyes. My mom had a problem with her leg there because they beat her. I saw it and it scared me. He pulled her by her foot and knocked her down. To get everyone to pay quickly, they scared us. They burned one child and once they cut someone's neck and he died. We were there for about two months. Next to where we were there were people who kidnap and kill and take out their hearts. So we weren't always allowed to go outside. I didn't know that and I wanted to go see what was going on in that house and there was a kind of border and I looked and then I saw tons of people who had their hearts cut out. My mother came out and yelled at me not to go there and ever since then I was afraid to get up at night and go to the toilet.

(S. 13 years old)



“

I still remember the Sinai desert (where the torture camps are) and still think about it now. Once when I was in Israel, someone called me and asked me to save him. I asked him what he needed saving from and he called me every night and asked. They would tell people there that if they had no one to pay for them they should call all sorts of numbers and ask them to save them. So when he called again I told him I was only a little girl and I couldn't help him. It was really frightening to remember again everything that had happened to me. Then they told me in Arabic that if he didn't pay now, they would kill him and take his heart, so I told my dad and my dad paid for him. That happened to my dad in Sinai, too. One he was almost killed, my mother paid for him and he got out okay.

(Y., 14 years old)



We met people who we were afraid of at the beginning but they told us they would help us. They gave us water and took us to their home, and every few days we had to move houses so they wouldn't catch us. Part of the time we continued by car and we passed through many places. After that we walked with many other people. Once we also took a truck with lots of other people. We also had to pass one sea in a small boat and had to huddle together. My brother and I nearly fainted so they took us upstairs. There were three or four days that we were without food.

(K., 12 years old)



My parents left Eritrea because of the Prime Minister there, not because they wanted to. I don't know what he does but they say he's not good. Dad was also in the army there and it was hard for him. According to what I think every Eritrean would want asylum.

(A., 12 years old)



Mom and Dad were both in the army. Mom was a regular soldier and Dad was a commander. I saw Dad for a little time, once a month, or when there was a holiday. He would come and bring lentils or meat. It was hard. She was afraid they would make me a soldier. They take everyone. You go to the army for many years, train, and then you guard the Eritrean border and have to kill anyone who tries to leave.

(S., 14 years old)



Dad was in the army and they forced him to stay longer. He had already finished and then they told him he had to keep going and my dad didn't want to. They told him that if he doesn't stay in the army they'll put him in jail, so instead he ran away. He didn't want to continue and he was going crazy from it, so he ran away.

(V., 12 years old)



02

I miss her sometimes, but not always.”

Thoughts on family

Many of the families we meet in the library are single-parent families. One of the parents, usually the mother, raises and supports the children alone, which puts stress on the family unit. Single mothers often face economic hardships, fatigue and lack of free time to spend with the children. In addition, the children experience many difficulties ranging from longing for the parent who left, taking responsibility for parenting roles, and anger at the situation, or even their parents. Even in families where both parents live and raise their children together, there is instability in the family since most parents have to work long hours and only see their children for a few hours a day, if at all. The young children are usually in makeshift day-care frameworks run by the community and crowded with dozens of other children (known locally as “children’s warehouses”) for 12 hours each day, which impedes their normal development.



“

Now that Dad is not at home it's hard because Mom isn't with us, she has to work harder. When Dad was at home we used to talk and eat together and do things together. I talk to Dad every day. I ask him how is it there? What is he doing? If it's fun, if it's cold. He went to Germany about three years ago, I don't know why. Before that he was with us here in Israel. It's not that I want to move to Germany with him. I want to live here. With my friends, and the [Levinsky Garden] library. Maybe when I'm big, I'll fly to him.

(R., 10 years old)

“

I don't really feel good talking, because if I talk about my mom it touches a very sensitive point because my mom didn't raise me, my dad is the one who raises me. He is the only one I see and know. With my mom I don't feel like she's my mom, she's just a woman. She's in Sweden now and she's happy there.

(M., 12 years old)

“

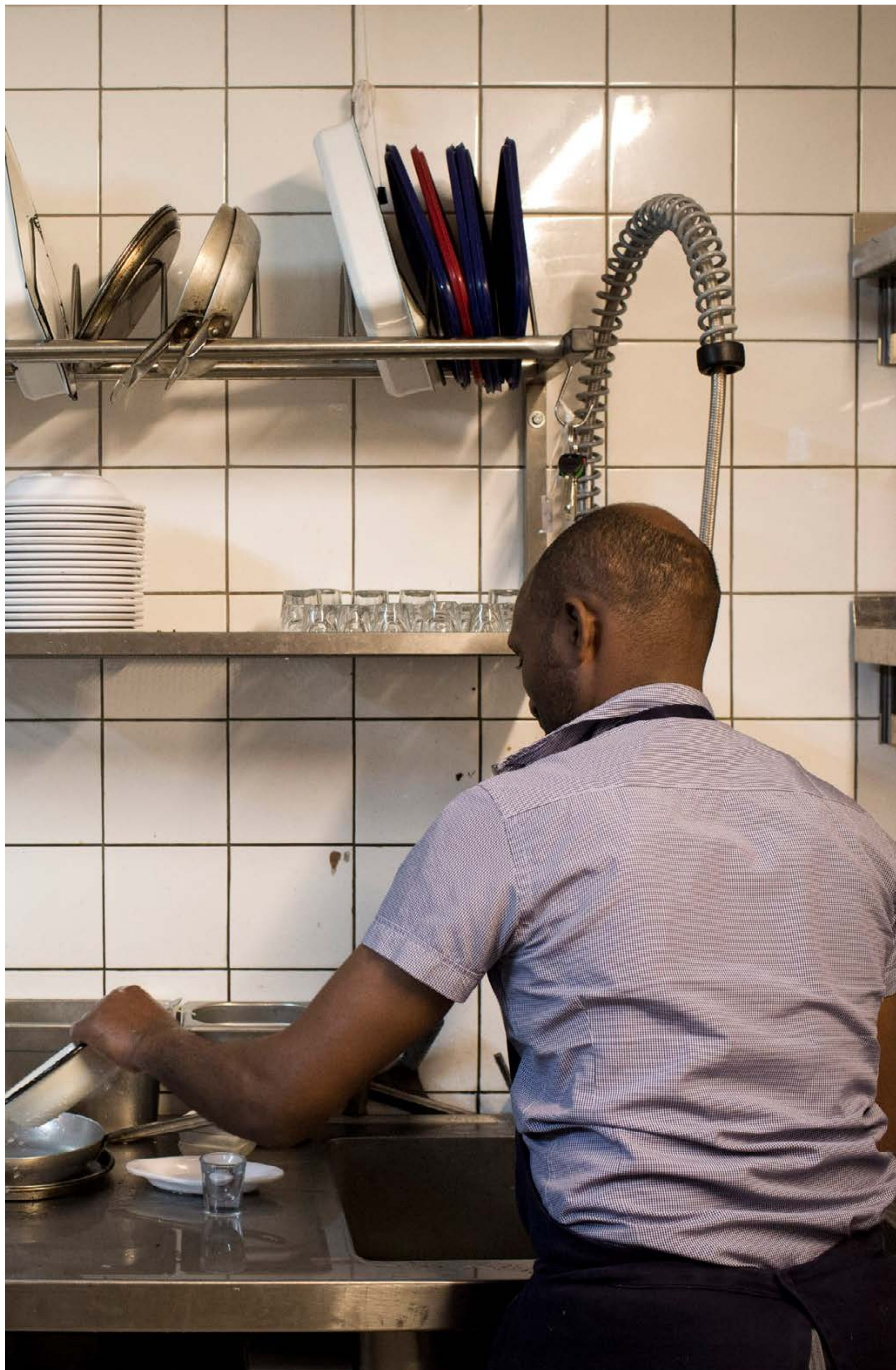
At first, mom lived with us in the house but not now. She left a few months ago. I miss her sometimes, but not always. I heard she has a boyfriend and that she got married, but I'm not in touch with her. My mom told me not to talk to her or call her so I don't talk to her. I have no idea why she said that. When she lived with us everything was fine and then she started acting differently and after that she just left the house and we didn't know why.

(S., 13 years old)

“

When we were in Eritrea, Dad was in the army, he was a soldier. He didn't come home a lot, so I cried all day, for about a month. I love my dad the most. I was always close to him, even when I was little. Once, when my mom was at home, Dad worked two jobs. But now he has one job. He leaves at 5:00 and come back around 18:00 or something like that. He's always home when I come back. He waits for me to eat dinner together because he doesn't like to eat alone.

(S., 13 years old)



03

“Dad works two jobs. He leaves at 7 AM and comes home at 10 PM”

Living and earning and living

Asylum-seekers in Israel are under group protection from the state, but the vast majority do not hold work permits. The government fails to regulate the status of asylum seeker, leaving them vulnerable to abuse from exploitative employers. Many are required to work two jobs around the clock, often in hard manual labour for minimum wage. As of 1 May 2017, the “deposit arrangement” for asylum-seekers came into effect, requiring them to allocate a fifth of their salary to a deposit fund that will be returned to them only if they leave Israel. This “arrangement” is extremely destructive for the asylum seeker community, harming the livelihoods of children and families. Due to their lack of status, asylum seekers are also vulnerable to exploitation when renting apartments. Asylum-seekers cannot usually provide checks or guarantors and are therefore rejected by many apartment owners and forced to live in overcrowded and congested neighbourhoods, paying much higher rent compared to market prices and without stability and security in their accommodations.



“

I live with my parents and two sisters. There are three rooms in the house, we took the biggest for ourselves and the other two we rented out because the owner of the apartment raised the rent. There is a kitchen and a bathroom outside that is shared by all the apartments. We have three beds. My mom and sisters sleep together in one bed and there is one bed for me and one for Dad. The people who live with us at home are alright. I get along with them. Like, kind of. I don't like all of them. They make a lot of noise. One works a lot and she comes home at two in the morning and bangs the door and then everyone wakes up.

(B., 11 years old)

“

I live with Mom, my brothers and my mom's brother. I mean, he doesn't live with us all the time, he just comes to shower and change clothes. He doesn't sleep at our house. Maybe he sleeps with his friends. He comes to rest with us sometimes. We are five brothers and my mom, and we have two rooms in the house. The beds are all mixed up, it's not always the same, we just take a bed and sleep. This house has a kitchen and bathroom in the house, just for us. My brothers are in daycare every day until eight at night. Mom works as a cleaner.
(M., 9 years old)

“

Mom leaves very early. She gets up at four in the morning and gets organized and leaves at five-thirty. I hear her when she gets up because she makes a lot of noise and wakes everyone up. I feel sorry for my little sister because she gets up at four-thirty with Mom. Mom takes her to kindergarten so she has to leave with her. She's there from six in the morning until seven at night.

(R., 11 years old)

“

Saturday is the hardest. Mom goes really early in the morning, at five and sometimes at four in the morning. She leaves when we're sleeping and she comes back at five, something like that. We keep telling her that Saturday is a holiday but she doesn't listen. Anyways, she gives all the money to the landlord. My mom gets money every month and every month she pays him all the money she gets.

(L., 9 years old)

Life in the Neighbourhood

Neve Sha'anun, a small neighbourhood in the southern part of the city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, suffers from institutional neglect and a lack of public services. Beginning in the first half of the 2000s, when the first wave of refugees from Africa arrived, Israeli authorities sent asylum seekers on organized buses directly from the detention facilities in the south of the country to Levinsky Park in Neve Sha'anun. Neve Sha'anun is one of the densest neighbourhoods in Israel and has yet to recover from the damage caused to the neighbourhood by the building of the New Central Bus Station- a monstrosity of a building that occupies 10 square blocks but stands 60% abandoned and attracts drug dealers, prostitutes, and crime- in .the heart of the neighbourhood





01

“This neighbourhood isn’t good for me”

Dangerous spaces

Neve Sha’anan, due to its failing infrastructure and years of neglect from the State, has become the home of the most marginalized communities within Israeli society. Many of the children in the neighborhood are exposed daily to cases of violence, drug abuse and other stressful situations that create a sense of precarious security. At the same time, high police presence and excessive policing, including harassment and false arrests, lead to feelings of alienation, fear and anger among the children. The neighbourhood is a major transport artery, and about 5000 busses pass through its streets daily. During the past year, five children from the library were injured in road accidents and dozens of other road hazards, such as uneven sidewalks, broken traffic lights and open construction sites, were reported to the staff. The city’s long-standing neglect of infrastructure, lack of streetlights, unsuitable roads and narrow or non-existent sidewalks have led to a situation in which children and neighbourhood residents are in constant danger.



“

I don't like the drug addicts in the neighbourhood. I see it a lot, but it doesn't bother me. It doesn't like hurt me or anything. I also don't like it when they arrest people. I've seen it many times and they also beat them. It scared me. I think to myself if the drug addicts were like that when they were small, too, and why did they choose it? I've seen people who give themselves shots, many times. Me and my friend did a search near the park and found 25 needles. We took a rock and broke all of them and buried them with sand. It doesn't scare me to touch it. One guy also tried once to offer me money. He came and told me that if I helped him move his things somewhere he would give me two hundred shekels. But I didn't do it.

(B., 11 years old)

“

This neighbourhood isn't good for me. I feel safe in it, because I know a lot of people in it and they protect me from all the bad things so I walk freely, but there are things going on there that a kid like me shouldn't see like whores and people selling drugs. One time I saw people fucking in the park. There's a lot of police in the neighbourhood, mostly at night. One night I wake up from hearing screaming- the police caught two Arabs, beat them up and put them in the police car. A few days ago, I saw them giving an electric shock to a crazy black guy. In my heart I said 'what shitty people'. Even if he did something bad, it hurts me.

(M., 12 years old)

“

There are people in the neighbourhood who fight and shout under my house. Some people say to me, 'Do you want to marry me?' but I ignore it. I also see drug addicts in the street. I don't really notice that anymore. I don't care. In the neighbourhood, I've seen people taking stinky drugs, in cigarettes and in a bottle. I don't understand why they do it. Sometimes I get scared how they do it. It really looks scary. What can I say to them? Better to stay away.

(K., 12 years old)

“

There are a lot of drug addicts in the neighbourhood. Once in the middle of practice, a drug addict threw a bottle of beer at us while two kids were running after the ball and it almost hit them. We shouted 'who's there?' and then he ran away. Now mostly there's something black that they smoke. And a lot of times they hide drugs in the grass where the playground is under the slides.

(N., 14 years old)



“

It's dangerous here because of the roads. Once I saw a woman crossing the road with her little girl, and before they could reach the sidewalk, the car ran over the little girl. And there was the case of the mother of a kid I know who was run over near our school. I'm afraid to go cross the roads, so I'm careful. There are lots of roads on my way. My brothers also saw that one man drove through a red light and ran over someone.

(K., 10 years old)

“

The situation in the neighbourhood sucks, tons of homeless people, drug addicts, asylum-seekers. Everyone is here together. They don't take care of the neighbourhood, maybe there have been a few renovations here and there recently, but they don't think about the people themselves. The State doesn't care, they just put them here.

(S., 16 years old)

“

"I went home back from school, when I crossed the road at the pedestrian crossing a bus came very fast and hit me. I don't remember anything, but my friends, who were with me, told me that I was thrown to the other side of the road and bleeding from my head. Then an ambulance came and took me to the hospital. I was there for two weeks.

(B., 10 years old)



02

“It happened to some girls that you know”

sexual harassment and assault

Despite high police presence, there is a feeling of lawlessness in the neighbourhood that is threatening for children and families. The children shared with us stories of sexual abuse, harassment, and dangerous situations they have experienced. The dangers are often intensified as a result of the lack of awareness about sexual assault and harassment, especially awareness of parents and family.



“

When I was in the second grade, I got off the bus near my house on Levanda street and there was a man looking at me. I went upstairs to my house and he followed me upstairs. He started hugging me and told me to come downstairs with him and that he had a lot of candy. I said ‘no thanks’, he said ‘come, come’. I tried to climb the last steps of the building and then he picked me up and went down a few steps. I started yelling so he left me and ran. I quickly went inside my house. I didn’t tell my dad that because I didn’t want him to worry. After Dad left, I heard knocking on the door and realized it was that man. I turned off the lights and the television and pretended there was no one in the house. I went into the bathroom and waited. I went out and looked under the door and saw shoes. I went back into the bathroom until he left. Since then every time I would go up the stairs of that building on Levanda I would look to see if anyone was there.

(A., 12 years old)

“

It didn’t happen to me, but I know some children that it happened to. It happened to some girls that you know. There are other people who harass, not just the drug addicts. They don’t know them, and the girls don’t want to talk to them and they go exactly where the girls are.

(T., 14 years old)

“

In Neve Sha’anana, I didn’t feel comfortable going outside. So, I preferred to stay home. One time, about a year ago, I was with a friend in the Levinsky Park. We sat there, and then a drug addict winked at us and we didn’t look at him and we just rolled our eyes at him. So he took out a knife and came towards us, so we just ran away.

(G., 13 years old)

“

Many times when I walk in the evening on Har Tzion street cars stop next to me. They want me to come in [and for me to have sex with them] and they beep at me. I run away right away. It’s scary.

(D., 11 years old)

“

There’s a man who walks around with a scary dog and threatens us when we sit at the park. One day he came and said that if we didn’t marry him he would tell his dog to bite us. We ran away and he chased us with the dog. We got really scared and went into some shop but the man in the shop shouted at us and threw us out. We were afraid to run home because then he can know where we lived ”

(A., 12)

Identity and Future

The lack of a clear immigration policy, coupled with non-transparent bureaucracy, have created an unpredictable and destabilizing environment for the library's children. The children are forced to ask themselves: Where will I live in a few years? Will I be in Israel or will I be deported back to where I came from? The children internalize the oppression that is all around them and believe that they, above all, are foreign children and that they will continue to be without rights and exposed to discrimination and racism. On the other hand, for most of them, Israel is the only country they know. They like the neighbourhood, the city of Tel Aviv, their friends, and their community. These two opposite notions, belonging and alienation, emerge in contradicting feelings of shame and pride, of a sense of being an outcast and a desire to integrate into society.





OI

“Am I different from you?”

Questions about rights and status

Feelings of confusion, detachment, and uncertainty resulting from their lack of status hinder proper development for the children, especially in their identity formation. The children live in risk of deportation in an unfamiliar country, causing a sense of existential anxiety that becomes an essential part of their experience of existence. For adolescent children, lack of status is a particularly problematic issue. At this critical age, adolescents find it difficult to formulate their identity and plan for the future, and they are left with feelings of isolation, detachment and not belonging.



“

Sorry for saying this, but my status sucks. They don't treat us like human beings. The way they treat you is not the way they treat me. You have a (resident) ID, but I have to go to renew my visa every so often, and they treat us badly. They shout at us and if we didn't have a visa they would take us to Holot. It bothers me that you have an ID and I have nothing, that we are treated differently. Am I different from you? If we walk down the street and they catch us — for us it's Holot and for you, if you go they won't do anything to you. We see police and we are afraid. We're treated like animals.

(R., 12 years old)

“

I feel like I'm an African, a nigger, different. That's what I know. I don't have any Jewish friends at all. My African friends feel the same way I do. If I tell Israelis that I am a refugee, they don't understand me, but my friends from my neighbourhood get it. We talk about it among ourselves, we ask why we came here..

(D., 12 years old)

“

I wouldn't want to go back to Sudan because of what I hear in the news, that there are a lot of wars there. It scares me. The kids in my class tell us that they don't want to go back to Eritrea because the Prime Minister there kills a lot of people. I don't feel Israeli. I don't know why. I feel like I belong to the world. I won't stay here in Israel.

(L., 11 years old)

“

I feel half-half, half Israeli, half not. Yes, because I grew up here, I study here, I breathe here. Half not because I know where I came from, what my origin is, I will never forget where I came from. I will not change. I am Darfuri and they are murdering my people and I have to help them.

(K., 15 years old)

“

I knew a lot of children who left for South Sudan when they got independence, but now there is war there again. They took them to Saharonim (a detention center near the Egyptian border), and then they came back, packed and suddenly disappeared. I didn't even say goodbye to them. We were sad, we cried. Now we sometimes sit around a few friends and remember them. They just deported them.

(A., 16 years old)



02

“What did we do to them to make them treat us like this?”

Questions about racism

The past few years in Israel and in Neve Shaanan especially, have been characterized by a racist and xenophobic public atmosphere. Elected officials incite violence against asylum-seekers and their children. Many children testify to a sense of insecurity in public spaces, hostility, harassment and assault as part of their daily routine. Alongside these manifestations of racism, there is also institutionalized, systemic racism, which prevents them from living normal and just lives in Israel. The discriminatory legislation that has been developed in recent years against asylum-seekers, that includes incarceration, harm to the family's livelihood and a lack of social services, further reduces opportunities for refugee children.



“

Many times when I walk down the street people curse me. They say ‘you black girl you shouldn’t be here’. They said to us, ‘You niggers, you’re like donkeys’, but we didn’t answer and just walked away. At first I didn’t know that there was discrimination, but in the third grade I noticed in school (in the north part of the city) that if I needed something, for example, I asked what the homework was, the children would say ‘Don’t talk to us’. They would even turn away from me when they saw me coming. They used to tell me that I was the colour of poo. The teachers didn’t help me at all. Even the teachers were racist to me.

(T., 13 years old)

“

They cursed me in the park, a woman passed by, told me ‘Go back to Africa, you niggers, it’s not your country. Say thank you that we let you in here’. It hurt me, made me feel different, that they don’t want me.

(D., 12 years old)

“

Two days ago we saw a man, he came to us three times. Every time he comes, looks at us strangely, laughs at us. He kicked my friend. The friend cursed him and he laughed at us. It doesn’t scare me but I don’t understand why they do it. What did we do to them to make them treat us like this?

(M., 12 years old)

“

We went on an annual trip to Acco with the school and while we were walking around some kids in Acco called me and another boy chocolate. They turned to us and laughed. I didn’t respond to them, I didn’t get angry. I laughed because it didn’t hurt me, but I think they were trying to hurt me.

(S., 16 years old)

“

Once I was in Shapira (a neighbourhood in South Tel Aviv), I was playing and I saw a dog there, so I asked his owner if the dog bites. He said no and that I could pet it, and then a woman came, the woman who is always bothering us. She told me something that isn’t nice so I don’t want to repeat it. It has to do with racism. I told the policeman, but the policeman himself is racist.

(K., 10 years old)



03

“I won’t succeed, I’m a refugee”

Hopes for the future

The children we meet in the library think about their future with great fear and confusion. On the one hand, they want a better future for themselves and their families, and wish for a “happy ending,” when they can acquire a profession, earn a living and escape the cycle of poverty and exclusion. On the other hand, their eyes are also open to reality. They know that there is no certainty that they will remain in Israel, and even if they remain, they have no confidence that they can fulfill their dreams in Israel.

“

I don't feel like I belong so much in Israel. I think in Eritrea I would feel better. Because of the language and family. But, in the meantime I don't want to go back until the situation there changes. When I look on Facebook I always see that they say bad things about the Prime Minister there. That he kills people. And it's true, he kills a lot of people. (A., 12 years old)

“

In five years, I would like to be in Canada, or Holland. My friends are there. I would like to work in photography, with tools, but not to study at university. I won't succeed, I'm a refugee.

(S., 14 years old)

“

I'm afraid that in the end I'll work at a bad job, like cleaning. I see my mom and it's really hard for her. When she comes home she's always tired, even though she pretends she's not tired. I sometimes tell her when she comes home that I'll make the food instead of her, but she says she's not tired, even though it's not true.

(R., 13 years old)

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I would also like to go to Germany. I haven't seen my brothers in about 5 years and I would like to see them, I miss them. But, it's also a little scary to travel to a new country because when I was new in Israel I didn't have friends in school in Ramat Aviv (a neighbourhood in North Tel Aviv). They were all racist to me. I'm afraid it will be like that in Germany.

(S., 13 years old)

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I would like to stay in Israel, even when I grow up. But, I think we'll go back to Eritrea. My dad talks about it and my mother wants to, also. It's not good for her here and she wants to go back to her family and uncles and aunts. I want to stay where my friends are. I feel like I belong here in Israel.

(K., 12 years old)

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I have to succeed in football, because if I don't, I'll have to work like my parents do. I want more, they work so hard and I will have to help them.

(A., 16 years old)



Epilogue

This document was written after many years of close Relationships with the children of the library and their families. We felt obligated to bring their stories to the public and make their voices heard. We believe that it is our responsibility, as educators in the communities, to spread and promote positive social change for the children, which will lead to broader changes that will benefit all residents of the neighbourhood.

The children shared with us the vulnerability, distress and ongoing trauma that began with the conditions of life in the country of origin and the dangerous journey to Israel, and continues to be present in their lives here as well. The absence of basic rights, the harsh memories from the journey, the manifestations of racism and an unclear future all affect the children's lives and prospects. They are also impacted by the criminal and violent environment in which they are raised and educated. Drug trafficking, crime, neglect and the lack of resources and social services have been part of the life of the Neve Sha'anani neighbourhood and its residents for a long time. The children live in a reality where drug dealers, pimps and women in prostitution are part of their neighbourhood landscape and is seen by them as normal. Growing up in the shadow of all of this has serious consequences for the proper development of children, and they experience feelings of detachment, lack of belonging and existential anxiety about their future. The words of the children presented here are only the tip of the iceberg of the stories of thousands of other children, trying to overcome the daily challenges of being a refugee child in South Tel Aviv.

In recent years, the library staff has developed educational programmes for children and youth in order to meet some of the needs that were mentioned in the children's testimonies. Our primary goal is to open the library as much as possible for educational activities in the afternoon, so that children don't have to spend their time wandering in dangerous areas. We make the Levinsky Park

a safe area for them and provide them with access to educational, cultural and artistic content during after school hours. At the same time, strengthening ties with children and their families enables us to support their parents in the process of realizing the children's rights, and to advocate on behalf of the children before the welfare and education authorities.

The library staff also works to promote the children's educational, social and political growth. We operate learning centers and social groups in which we work with the children on various topics, such as: group empowerment, developing personal strengths, encouraging activism and raising awareness of the power of the individual and of all of us as a group to promote and bring about change. We established a dialogue group with refugee children and Jewish children from the neighbourhoods of South Tel Aviv, where the children from both groups meet to get to know each other, play together and participate in joint workshops. In addition, we regularly advocated on behalf of the the neighbourhood, and especially for the children who live there, before Israeli decision makers.

The children, whose voices are heard in this document, are not subject to removal from Israel. They are here and they are not about to disappear anytime soon, but the only place they know, if only they could call it "home", rejects and does not accept them. This creates a growing sense of alienation between them and Israeli society. Therefore, the authorities in Israel, the municipalities and the government, must address this issue and formulate a systemic response that will improve conditions in the neighbourhood, for the benefit of all its residents, and especially for the children. By recognizing and granting status to the children, thereby providing for the basic rights of them and their parents, they will have a just life in Israel as they deserve. Such a systemic mechanism must include access to social services and health services, as well as an emergency programme for the rehabilitation of the neighbourhood to address its many problems.