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# Early, Timely



The Association for Early Intervention with Special Needs helps very young children with special needs, in their formative years, learn life skills, and prepare for mainstream education

**T**he Association for Early Intervention for Children with Special Needs in Azaiba, is Oman's best known specialised care centre for very young children with conditions such as autism, Down's Syndrome, learning disabilities, motor-skills impairment and many more.

#### Understanding Early Intervention

FACES met Hasan Al Moosa, one of the key members and driving forces behind the Association, to get a better understanding of what services they provide and how it impacts the children and society as a whole. "We focus on quality, not quantity. It makes no sense to say we have 200-300 children here, and the ones that benefit may only be around 50. Our aim has been to mainstream the children after age 6, and we have managed to do that for hundreds in the last nine years," says Hasan.

"We also realise that not every child can be sent to mainstream schools after their

#### **Dr. Masooma Al Saleh**

*Director of the Association, is a trained Montessori specialist as well, and her life's mission is helping young children learn and progress*







time here, not because the child is not ready, but because our regular schools aren't ready to take on these kids, and that is why our secondary and larger aim is to make the children ready in every way – to eat, dress and tend to themselves, and in the end, make them ready for life." 87 young children currently benefit from the day care centre, which is only the first part of services offered. "We also have an out-reach programme, in which our trained volunteers visit the children at their homes, not to teach or train them, but their parents. About 150 kids benefit from this programme, and a home visitor spends over an hour and 15 minutes every week with the mother, and a week

later, the assessment for the previous week is made," says Hasan.

The most important of the Association's services is the third – the assessment centre. "This is the only one in the country, with four therapists – a paediatric therapist, speech pathologist, psychologist and occupational therapist, who work together as a multi-disciplinary team." Special programmes may be designed for individual children, to be implemented by the specialists, teachers, home visitors and parents.

"Because the child spends five hours a day here, and the majority at home, we rely on the mother to become the best teacher for the child. In general,

we say there is no child who will not progress. There are difficult cases, and the more difficult ones are treated only at home, as they need one-to-one interaction. Since our resources are limited, we get only children aged 3-6 to the day care centre. In home visitation, all children between newborn infants to age 9 are catered to," explains Hasan.

### Behind the scenes

Without doubt, running such an organisation offering such intense and specialised care and services is no easy task. "We still have a lot to expand and develop. When we opened initially, we were against the idea of opening classrooms on the first floor, but

The Association works in 3 parts - a day care centre, home visitation programme and assessment



At the Association's day care centre, classrooms are split according to theme, and the children are not grouped according to their condition, but mingle freely




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two years ago, due to the long waiting list, we had to do it. We also move non-classroom activities to the terrace. This means we have now exhausted our space and capacity in this centre," says Hasan.

The new Centre coming up in Seeb area will be purpose-built, purpose-designed and purpose-equipped one, to accommodate over 500 children. The number of specialists would also go up to 20. "We will also have music and art therapists and offer complete services like a gym, multipurpose therapy hall, hydrotherapy facility and a bigger assessment unit, four sensory rooms, cafeteria and a resource room for

everyone," said Dr. Masooma Al Saleh, director of the Association. "We not only provide services to the children and their families, but training facilities for universities and the Ministry of Health."

The Association is open to children of all nationalities. 'Disability doesn't discriminate, why should we' is the underlying motto. The medium of instruction is only Arabic for now.

"We're involved with children, the future of the country and they have potential which we believe in, invest in and explore for them to grow, learn and lead normal and fulfilling lives," say Hasan and Dr. Masooma. 



### To know

→ The Association offers three-pronged services by teaching children at the day care centre, sending trained volunteers for home visitation to help the parents teach/train the child better, and a later assessment unit where the child's progress is continually monitored.

→ Operational expenses are huge and the Association welcomes any kind of financial, product or service assistance. Anyone can contribute in any way, and we encourage you to do it.

→ The Association is the first and only one of its kind in the country, and offers its services to hospitals and students as well

→ Contact the Association on 24496960, and make a difference to a child's life.



The current centre has reached its capacity and the Association will soon expand to bigger, better premises