

Happy to share with you our social work day celebrations in Israel.

On 1 March 2016, a special event was held at the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) in honor of World Social Work Day. The event was initiated by the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, the former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Services, the IFCJ (the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews), and the Israel Union of Social Workers.

During the course of that day, eight different Knesset committees held discussions about issues relating to the role of social workers, which were attended by social workers, social services users, and Israeli Parliament members. The committee discussions included: issues relating to investment in care for children at risk and their families; dual diagnosis treatment; the contribution of social workers dealing with absorption of immigrants from different cultures, and the treatment given by those workers; the status of social workers; employment rights for social workers; partnerships in social and welfare services; and therapeutic settings for adolescents without family support who live in residential facilities.

In addition, a special session of the Knesset was held in honor of World Social Work Day, in which there was a preliminary reading of the proposed Legal Capacity and Guardianship amendment regarding the matter of deciding disputes between parents about guardianship. According to that proposal, the court will be the only party responsible for resolving the dispute, and the social worker will not bear responsibility for making the final judgement. The proposal clarifies that the role of the social worker in matters relating to legal proceedings is to prepare a summary and recommendations to the court, whereas the role of the court is to investigate, to enable each of the parties to express their opinions, and to make a decision. The working assumption is that this new situation will enhance the ability of social workers to improve the situation of children and families, and even enable them to continue accompanying the children and families after the court has made its decision. Most of the Members of Knesset in the forum discussed the role of social workers and the role of judges and the court in various contexts of the profession. They also discussed the situation of those who do the work as well as the shortcomings of the existing social policy.

On that day, several social workers and academic scholars were granted awards of distinction.

Awards of distinction were granted to two outstanding and groundbreaking social workers: Shira Avni (MSW) from the Jerusalem Municipality received an award for leading a special, innovative work procedure which ensures that the social aspect will be taken into account in urban planning and in constructing language for professionals; and Natalie Hilu Munier from the Department of Social Integration at the Lod Municipality received an award for establishing bi-national after-school care programs for young children.

Two more awards were granted to two social work departments: (1) The social work department at the Ziv Medical Center in Safed, which established an innovative and creative psychosocial care service for wounded people from Syria who are hospitalized at the Medical Center. The service was established in cooperation with the community and organizations that provided these patients with the necessary assistance and accessories. (2) The Social Services Department in the Hadar neighborhood of Haifa, which established a community social networking program where neighborhood residents work voluntarily and help their friends living in the neighborhood on the personal, family, and community levels. Young community members also became involved in the project. They anchored themselves in the neighborhood and became socially involved in promoting neighborhood projects, e.g., a project in which neighborhood residents help children at risk, elderly people, independent (single parent) families, and other populations with special needs.

Prof. Yael Giron, currently the Chair of the School of Social Work at Zefat Academic College, was honored with a lifetime achievement award for her contribution, over the past 20 years since the enactment of the Social Workers Law in Israel, to promote expertise in social work fields, to give them recognition and to set norms for granting an expert's license. As of 1 August 2016, 9 fields of expertise in social work will be recognized by the State of Israel.

In addition, awards of distinction were granted to two outstanding and groundbreaking academic scholars:

Prof. Muhammad Haj-Yahia of the School of Social Work and Social Welfare at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem received an award of distinction for establishing a groundbreaking field of research on domestic violence in traditional societies.

Prof. Orit Nuttman-Shwartz, who developed new concepts in the field of personal and social trauma, received an award of distinction for her groundbreaking efforts to integrate academic work and work with needy communities. The main concepts that she developed include shared traumatic reality, and international social work. She also initiated an innovative curriculum that includes work with refugees, work migrants, asylum seekers, and populations that have no legal status.

Happy social work month for all of us

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In addition, the Federation of Local Authorities published an advertisement in the newspapers thanking all municipal social workers for their contributions to the communities. They also encouraged all the local mayors to recognize the social workers in their cities on March 15. Already, in the city of Carmiel, the mayor placed a large sign at the entrance to the city saying "we honor our social workers – thank you!"