

Report on a Visit to ALUMA

After attending the Herczeg Seminar in Tel Aviv, Sharon Allentuck, our current NCJWC President, and I made an appointment to visit ALUMA, previously known as the Israel Family Counselling Association (IFCA). NCJWC's only Israeli project, ALUMA, is situated on Bar Kochba, a quiet residential street. A sign in front signifies what it is, but if one walks quickly, it is easily missed.

Upon arrival, we were greeted by Peninah Rabin (the sister of a Past President of ICJW, Leah Aharonov), a dedicated, long term counsellor of ALUMA.

The 'house' itself is a very narrow, non-descript, detached bungalow. Consisting of three treatment rooms and one larger room which serves as the office. The furniture is simple, no artwork adorns the walls, the paint is peeling and the house is well worn, yet one immediately realizes the warmth generated from the place. The welcoming atmosphere is genuine. Clearly, the funds received are being spent on the clients and not the décor.

As we await the arrival of the Director of the Board, Tzippy Shamir, Peninah gives us a tour of the premises.

We immediately notice the sign in the hall acknowledging the generous bequeath by Ann Leith, an NCJWC Vancouver Section long time member who remembered ALUMA in her will. With this money, ALUMA obtained a great teaching tool used to observe social work students counselling clients. A two-way mirror and state of the art video equipment is very much appreciated and well used. The modern video equipment is in sharp contrast to the tired appearance of the house.

Tzippi tells us the social workers work here for little remuneration. They are helping these people more as a mitzvah than as a means to make a decent living. The clients come from all over Israel, some seeking this hidden oasis to remain anonymous while getting help. ALUMA does not advertise; its' clients discover this place only by referral.

Many of those helped are couples experiencing all kinds of problems. ALUMA has a niche target audience of families experiencing problems with children having learning disabilities. Many gay couples come to seek couple therapy. For a small place, with very limited financial resources, ALUMA is filling a real need, helping many troubled people.

We are told that ALUMA has grave financial difficulties. Working on a shoe-string budget, they continue to operate. We could see how every dollar is appreciated. Since the 1970's ALUMA's only supporter from outside Israel is NCJWC. As is the NCJWC way, we look for small projects that make a difference in people's lives. ALUMA fits our mandate nicely. As NCJWC members, we are all committed to supporting this family service organization. J Members' dues include ten dollars that goes directly to ALUMA.

Until recently, sections across Canada have raised additional funds for ALUMA. Today, little else besides our mandatory donation has gone ALUMA's way. This loss is greatly recognized and missed.

Hearing about the work being done by ALUMA, and speaking with their representatives, Sharon and I were greatly impressed. We could see how much our contribution means.

The message that we realized was clear. NCJC members should consider ALUMA if they are looking to support Israeli projects. A donation to ALUMA definitely make a difference. Sometimes we are quick to donate to 'flashy' Israeli projects, and we forget about our own commitment and how meaningful to individuals these funds are.

Our visit was definitely an eye opener into how this grassroots counselling service is performing such a valued service in Tel Aviv with so little fanfare. We should be proud to be associated with this important project and continue to offer our support.