CITY HALL EMBRACES EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT: REACHING AN UNDERSERVED POPULATION IN TEL AVIV, 2016–2019

SYNOPSIS

In the early 2010s in Tel Aviv, parents with children under four years of age were mostly on their own when it came to finding the child care services and support they needed. Although the city was an economic and technology powerhouse, the government showed little interest in providing for the youngest residents. Public concern about the cost and quality of day care and a shortage of opportunities to ensure infants and toddlers thrived drew parents into the streets. In 2016, the city began to respond. Municipal departments expanded services, launched a digital platform for parents, and renovated public spaces to suit children three years old and younger. By 2019, early childhood development had become a government priority and part of the mayor's reelection campaign platform, although scaling services to some of the poorest neighborhoods remained a challenge.

INTRODUCTION

On a frigid morning in December 2017, Yoav Ben-Yehuda, director of parks and gardens in the city of Tel Aviv, walked down a Copenhagen street wondering why he had left the Mediterranean sun behind. He and eight other high-level Tel Aviv municipal officials were on a three-day study tour hosted by Gehl, a Danish architecture and design consultancy, in order to see how Copenhagen's urban environment supported the health and development of the city's babies and toddlers.

Ben-Yehuda thought the trip was a waste of his time. He had been in his position for a month when the municipality's director general, known as the CEO, instructed him to join the Copenhagen tour. The pretrip presentation on the long-term positive impact of investments in education and parent–child relationships from birth to age three years had caught his attention, but he didn't see how it was relevant to his work in planning, constructing, and maintaining 720 hectares of parks and gardens for a city of 430,000. Tel Aviv had plenty of playgrounds. Was there really anything that it could learn from its Danish counterpart?

A great deal, it turned out. During the next three days, Ben-Yehuda and his fellow municipal officials saw playgrounds, squares, and other venues that transformed their view of how a city could serve the needs of *all* of its citizens—especially the very young and their parents. "There is something in the vibe in Copenhagen—how public spaces invite people to come and stay," he recalled. "You walk down a street and suddenly it opens up into a small square and a playground. No fences like in Israel. Everything is open. I realized I could make public spaces where parents and small children want to stay and have fun and learn." When he returned to Tel Aviv, Ben-Yehuda launched plans to renovate and design playgrounds and public spaces with parents and young children in mind.

Before the mid 2010s, the Tel Aviv municipality had shown little interest in the needs of families with young children, even though the challenges facing this demographic group had had grown. As the city developed into an economic hub with a thriving high-tech industry in the late 2000s, young families flocked there, lured by good jobs and the country's best public schools. By 2018, more than a third of Tel Aviv's residents were aged 18 to 35 years, and 6.3% of the city's population was 3 years old or younger—well above the developed world average.[1]

But away from their hometowns and confronted with rising living costs, young parents struggled to find day care and other services that would help their infants and toddlers thrive. In 2011, as part of nationwide demonstrations over rising costs and deteriorating public services, they had taken to the streets to protest those gaps. Images of these "stroller marches" quickly landed on the pages of Israel's newspapers.

Tel Aviv's mayor tasked a Bloomberg Philanthropies innovation team—a research and advisory unit attached to his office—to develop options for alleviating the city's high cost of living. In 2015, after conducting a citywide survey, the team found the top three high-cost-of-living contributors were food, transportation, and early childhood services—particularly for toddlers and

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Box 1: How successful societies, toddlers, and urban planning go together

In 2007, a report in medical journal The Lancet estimated that 200 million children younger than five years of age would fail to reach their lifetime potential in cognitive and socioemotional development because of four causes: malnutrition, iodine deficiency, iron deficiency, and inadequate stimulation during their first five years of life.

From birth to three years of age, the rapid formation of neural pathways in a child's brain—at a rate of 1,000 synapses per second, according to *The Lancet*—shapes future achievement, including performance in school, social integration, and labor market success. The societal benefit from investment in early childhood development is possibly as substantial as the gains from prevention and control of endemic disease, researchers reasoned.

Commentator Richard Jolly wrote, "The problem is not the lack of knowledge about what to do but the lack of professional and political commitment to mobilize action on the scale required—and for poorer communities in countries throughout the world." The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) soon brought that challenge to the attention of governments. SDG Target 4.2 pushed governments to ensure that by 2030, all children would have access to quality early-childhood-development care and preprimary education so that they would be ready for primary education. However, scaling even the best early-childhood-development interventions, such as parent coaching, could be difficult. Many families lived in areas that were hard to reach because of difficult geography, areas that had only limited infrastructure, or areas sustaining conditions of violence. And staffing costs could deter local governments and other providers.

In response to those challenges, the Bernard van Leer Foundation decided to reward creative ideas for enabling cities, where the majority of the world's population lives, to serve children younger than five years and their caregivers more effectively and efficiently. The foundation encouraged municipalities to align street design, sidewalks, parks, public transportation, and building hours with one another with a view to improve access to key services and encourage social interaction while also clustering services that caregivers and children need. The foundation's Urban95 initiative, launched in 2016, asked, "If you could experience a city from 95 centimeters—the height of a three-year-old—what would you change?" The foundation noted that when children benefit, so do others: "When urban neighborhoods work well for pregnant women, babies, toddlers, and young children, they also tend to nurture strong communities and economic development."

See Richard Jolly, "Early Childhood Development: The Global Challenge," commentary in Child Development in Developing Countries series, *Lancet,* v. 369, January 6, 2007. Lancet series accessible at **https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/documents/lancet_child_development/en/**. A 2016 *Lancet* series on the same subject appears at https://www.thelancet.com/series/ECD2016. The full Urban95 description appears at **https://bernardvanleer.org/solutions/urban95/.**

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infants aged three years and younger. Government policy had little impact on food prices, and the national government set transportation regulations; but the city could take steps to make it easier, and therefore slightly less expensive, for parents to find playgrounds, day care centers and kindergartens, and health and education services their children needed.

A year later, Tel Aviv accepted an invitation to join a program initiative called Urban95, which aimed to incorporate a focus on the needs of young children and those who care for them into city design, planning, and management. The program asked, "If you could experience a city from 95 centimeters—the height of a three-year-old—what would you change?"—hence the program name (text box 1). It amplified concern for quality and accessibility in a conversation that had started with a focus on cost.

The small team of city officials responsible for implementing the program had to build support for the reforms within the municipal government. Their goal was to trigger a change in mind-set by making an otherwise neglected issue a city priority. Moreover, the new investments would have to reinforce each other both to respond to residents' concerns and to enable Tel Aviv to scale up access at reasonable cost—and that would require close coordination across municipal departments (called *administrations* in Tel Aviv).

THE CHALLENGE

A pioneering spirit had pervaded Tel Aviv since its founding in 1909, when a few dozen families from the ancient city of Jaffa divided plots of seaside land by blind lottery. During succeeding decades, the city became an economic and cultural hub, though there were some hard bumps in the road in the 1990s, when it was on the verge of bankruptcy. Elected mayor in 1998, Ron Huldai, a former combat pilot, invested in education, restructured the municipality, and increased revenue by luring foreign investment and developing infrastructure projects, all of which restored the city to solvency. The high-tech and financial sectors boomed.

In many respects, the city was unfriendly to young families, however. Tel Aviv ranked among the most expensive cities in the world.[2] Newcomers lacked social networks to rely on for child care, and day care services were expensive and unregulated even for middle-class parents—to say nothing of residents in Tel Aviv's marginalized communities, who faced an even worse situation. Even the city's lively, crowded sidewalks, buzzing with electric bikes and scooters, felt intimidating, perilous even, to those with a child in a stroller. Financially burdened and adrift, many young parents turned to the municipality for support.

To address these issues, getting the mayor and senior officials on board was crucial. The municipality was highly centralized. Beneath the mayor's office, city CEO Menachem Leiba made most of the operational, policy, and budget decisions. After the mayor, Leiba was the most powerful official in the city. Seven coequal administrations, plus a Spokesman's Office, reported directly to the CEO. (figure 1)

Top-level support did not guarantee success, however. The willingness of the municipal administrations to cooperate with one another was also important. Each week, Leiba held one-on-one meetings with the director of each administration, plus a Thursday morning meeting with all of them. Besides that, there were few institutional mechanisms for collaboration.

A few officials in the Tel Aviv municipality had tried to identify options for making the city more hospitable to young children. After the 2011 protests, the Strategic Planning Unit of the Engineering Administration developed a comprehensive early childhood development policy for the city, focused on services for children through age three years. Deputy Planning Director Hedva Finish brought together representatives from the Social Services and Public Health Administration and the Education Administration to begin implementing the policy. Around the same time, Michael Vole, then a manager in the Education Administration, proposed city-sponsored activities for young families. Two years later, Vole led a municipal cost-of-living committee that put the creation of city-owned day care facilities on the agenda.

But these proposals went nowhere. Three challenges—legal constraints, cost, and coordination—made it difficult to develop a response. Building and operating day care centers at a large scale would be expensive, and existing laws limited policy options, including providing for child care services in new multiuse space. Further, the city had no formal authority to regulate day care facilities already operating in the private market. Without a national legal framework, the city could be held liable if anything went wrong at a private center it tried to regulate by its own volition.

At the time, the mayor and CEO agreed that early childhood should be the national government's responsibility, not the city's. The national government already covered children older than three years; covering children three years and younger would be the next step, and the cost would be substantial not only immediately but long term as well. "The city's position was, 'we can't play the game with the central government that when it doesn't take responsibility, we step in to do it instead, and then we get stuck owning it forever,'" said Vole. "Even if we had the funds now, in 10 years who knows—maybe we won't. That's a very good and responsible argument" (text box 2).

The 2015 Bloomberg innovation team survey began to turn the tide. By making the link between child care services and the cost of living, it helped the mayor explain the issue in ways some of his coalition partners could more easily understand. The data it assembled opened everyone's eyes to the financial struggles families with young children faced. And its work also helped enlarge the range of possible remedies to measures. The mayor was willing to lend his support to proposals that did not appear to pose as many risks as the option of city-run day care centers did, provided proponents made a strong case that the approach made strategic sense.

Box 2. The Stroller Marches

New parents in Tel Aviv faced an expensive and unsettling challenge: child care. In the mid 2010s, female employment in Israel was above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's average, and paid maternity leave was three months.[1] (Paid paternity leave was eight days). A limited supply of means-based, subsidized public day care facilities served only 23% of children from birth through three years of age. Most parents enrolled their children in private facilities, the average cost of which was ILS (Israeli New Shekel) 42,000 (US$11,700) per year—four times the undergraduate tuition at Israel's most prestigious public university.[1] Unlike the public facilities, neither the central nor the municipal government regulated the private day care facilities. There were no mandatory child-to-staff ratios; there was no required training for caregivers in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid; and there were not even criminal background checks on prospective employees.

And as difficult as the situation was for middle-class parents, it was far worse for Tel Aviv's marginalized communities: the 18,000 Arabs in Jaffa, which in 1950 had formally merged with Tel Aviv, and the 42,000 mostly African asylum seekers and undocumented migrants living in ghettos in the south. Unlicensed asylum-seeker day care operations held infants in squalid, cramped conditions; media called them *baby warehouses*.[1] During a two-month span in 2015, five infants died due to negligence at such facilities.

Public outrage over Tel Aviv's child care situation began to boil over in the early 2010s. Young parents raised a distinct voice in a wave of protests over the high cost of living and deteriorating public services that brought Israelis into the streets throughout summer 2011. In what became known as *stroller marches*, thousands of parents thronged downtown Tel Aviv boulevards to demand greater government involvement in the private day care system, chanting the slogan "Nursery is not a warehouse."

In response to the protests, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appointed a committee headed by economist Manuel Trajtenberg to recommend socioeconomic reforms. Among the recommendations passed into law was a reduction in the age at which the government would begin providing free kindergarten: from four years of age to three. The national government did not, however, increase services for children three years and younger.

FRAMING A RESPONSE

The Bernard van Leer Foundation first sought to engage Tel Aviv as one of 10 global pioneering cities for Urban95 just after the Bloomberg team conducted its survey. It brought ideas that further extended the range of options and helped decision makers link policy to scientific evidence on early childhood development. The € (Euro) 30-million (US$33-million plus) initiative to help align investments in sidewalks, streets, parks, public transportation, and facilities with services families required to help their infants and toddlers flourish was also getting underway in Brazil, Colombia, Jordan, and other countries. "In Israel, everyone's looking at Tel Aviv, so if you do something here, it will have a

national impact," said Daniella Ben-Attar, the foundation's Israel country representative.

At a 2016 conference, Ben-Attar met Finish, the deputy director in the city's Strategic Planning Unit who had created the abandoned early childhood development policy several years earlier. Finish mentioned the Bloomberg team's cost-of-living research and suggested that could be a possible way forward. Ben-Attar met with the Bloomberg team members and began contributing research funding and expert knowledge.

Ben-Attar's collaboration with the Bloomberg team drew the notice of Hila Oren, chief executive of the Tel Aviv Foundation—the philanthropic arm of the municipality—which administered the millions of dollars in donor funds the city received each year. Ben-Attar put the case for the city's participation in Urban95 to Oren, who was impressed. "I realized how big an issue this was and how important it would be to the city," Oren recalled.

Oren, who reported directly to the mayor and had a reputation for scrupulously vetting external proposals, took the idea of an early childhood development grant to Mayor Huldai, arguing that Urban95 was an international initiative that would augment Tel Aviv's cachet as a leading global city. "The mayor [was] wary because Tel Aviv is a hot city where everyone wants to try things. We are the early adopters, and NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] often approach us," she said. "But in my assessment, this was not a risky proposition."

The mayor gave Oren the green light to bring a proposal to the CEO. For the next few months, the Bloomberg team, Ben-Attar, and the Tel Aviv Foundation staff worked together to draw up the parameters of an Urban95 project for Tel Aviv. One of the goals of the program was to give parents and caregivers skills, knowledge, and an urban environment that would facilitate positive interactions with young children that advanced their development. The team focused on five main areas: (1) developing municipal organizational infrastructure to support early childhood, (2) establishing citywide parenting services and a digital platform for families of children younger than three years, (3) improving the quality and affordability of child care, (4) adapting public spaces to the needs of families with young children; 5) enhancing urban mobility so that it was easier for caregivers and young children to reach important destinations (exhibit 1). The team examined global best practices, consulted experts, and met with city officials to learn how best to fit reforms into existing work plans. "When we came to the CEO, we already had all these allies in the municipality on board—people who were thinking this stuff was great because it would help them do their own jobs," recalled Ben-Attar.

The CEO accepted the proposal, which included a €1-million (US$ 1.1-million) commitment from the Bernard van Leer Foundation that the city would match at least one-to-one, as was its policy for projects involving donor funding. But he instructed the team to revise the plan with a view to reducing the programming and funding for child care, because he was wary of committing to a municipal role in running day care centers. He suggested directing the
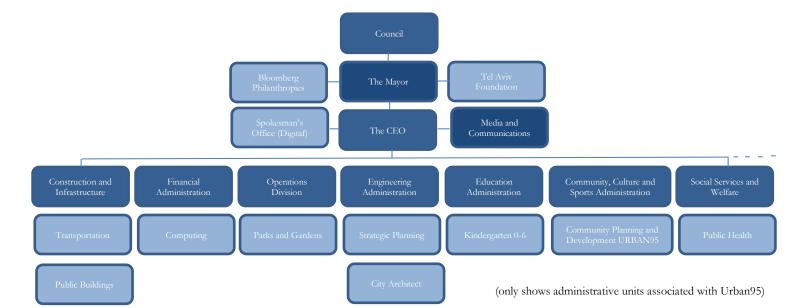
Figure 1: Tel Aviv Municipal Government (strong mayor council system)

(only shows administrative units associated with Urban95)

resources to public spaces instead. According to his colleagues, Leiba could personally relate to the need to make public spaces friendlier to people of all ages because he had recently become a first-time grandfather; when he took his granddaughter to city playgrounds, he saw that there were few places for parents to sit and that the equipment was too big for toddlers.

The grant created a position for an Urban95 project manager in the municipality to work with city officials across administrations to implement the reforms. The question was, where to put the position? The logical choices were the Social Services and Public Health Administration, which oversaw 15 well-baby clinics (called in Hebrew *Tipat Halav—Drop of Milk* in English) that provided free services for parents and infants, and the Education Administration, which oversaw all of the city's kindergartens. The CEO, however, assigned Urban95 to the new Community, Culture, and Sports Administration.

The mayor, who had grown up on a kibbutz, had created the community administration in 2015 to bring aspects of Israel's agricultural communes to modern city life. The administration oversaw cultural, sports, and religious activities; youth organizations like the scouts; and the city's 32 community centers—neighborhood hubs that provided services for all demographic groups.

The community administration had an ample budget, a staff of more than 2,300 employees or contractors, and leaders with reputations for delivering results. Director Ronit Ferber had served with the CEO in the air force, rising to the rank of colonel, an exceptional achievement for a woman in the Israel Defense Forces. Vole, head of the development and strategy unit, had been a commanding officer in the intelligence corps and then a special assistant in the

Israeli prime minister's office. And he had recently created a new Tel Aviv Education Administration department focused on improving services for young adults.

With its focus on quality-of-life issues, the community administration collaborated with other administrations to a degree that none of its counterparts did. That made it a natural place for Urban95, a framework for addressing early childhood development as not just a pedagogical issue but as one concerning all areas of a child's life—from parks to sidewalks.

To assist with implementation, the Urban95 project manager would work for Vole, and the foundation would give the community administration the funds to pay that project manager's salary. The initiative was therefore inside an administration with its own resources and workforce. This arrangement departed from other models. For example, the Bloomberg innovation team was an independent unit attached to the mayor's or CEO's office, as was a chief resilience officer from the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities program.

"The position of Urban95 inside the community administration was an advantage," said Vole. "In an organization whose metrics are implementation and delivery, being attached to the CEO can seem like a strong position, but it's not necessarily so. To deliver, you need not just the generals but also the soldiers."

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

To help serve the needs citizens had voiced, Tel Aviv began to elaborate specific objectives and targets in each of the five focus areas: developing municipal organizational infrastructure to support early childhood, creating citywide parenting services and a digital platform for families of children three years and younger, adapting public spaces to the needs of families with young children, improving urban mobility so children and caregivers could efficiently reach the services they needed, and reforming private day care facilities. The most prominent issue—reforming day care facilities—was fraught and complex, so the city focused most of its initial energy on the other elements of the program.

Building a shared vision

The Urban95 project's first step was to build support within city government, taking the initiative beyond the strategic planning officials who were involved with the Bloomberg team. Although the mayor was already on board, it was important to reach the implementers and to deepen the engagement of some of the senior decision makers. To help pilot that effort as well as other dimensions of the program, a hiring committee sought to find just the right person. In early 2017, after a careful search, they offered the job to Bosmat Sfadia-Wolf.

An architect with a master's degree in housing and urbanism, Sfadia-Wolf had visited or resided in several places beyond Israel but was a native of Tel

Aviv and had a private architecture practice in the city. She had shared her ideas with municipal officials before but had no direct public-sector experience. And aside from being a mother of two young boys, she had little formal background in early childhood development. Her outgoing personality and results-oriented attitude impressed the hiring committee, however.

Working closely with Vole, Ferber, and Ben-Attar, Sfadia-Wolf's first task was to build support within the municipality for implementing the early childhood development reforms set forth in the city's Urban95 proposal. Sfadia-Wolf studied research Ben-Attar had sent her, and she developed presentations containing data and stories that would resonate with specific officials. For instance, to the mayor, who cared about cost savings and long-term vision, she cited research conducted by Nobel Prize–winning economist James Heckman, who had found that investments in early childhood produced multifold returns for society.[3]

During a six-month period, Sfadia-Wolf met with dozens of municipal employees. She not only presented her case but also listened to what each department needed, and she identified potential opportunities for Urban95-supported interventions. Ferber, who, with her close connection to the CEO, held clout in the municipality, helped the new project manager secure time on the calendars of top-level directors. She also recruited her colleagues and subordinates. "She was very engaged and is an amazing pusher. She has a rare ability to get people crazy about doing things. She got them excited," recalled Vole.

Sfadia-Wolf also met with the heads of departments within administrations as well as other midlevel officials to explain Urban95. "We went to everyone," Sfadia-Wolf recalled. "It can't just be the city managers; you have to reach the implementers, too. It's important to have the city engineer on board, but he's not the guy who puts the garbage bin on the lamppost that obstructs a sidewalk." She found that departments that focused on education, social services, and quality of life were more receptive than were those in which early childhood development was a less obvious focus area. They included departments that dealt with city engineering, public spaces, and transportation.

When Sfadia-Wolf went to the Transportation Department within the Infrastructure Administration to build support for implementing reforms related to improvements in mobility for young children, she encountered resistance. The department had competing priorities, chief of which was a long-delayed light-rail project meant to alleviate worsening traffic congestion. Moreover, interventions that could affect city traffic patterns, such as widening sidewalks or making a road crossing safer, required approval by the national Transportation Ministry, which set traffic regulations for the entire country, as well as a municipal committee—a lengthy process.

To help build understanding and know-how, the Bernard van Leer Foundation sponsored study tours for municipal project teams. In May 2017, right after Sfadia-Wolf came on board, Ben-Attar arranged for a handful of Tel Aviv municipality officials, including Vole and Ferber, to attend a foundation

executive-education program focused on scaling early childhood development programs. Hosted at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and including teams from different countries, the weeklong program introduced the municipal officials to the Bernard van Leer Foundation's approach to strategic planning and tools for scaling programs.

The trip that had the biggest impact on city managers was the visit to Copenhagen in late 2017. The capital of Denmark consistently ranked as one of the world's best cities in terms of quality of life. For decades, urbanist Jan Gehl and his firm had worked with Copenhagen's municipal government to gather data and set cross-departmental targets for public-space use—such as number of bicyclists, amount of time people spent in public spaces, and resident satisfaction with the city's parks, playgrounds, sidewalks, and squares.[4] The city was known globally for its bicycle infrastructure and people-centered urban design.[5]

The visit was unprecedented for Tel Aviv, and even though the foundation funded it from outside the grant, the optics invited criticism. Going to executive leadership training at Harvard was one thing, but why were nine top city officials taking a three-day trip to Scandinavia? Adding to the pressure, local Tel Aviv elections were scheduled for October 2018, so for the trip to have an immediate impact on the participants' work plans and budget decisions, it had to happen before the campaign period began in February, when law prohibited the municipality from launching new projects that could be construed as attempts to win votes—such as building new playgrounds or making infrastructure improvements.

The trip took place in the middle of December, when Copenhagen temperatures were below freezing and daylight lasted only about seven hours. During three days of panel discussions, workshops, and tours of the city, the Tel Aviv group learned about the people-centered principles Gehl had applied to transform Copenhagen; to change the city's design of playgrounds, sidewalks, and public squares with young children in mind; to create quantitative and qualitative tools to study public life; and to observe how municipal officials collaborated across agencies and engaged the public.

Every participant came away with positive feedback about the trip. "It was the best investment we ever made," Vole said. "Let's imagine that the entire, €1-million [US$1.1-million] Urban95 grant was cut down to €100,000: I would still invest €50,000 in that trip because professional consultants or policy papers or pilot projects—all of that pales in comparison to finding a way to approach the people who have the real resources—and Tel Aviv has resources—and shape the way they themselves want to spend those resources."

The trip also produced unexpected bonding among the participants. "When we went to Copenhagen as a group, we built something I can't explain. It was a magical thing," Ferber said. The participants formed the Copenhagen Committee—a coalition in the municipality—and met as an informal steering group every two or three months to exchange updates and brainstorm new ideas.

Copenhagen was a turning point for the Urban95 program and for generating support and awareness for early childhood development reforms in the municipality. "It was like a revolution," Ferber recalled. "We came back to Israel, and everyone was highly motivated: early childhood, early childhood, early childhood."

Quick wins and branding

During one of the brainstorming sessions in Copenhagen, Ben-Yehuda sketched a large, pop-up urban play space for toddlers based on the designs and equipment he had seen on the study tour. When he returned to Tel Aviv, he worked with the Urban95 team to make the space a reality, using his own budget to procure the equipment, and engaged the community administration in planning, design, and implementation as well

Six months later, Ben-Yehuda's team, working with community administration central division head Idan Gavish, set up the space in the middle of Rabin Square, the city's most prominent public space, abutting city hall. Thousands of parents brought their children to play in sandboxes and climb on equipment, and the mayor and other city officials toured the site.

The pop-up play space was supposed to be there for three days, but on the eve of the first day, an unexpected problem arose: Israeli pop star Netta Barzilai won the Eurovision Song Contest. Participants representing dozens of countries had competed in Lisbon during the annual event, and almost 190 million viewers worldwide had tuned in to see Israel win for the fourth time since 1973. Barzilai was returning to Tel Aviv the next day, and the city had to hold her victory concert—an event of national importance—in Rabin Square.

The CEO told Ferber that the city would have to either postpone the opening of the play space or move it to a less prominent public square. Ferber pushed back, and the CEO agreed to spend his office's own budget to deconstruct the play space and then reconstruct it in the early morning hours after the concert. His willingness to do so reflected not just Ferber's influence. "He agreed to do this only because by now he understood the importance of the early-childhood-development issue and of this event," Ferber said.

Vole would later recount that the play space was as much for the high-level municipal officials as it was for Tel Aviv's young families. Several parents complimented the mayor on the play space and the city's commitment to young parents. "A municipal government is all about implementation," said Vole. "We are not a research center. Mayors are expected to deliver, so they need to see results."

The play space was part of a strategy to rack up visible quick wins that would demonstrate Urban95 was delivering results. Upon returning from Copenhagen, managers launched various pilot programs that included so-called toy sheds, from which parents could check out toys they and their toddlers could play with at playgrounds. Building a physical structure required permits that took months to procure, so the first two were mobile—an idea Ferber and the city engineer had come up with while waiting to board the flight back to Tel

Aviv from Copenhagen. In another instance, Gavish converted an abandoned coffee shop on a busy pedestrian boulevard into just such a toy shed. "This approach of quick pilots worked really well with this city's culture," recalled Vole. "Let's try something, make it work one time, get everyone excited, and then figure out how to scale."

Sfadia-Wolf facilitated implementation. "The work process is: I have an idea. Then I call Bosmat [Sfadia-Wolf]. Then we draw up a plan. Then we make it happen," said Gavish. Sfadia-Wolf found that her background as an architect was indeed a useful qualification. "I came in not knowing much about early childhood development—except for being a parent of two young children in the city. But what I did know was how to bring people together around a vision and work together to implement it—same as creating a building," she said. A major difference, however, was that unlike in architecture, she learned to keep her name off the buildings she was creating. "What we do, it's not about us; it's about helping the managers take an idea and devise solutions, and we go hand in hand with them until the project is done," she said. "It's not just about the money; it's mostly about giving tools and knowledge to these city managers and helping make an impact on people's lives. We are like the infrastructure to make changes happen. They deliver it, and they can take the credit."

The quick wins boosted the power of the study tours and helped transform the perception of early childhood development. "We had created a brand. We made it cool," Vole said.

Two years earlier, the municipal leadership had avoided the issue of early childhood development, but now it was embracing it. When Mayor Huldai released his official platform for the October 2018 election, early childhood development—and Urban95 itself—featured prominently among his priorities.

Parks and playgrounds

Tel Aviv's residents, too, were seeing changes. A few months after the Copenhagen trip, pedestrians in Tel Aviv's Meir Park came across an unusual sight: city officials, including Parks Director Ben-Yehuda, were in the playground area on their knees. Ben-Yehuda wanted his staff to physically experience the playground from the height of a three-year-old.

After returning from Copenhagen, Ben-Yehuda began working on plans to add early childhood play spaces to 160 of the city's 475 playgrounds, so that at least two playgrounds in each neighborhood were suitable for young children. He also adjusted the blueprints of 200 new planned parks and playgrounds. Drawing on what he had learned from Copenhagen and the Urban95 team with regard to things that facilitate early brain development, the play spaces included sand, water, and toys and structures made from wood, not plastic. "Just as every playground in the city is wheelchair accessible, every new playground we build has Urban95 inside," Ben-Yehuda said.

Ben-Yehuda took those ideas and others to the CEO, who agreed to allocate him an additional $10 million over the next two years—a 25% increase in his budget for development. "He loved that I was proposing small

investments in several sites across the city that would have a noticeable impact. And it was my luck that he thought this issue was important," Ben-Yehuda said. He made Urban95 an individual line item in the Parks and Gardens Department's annual budget.

In designing several of the new parks and playgrounds, Ben-Yehuda consulted with residents to incorporate their wishes into the spaces. For the renovation of one large playground in a neighborhood with many young families, the city surveyed 750 respondents on various aspects of the design. The logic was that if residents felt they had played a role in creating the space, they would use the space and exercise stewardship over it.

Photo Credit: (top) Oded Antman / Bernard van Leer Foundation, (bottom) Courtesy of Shani Halevy

Derman Verbakel Architecture—the firm of Els Verbakel, an architect with a doctorate in urbanism who specialized in public spaces—was contracted to conduct research that would inform these urban design solutions. In various squares, boulevards, and playgrounds, the Derman Verbakel team photographed pedestrian activity at five-minute intervals in the morning, in the afternoon, and on weekends. The team also distributed questionnaires to pedestrians to measure their satisfaction with issues such as noise and safety. Derman Verbakel's findings echoed what Parks Director Ben-Yehuda had intuited from what he had seen in the public spaces in Copenhagen: that the most-successful spaces were those that invited parents with children to stay, not just pass through. The team incorporated that information into the solutions they designed for the pilot sites. New and renovated playgrounds displayed signs explaining Urban95 and how the new elements and equipment enhanced early childhood development.

At first, the playgrounds staff resisted. The planning and installation of additional equipment increased their workload, and some regarded early childhood development as an irrelevant subject—same as Ben-Yehuda had before his trip to Copenhagen. Having his staff get down on their knees in Meir Park was part of his strategy to bring them along.

Ben-Yehuda moved quickly and did not initially gather data on the impact the changes had. "We took Urban95 and we made things happen fast. If you really want a project like this to come true, you don't have to wait until you plan

everything. Take some things and do them fast. Do it. If you do it, everybody will come," he said.

"We never had to invest much money in his projects," recalled Vole. "He did it on his own. In the beginning, we were worried whether he would invest in the right things, but it was his budget and we couldn't stop him." Vole added that Ben-Yehuda's team was careful not to build facilities that were expensive to maintain, having learned that lesson on other projects in the past.

The 15-minute neighborhood

Before 2016, Tel Aviv had provided little in the way of services for young parents and their children three years and younger. But starting that year, the city made several efforts to improve and expand services—and to make them more accessible for young parents.

The primary points of service between the municipality and young parents were the well-baby clinics, which provided basic prenatal and postnatal care—such as vaccinations and infant development checkups—at no cost to parents. And there were 15 of them in Tel Aviv, serving almost 40,000 patients a year.[6]

When former social worker Sharon Melamed became director of the Social Services and Public Health Administration in 2016, she launched a major effort independent of Urban95 to reform the well-baby clinics. Many of the buildings were dilapidated and uninviting, and though the professional services were good, the clinics weren't as welcoming to young families as they needed to be. In Melamed's words, they were "not good enough" for Tel Aviv. Seeing young families as clients was one priority, while coming into the digital age was another. Because the national government controlled the training of nurses, however, Melamed had to work sensitively to introduce new ideas.

The administration improved the aesthetics of the buildings to make them more welcoming to babies and young families by hanging photographs, repainting, and creating play spaces. The administration introduced an online appointment system, and it trained the nurses and administrative staff to be gentler, more sensitive, and more patient with young parents. And it started offering free courses and services for young parents on such subjects as speech therapy, parental coaching, and psychological counseling.

At around the same time, Urban95 was facilitating reforms in the community administration's community centers—neighborhood hubs central to the mayor's vision of creating a kibbutz in the city. Free and open to all residents, community centers had facilities such as libraries, youth clubs, shared coworking spaces, and athletic fields. They held holiday celebrations, conducted after-school activities, and hosted cultural events. Tens of thousands of elementary school kids, teenagers, and older adults frequented the centers, but there were barely any services dedicated to babies and toddlers.

Sfadia-Wolf's presentation about the importance of early childhood development had had a profound effect on Amnon Eshel, head of building and infrastructure in the community administration and a new grandfather. Eshel was already renovating or expanding 30 community centers, and now he worked

with the Urban95 team to install or improve indoor play spaces. Ferber secured a budget increase from the CEO for the renovations, and Eshel went out into the field to persuade community center managers, who, though within the hierarchy of the community administration, had a great deal of autonomy with regard to the designs and services of their centers. He gave the same presentation Sfadia-Wolf had showed him.

The community administration, with support from the Urban95 team, piloted new indoor playgrounds at five community centers in 2018 and after receiving positive feedback from community center managers, planned to finish five more in 2019. "Parents come up to me or one of my staff and tell us the gymboree [an indoor play space] is amazing. And I'm thinking, it's just a gymboree. There's no reason they should be giving feedback that strong. But people say they're having good experiences. They find themselves playing with their babies—not just sitting on the side playing on their phones. I think it's thanks to the thinking that went into the design," said Noam Bar Levy, director of a community center that installed a new play space.

Further, the Urban95 team developed for the community centers certain activities and workshops specifically for young parents and their babies, such as expectant-mother yoga, breastfeeding clinics, baby massages, interactive storytelling, and coaching sessions on such topics as infant sleep, nutrition, and language learning. Parents had to pay for each session, though the city subsidized the cost.

In early 2018, not long after the Copenhagen trip, Sfadia-Wolf met with Melamed and Ferber. She pulled up a map of Tel Aviv that showed the density of three-years-and-under populations in the city, plus the location of every community center and well-baby clinic. The three noticed that because of gaps in the distribution of the facilities, some families might be close to a community center but far from a clinic or vice versa. It became apparent that the problem could be solved by offering both kinds of services at both kinds of facilities. "Rather than think of the city in terms of administrative responsibility, what if we looked at it geographically?" said Sfadia-Wolf. "If I'm a mother, I don't care whether a breastfeeding seminar is provided by the social services administration or by the community administration. I just care that I can access that service as easily as possible."

Inspired by ideas shared at a Bernard van Leer Foundation global meeting on mobility that Sfadia-Wolf had recently attended, the group came up with the idea of the 15-minute neighborhood, whereby every parent—no matter where that parent lived in Tel Aviv—should be only a 15-minute walk from the same services. There were limits—doctors would remain exclusively in the clinics— but the community centers could deliver basic health services such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training and nutrition counseling. The social services administration would take responsibility for the health-related services, and the community administration the others—no matter which facility was delivering them.

In deciding what to include in that standard basket of services, Sfadia-Wolf enrolled Dana Shai, a psychologist from the Academic College of Tel Aviv–Yafo who specialized in early childhood development, to evaluate whether a particular workshop or activity advanced the cognitive, linguistic, or motor development of young children. "We created the criteria for a workshop, that it had to address the parent–infant relationship *and* the parent's well-being. It had to be playful, enjoyable, structured. It had to be modular and flexible so it could fit different populations," Shai said. The final basket included workshops on language development, nutrition, first aid, breastfeeding, and arts and culture; others focused on strengthening caregiver–child relationships.

The team sent the list to community center heads together with an instruction book about the features of indoor play spaces, which were included in the basket of services. "Until Urban95, every community center more or less did its own thing. Each made activities according to what it thought was best," recalled Gavish, director of the community administration for the center of Tel Aviv. "Now there are standards. If you open a play space, you know how it should be in every aspect: human resources, capacity, what kind of equipment it should have."

Two years earlier, a collaboration between the community and social services administrations would have been unthinkable. "If you were talking to me in 2016, cooperation with the community administration would have seemed impossible," said Melamed. When the community administration was founded, it took resources, personnel, and responsibilities from the social services administration. Through many hours of discussion, some with professional consultants, Melamed and Ferber defined boundaries and grew to trust each other and work together.

Creating the 15-minute neighborhood citywide increased the pressure on staff at both the clinics and the community centers. Services expanded rapidly from only a few dozen parent–child activities, workshops, and clinics per month to an estimated 400. As a result, employees at the clinics and the centers were in some cases unprepared to keep up. Labor regulations precluded dismissing community center employees who lacked certain competencies, so the Urban95 team began training existing employees in how to help maintain the new play spaces and administer the expanded basket of services. The administration also hired seven new early-childhood-development managers to oversee services across the community centers.

In addition, Urban95 drew on the Bernard van Leer Foundation's global and professional connections to hold a series of educational seminars aimed at training municipal workers in key early-childhood-development areas. The series included a conference on early childhood speech featuring Patricia Kuhl, a University of Washington professor of speech and hearing sciences, whose work on early language development, the science of how babies learn, and young-child brain development had won numerous awards and distinctions. More than 120 municipal employees—many of whom worked directly with babies and

toddlers—attended the conference, and the *Haaretz* newspaper published a feature about the event.[7]

Digitaf

Back in 2016, the Bloomberg innovation team, working with Ben-Attar on cost-of-living research, found that many young parents were not aware of useful activities available to them in the city. In a brainstorming session, the Bloomberg team fleshed out a digital platform that could provide young parents with citywide event and activity information. The Urban95 grant proposal included the idea.

At around that same time, Shirly Dim, who had recently given birth to twins, was on maternity leave and feeling isolated. She worked in the city Spokesman's Office helping manage DigiTel, Tel Aviv's online civic engagement platform that had earned the city the World Smart City award from the Smart City Expo World Congress in 2014.[8] When she returned to work in late 2016, she wanted to do something for lonely new parents, so she created a DigiTel event for a daytime stroller walk around the city for mothers on maternity leave.

The event was well attended, so Dim's boss authorized her to hold others. Dim created other small activities, and then her office came together with the Bloomberg team, Urban95, and other administrations to develop a dedicated offshoot of DigiTel for young parents based on the Bloomberg design. They called it Digitaf. (*Taf* is a play on the Hebrew word for *toddler.*)

The city formally launched Digitaf at the end of 2017. The Spokesman's Office automatically enrolled any parent who was registered for DigiTel and had a child three years old or younger. (In registering for DigiTel, Tel Aviv residents provided the municipality with extensive personal data, including the names, genders, and ages of their children.) The office asked the well-baby clinics to encourage pregnant women to register as well. When a woman gave birth, she received a Digitaf card with her child's name on it and a small care package that included a diaper bag and a Born in Tel Aviv onesie. Within a year, the office said, the parents of 76% of children from birth through three years of age were registered with Digitaf.

The office also created a Digitaf Facebook group wherein a dedicated social media administrator posted activity announcements and other information for young parents, including live presentations by early-childhood-development experts. The presentations were organized and designed by Urban95, drawing on the global expertise and networks of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The group was a platform for parents to relay complaints and feedback to the municipality. The CEO monitored the Facebook group—"every single post," said Dim—and contacted the Spokesman's Office if a complaint or question had gone unaddressed. By 2019, more than 13,500 Tel Aviv parents were members of the group, and around 12,000 were actively engaged.[9]

The Digitaf card granted young parents certain benefits, including free access to municipal services and activities, usually one-time workshops focused on reading or other types of parent-child interaction, as well as meet-ups for

stroller time. One successful event was a children's "takeover" of city hall, an afternoon event when offices on all 12 stories of the building featured storytelling, arts and crafts, music, and other activities for young children. More than 7,000 parents with children attended. Other features included a way to share observations or ideas and know what events would take place on any given day.

The office held Digitaf activities at city hall, municipal libraries, museums, hospitals, parks, and the community centers and well-baby clinics. The staff worked with the Urban95 team to create and refine the offerings as time went on.

The Digitaf platform and Facebook group enabled parents to coalesce as a community. "Digitaf is the municipality coming and saying there is a subpopulation here that we are identifying and delivering services to. That speaks volumes to how much has changed in the city's mind-set," said Shai, the psychologist at the Academic College of Tel Aviv–Yafo who advised Urban95.

Improving urban mobility

The Strategic Planning Unit, supported by the Urban95 team, explored ways to make the city more walkable for parents with young children, the urban mobility pilot moved much more slowly than the others, however, partly because of the need to navigate complicated inter-governmental relationships and partly because the transportation team faced competing priorities. The central government oversaw traffic regulations, so any plans that would alter city traffic patterns required approval from both municipal and national officials, which made it a time-consuming process. Moreover, the Tel Aviv Transportation Department was focused primarily on high-priority projects to alleviate the city's worsening congestion, such as a light-rail scheduled to come on line in 2021. City officials had little time to devote to a new pilot.

In early 2018, the Strategic Planning Unit held six focus groups to determine how parents moved about the city with their children and to identify the greatest barriers. A main finding was that families with young children preferred private cars because they felt it was unsafe to walk in many areas of the city because of traffic. In addition to vehicle congestion on the roads, electric bikes and scooters were popular, posing issues because they zipped along sidewalks already narrowed by benches and garbage bins.

The Strategic Planning Unit and Sfadia-Wolf formed a steering committee to plan and implement a pilot to make two urban sites more walkable for parents with young children. The committee included municipal representatives ranging from the city engineer to a public participation adviser, to an early childhood manager from the social services administration. The planning team also hired a company called Humankind, led by Lior Steinberg, to assist with its work.

As of mid 2019, the steering committee had selected two sites for pilots—one in the city center and another in the south—but the team was still gathering

data and brainstorming solutions. Once a full plan for the pilots was in place, they planned to bring it to the CEO for approval.

Addressing inequality

As the city expanded services, municipal officials sought to deliver them to those in greatest need, including lower-income residents, asylum seekers, and migrant workers living primarily in the south and east of Tel Aviv, and the Arab minority in the ancient city of Jaffa (text box 3). The community administration and the Social Services and Public Health Administration offered more services and facilities per capita in those areas than anywhere else in the city. Five of the well-baby clinics in poor neighborhoods dedicated specific areas of their

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Box 3. Mesila

Southern Tel Aviv was the home of some 22,000 asylum seekers, most of them from the Tigrayan ethnic group in Eritrea. Statusless and barred from the formal economy, many such asylum seekers were destitute. Almost all of their children were considered at risk by Western standards, because they were exposed to crime, drug abuse, and poverty. Many infants languished in unregulated, at times fatal, day care centers. "Asylum seekers have very few rights in Israel," said Tze'ela Sharon, director of strategy and resource development at Mesila. "So the municipality tries to step in to fill the vacuum."

Mesila, under the Tel Aviv Social Services and Public Health Administration, was Israel's largest provider of direct assistance for asylum seekers. The organization, which had 34 employees and 100 volunteers, focused on providing services and treatment for at-risk children and their families, including those with special needs or who had survived human trafficking, torture, or enslavement. Mesila provided weekly on-the-job training for the caregivers—who were usually undocumented migrant workers—in the unregulated infant day cares. The organization also helped start new government day cares that began opening in 2015 after five infants in the unregulated baby warehouses died in less than two months. The municipality provided the space, the central government provided the funding, and local NGOs operated them. By 2019, there were five of these public day cares, holding more than half of the asylum-seeker infants.

In 2018, the Urban95 team worked with Mesila to create a series of 10 short Web videos based on Vroom, a set of online tools and resources for young parents developed by neuroscientists and early childhood experts with funding from the Bezos Family Foundation. The videos, featuring actors and typical settings from the asylum-seeker community, provided quick tips for things parents could do in everyday life to improve their children's cognitive development.

Mesila posted the first video on its Facebook page in September 2018. The video received more than 15,000 views, and community members told Mesila staff it was circulating among local WhatsApp groups. In total, the 10 videos received more than 150,000 views and 668 likes. In December, Mesila hired a firm to conduct a focus group with 10 asylum-seeker mothers. The mothers saw great educational value in the videos and expressed interest in them. As of mid 2019, Mesila and Urban95 were discussing an expansion of the Vroom videos.

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facilities to early childhood development and offered an expanded battery of courses, including speech therapy and coaching for parents.

In the Urban95 grant, Ben-Attar had inserted a condition that at least 50% of funding should go to low-income populations, but defining socioeconomic level proved difficult. She and Vole eventually decided they would base it on geography: generally, the north was wealthy; the center, middle class; and the south, poor. When Urban95 did pilots, one pilot would be in the south and another in the center. Gentrified pockets existed in the south, too, however, and Ben-Attar persuaded the municipality to move the location of one mobility pilot project from an up-and-coming southern neighborhood to a much more disadvantaged area.

Even though early childhood services expanded, city officials realized marginalized groups weren't using the services as much as they had hoped. "The paradox is that those families are more in need of services, yet they access fewer of them," said Alma Shiran, who, as head of the community administration's southern division, oversaw all community centers in the south.

One issue city officials pointed out was that lower-income families focused more on making ends meet and so had less time to attend baby yoga classes or breastfeeding clinics. Another issue the Social Services and Public Health Administration identified was mistrust: residents on the periphery were more likely to have had adversarial experiences with municipal authorities.

Perhaps the biggest problem was that—as was the case with other types of public services—uptake of early childhood workshops, activities, and facilities cleaved along ethnic and racial lines. Even in marginalized areas, members of the Jewish, Hebrew-speaking majority were the predominant users and providers of services. There were community centers in the three southern neighborhoods where Tel Aviv's estimated 22,000 African asylum seekers lived, but municipal officials said the asylum seekers did not use them. According to Melamed, head of the Social Services and Public Health Administration, many parents living in African and Arab communities initially brought their infants to the well-baby clinic only for vaccinations and not to use any of the other services that could help their children develop and prepare for preschool and kindergarten.

The municipality launched outreach efforts. Social workers encouraged parents to attend courses and seminars. Nurses called families and reserved spots for them in clinics. Community administration workers identified parents who were neighborhood pillars and persuaded them to attend a workshop or clinic and then in turn persuade others. Only very gradually did use of other services begin to rise. Vole said that it would take a much deeper mapping process to identify barriers asylum seekers and minority populations faced, as well as multi-lingual services.

Private day care operations

In 2016, Anat Dayagi, a Tel Aviv resident in her 30s who worked in the tech sector, gave birth to her first son. Not long after enrolling her child in a private day care facility, she arrived one afternoon to pick him up and was told

he had been put down for a nap and had never woken up. The caregiver had no training in either CPR or basic first aid and had been alone with eight infants.

On the one-year anniversary of her infant's death, Dayagi wrote a lengthy post on Facebook that drew attention to the problem and linked on the Web to a petition demanding the government regulate private day care operators. The post went viral. Within an hour, it had 10,000 shares and comments. The media called Dayagi, and dozens of parents sent her private messages. In just a few days, the petition went from having 3,500 signatures to 65,000.

Not long after, a group of 50 people, mostly mothers with infants, packed into Dayagi's living room to begin devising solutions they could pitch to the municipality. Many of the mothers were professionals on maternity leave, and among them were lawyers who then investigated what the municipality had legal authority to do. Others scouted city-owned real estate that could be appropriate for use as day care centers. Others met with private day care operators to express their difficulties.

The group, which called itself Parents For Responsibility From Birth Tel Aviv, created policy recommendations aimed at improving the quality and increasing the supply of private day care facilities. The group said the city should build or lease more spaces for such operations; streamline the lengthy, expensive, and opaque process of obtaining a permit to use a residential space for day care services; provide pedagogical and safety training for day care operators; and establish a network among those operators. "We were like volunteer strategy consultants for the municipality," recalled Dayagi.

In June 2018, Dayagi and a few others met with the city CEO. They presented their recommendations and pointed to the 4,000 members they had on their Facebook group as a sign of public support. Then Dayagi told her story, breaking into tears in the middle of it. Vole, who was present at the meeting, recalled, "She shared her heartbreaking story, and there wasn't a dry eye in the room. Add to that the fact that they, as residents, had done their own research and come with policy proposals, and it was hard to say no."

A month later, Dayagi and her group met with the Education Administration and the Social Services and Public Health Administration to discuss implementation. Urban95 and the Bloomberg innovation team supported implementation efforts. Someone from the Education Administration partnered with Sfadia-Wolf and the Bloomberg team to begin writing a plan for building or renovating spaces that would be leased to private day care operators at low rents—sometimes one-third the market price, thus reducing the cost, with the aim of passing the savings on to customers. The well-baby clinics began offering CPR, first aid, and other courses specifically directed toward the private day care operators.

The Bloomberg team worked with the Infrastructure Administration's Public Buildings Department—which issued building-use permits for private daycare facilities—to streamline and bring transparency to the approval process. "When we came in, not a single person could describe the process from beginning to end, including all of the required steps a day care center owner

should take," said Itai Eiges, director of the Bloomberg group. The process involved in obtaining a permit took on average two years and 100,000 shekels (US$28,000), and an applicant had no guarantee of success. The team analyzed and mapped each stage in the process—36 stages in total—and went to individual offices to show them their roles in the process and what it looked like in the eyes of applicants. The team and the Public Buildings Department published a visual rendering of the process and made the rendering available to the public. "Now it's clear that if you want to open a day care center what the process is, and even though you have a lot to do, you learn whether you want to undertake it in the first place," said Eiges.

More broadly, in a sign of its commitment to address the day care problem, the municipality created a new early childhood division in the Education Administration and declared that it would take responsibility for improvements in child care for children from birth through three years of age. Although a small number of other cities had taken some steps to ease the burdens parents faced, Tel Aviv was the first municipality in Israel to make such a strong policy commitment, allocate resources and establish a municipal department with a high level manager to follow through.

Meanwhile, Dayagi and members of her group went to Jerusalem to sue the central government. The group had unearthed an old law that required the government to take responsibility for children from birth through three years old. The group planned to file suit in a high administrative court, demanding the government adhere to that law.

Before the group could do that, however, a member of the Knesset, Israeli's parliament, proposed new legislation. A national coalition of more than 250 parents and activists supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation had been running an advocacy campaign and working with the Knesset member to develop the law. Dayagi's group joined the coalition, and participated in committee meetings that negotiated the language. In November 2018, a bill passed into law, mandating that the central government set standards and supervise day care services for children from birth through age three years. Passage of the law meant little until the Knesset introduced statutes implementing it, but a framework was in place.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

The Tel Aviv municipality liked to move fast, though it did not universally succeed in doing so. "In this organization there's a culture that was shaped by the mayor, who is a kibbutznik and air force commander, and he's a doer," Vole said. "And there's a CEO who is basically the same. They have a vision, and they want to get things done and see results." Though the Bernard van Leer Foundation valued quick implementation, it also wanted the municipality to gather data on key performance indicators, conduct evaluations, and make long-term strategic plans for scaling interventions.

The Urban95 team in the community administration, too, grasped the importance of planning and evaluation. Data was essential for guaranteeing that

interventions in each program area aligned with corresponding objectives: Did a workshop equip parents with new child-developing skills? Surveys could tell. Did parents with toddlers stop to use a newly installed sandbox in a public square? A monitor with a stopwatch and a clipboard could record whether parents stopped and for how organize this work and make it useful to decision makers.

In early 2018, Ben-Attar hired an external strategic planning firm to help city officials think through their program goals and develop metrics. Municipal staff members rapidly grew frustrated with a process that entailed many meetings, proceeded in fits and starts, and sometimes seemed to substitute the firm's sense of priorities for the ideas officials offered.

Subsequently, the foundation hired a research and measurement coordinator to be part of Sfadia-Wolf's team. Beginning the job in late 2018, the new coordinator, Keren Raz, a social and economic policy researcher with a master's degree in public policy, began developing measurement and evaluation tools for gathering data on the impact of Urban95 programs. Raz approached the evaluation task in a flexible, more modest way that suited the dynamic, fast-moving context in which she worked. For example, after a parenting workshop, she would quickly administer a survey to participants and then feed it right back to the organizers. She evolved standards for indoor play areas—gymborees—based on parent input.

Raz also handled other aspects of monitoring and decision making support. She created an implementation database to record the various actions the city took. She sat with team members and asked them questions when they began to develop a new idea—what are the goals? the outputs?—the elements that would normally go into a logic model. Further, she acted as a research coordinator and worked with others to draw international best practices out of international experience.

Sfadia-Wolf's team assisted Raz in defining key performance indicators related to several metrics, such as child development outcomes, caregiver behavior and well-being, and public spaces. Raz was also able to consult outside experts, such as Shai, the psychologist from the Academic College of Tel Aviv–Yaffo, who helped develop criteria for workshops and feedback forms for parents who attended workshops and activities at the community centers.

Ben-Attar planned to hire another external firm to work directly with Raz and use the data Raz had gathered. Having an in-house evaluator did not constitute monitoring and evaluation best practices, but Raz worked well with the team—not attempting to shoehorn it into cumbersome planning and evaluation processes but introducing a brake. "Now, when [Sfadia-Wolf] is starting a pilot, I try to slow things down, just a little bit, and ask, "Wait, why are we doing this? What are our goals?"' said Raz. The bigger challenge was to introduce a culture of learning from data in devising new programs, Michael Vole said.

ASSESSING RESULTS

By mid 2019, Urban95 had been active in Tel Aviv for two and a half years, and it was too early to assess whether the program would have lasting impact. Still, several things indicated that early childhood development had become a municipal priority. The first was that the city had made a significant financial commitment. "To say early childhood is important—OK, everyone can say it, but to reach into our pockets to finance it with budget and resources—that says something," said CEO Leiba. A Bernard van Leer Foundation report in early 2019 found that Urban95 had so far spent €500,000 (US$556,000) of its €1-million (US$1.1-million) grant. The municipality had spent upwards of €1.8 million (US$2 million) in staff time and matching project funding, plus it had redirected an additional €5.3 million (US$5.9 million) in existing city budgets toward spending on parents and young children.[10]

Early-childhood-development agendas were in the 2019 work plans of six municipal administrations: community, social services, parks & gardens, transportation, education, engineering (strategy), and the city spokesperson (Digitaf). Other departments reported that although early childhood development might not be explicit in work plans, it was now something they considered.

In a further demonstration of the city's shifting mind-set, after the 2018 municipal election the mayor had appointed an elected city council member to the position of deputy mayor, with explicit responsibility for early-childhood-development services. Although the new deputy mayor had no power to direct or influence implementation, the position marked the first time early childhood development was a specific deputy mayor portfolio. There were seven deputy mayors in Tel Aviv, each with a different portfolio and each also a member of the 31-seat city council.

The municipality also hired and trained new personnel to focus on early childhood development. The community administration employed seven new early childhood managers for community centers. The creation of a new early childhood division, with a staff and director who reported directly to the head of the Education Administration, represented a change to the municipal structure that signified commitment to improve the private day care facilities. Urban95 estimated that 45 frontline workers and 170 managers and supervisors participated in early childhood development-focused knowledge-building workshops.

Pilots and renovations to public spaces were visible across the city. About 160 public spaces included elements for babies and toddlers, including 77 playground renovations. There were two permanent toy sheds on major boulevards, and seven mobile ones. The city planned to establish two large early childhood centers: one at the Tel Aviv Port in the city center and another in the area of the Old Railway Station in the south.

By 2019, 10 community centers were offering the full basket of early childhood services, and 13,000 parents had participated in parent–child activities at the community centers and well-baby clinics. According to the Spokesman's

Office, there were 400 to 600 Digitaf activities per month, and 22,000 parents of children three years and younger had Digitaf cards.[11]

The Urban95 team was still gathering data on key performance indicators related to the impact of workshops and activities, but initial surveys suggested parents felt the workshops were equipping them with new tools and strategies that improved their relationships with their young children. The municipality reported with early survey results for some of its programs, though the data were still limited. For example, of parents whose children participated in one brain-building workshop, 75% said the program introduced new knowledge, and 100% said, "It gave me new tools that I will use in future." In a reading workshop, "91% of participants . . . replied that after attending the workshop, they read more books (time spent reading and number of books) and that reading . . . had become a time of quality interaction with the child." After the workshop held to give families tools to cope with parenting challenges, 75% of participants declared, "The workshop provided me with new information I did not have before," and 100% replied, "The workshop provided me with new tools I will use in the future."

In mid 2019, the CEO instructed municipal officials to begin developing a proposal and preparing the necessary coinvestments for the second phase of the Urban95 project. The first project had run from 2017 to 2020, and the second potential phase would cover 2020–23. In a readout of the meeting, during which the CEO instructed the community administration and the Tel Aviv Foundation to begin outlining a second contract, the summary said: "Urban95 is a success story . . . The municipal vision is that in the near future, not only will all services be adapted to early childhood, but that coverage is important, and we are investing much to bring this to all families . . . The work program for 2020 must include the needs of Urban95."

Vole was promoted, in August 2019, to head the community administration for the city's Jaffa (district 7), which had a high concentration of minority residents and refugees, while his colleague Alma Shiran headed activities in the city's south. Sfadia-Wolf moved into Vole's previous position as head of strategy and development in the community administration.

REFLECTIONS

The early successes of the Tel AvivUrban95 initiative arose not just from availability of resources, but also from auspicious timing, helpful positioning within the city structure, a municipal government culture that prized efficient implementation, a skilled professional workforce, and a leadership with a penchant for innovative new ideas. "I'm not sure early childhood development is on the agenda in many major cities. But it is in Tel Aviv," said Hila Oren, CEO of the Tel Aviv Foundation.

The city's early-stage experience held several lessons about effective coordination, drivers of success, and scaling up of initial projects.

The timing was right. In the highly centralized municipal structure, in which winning and maintaining the CEO's support was essential, Urban95 came in

right after the CEO became a first-time grandfather. Many people in the municipality said a major reason the city took on early childhood in 2016 when it wouldn't in the past was that the CEO could now relate to the issue. Young parents, too, put pressure on the municipality to act, and they organized themselves. "I'm a strong believer in the idea that people need to get involved and push, and they did. They pushed their politicians to do something about early childhood development," said Michael Vole, a manager in the Education Administration.

Urban95's position in the municipal organization was another key to its success. Unlike other foundations that were separate units attached to the mayor's or CEO's office, Urban95 was embedded in a place where it had tools for implementation. "The advantage at the outset of Urban95 was that [community administration director Ronit] Ferber had the battalions, which made it possible for us to implement things overnight if we needed to," recalled Vole. "To build a brand and show success and get low-hanging fruit, we need people to work, and this is what we had here and how we built it."

In a municipality with few formal structures for collaboration, the Urban95 team built ad hoc networks to support implementation and to work effectively within the municipal government. Architect Bosmat Sfadia-Wolf was less a project manager than a collaboration manager. Ferber and Vole, who were politically savvy and influential, gave Sfadia-Wolf the support and space necessary for her to be effective. "I knew with Urban95 that I needed to put myself in the background, manage from the back seat, and let Bosmat drive," Vole recalled. "I had been in the municipality for eight years already, and people had opinions about me. Bosmat they didn't affiliate with anything. She is a real professional, and in some cases was a better bridge builder than I could be. People want to work with her."

The team's tactic of implementing several pilots to score quick wins rather than develop and follow a strategic plan got the project off the ground. By contrast, even though public pressure for early childhood services was high in 2011 after the cost-of-living protests, the Strategic Planning Unit's comprehensive policy proposal had gone nowhere. "I think that sometimes strategic plans kill us. You do need them, but if you want to take a new topic that no one cared about before and make people start caring about it, you don't start with strategic plans. No one will listen to you," said Sfadia-Wolf.

After the pilot phase, however, the municipality's preference for speed meant less priority was placed on the development of monitoring and evaluation systems to inform program scaling. In a context where new initiatives were constantly on the drawing board and staff focused their energies on implementation, there was a tendency to act on quick judgments about what worked without grounding those decisions in hard facts. In her mid 2019 report on the progress of Urban95, the Bernard van Leer Foundation's Israel country representative Daniella Ben-Attar wrote: "The municipality began implementing rapidly, far outpacing any type of strategic planning processes envisioned by the Urban95 project team . . . The units implement and do; once the director general

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[CEO] and the decision makers see it is successful, they put further investment to scale. There is neither time nor patience to wait for impact evaluations, logic models, or proof of outcomes." Data collection and efforts to encourage use of empirical evidence had to be tailored to suit the dynamic environment.

Ben-Attar balanced the van Leer Foundation's needs for rigorous planning and evaluation with the start-up culture of the municipality. "My philosophy is that Urban95 should be the municipality's; otherwise, it's not going to work. It's important for me to monitor the overall direction, content, and quality of the work, but the method is very much up to them. If they run it the way they want, it will be successful. It can't be my micromanaging them," said Ben-Attar. "We had to fit ourselves to their culture."

In the municipality's rush to embrace early childhood development, some said the city faced the problem of perhaps having *too many* services. "There are Digitaf activities and well-baby clinic activities and our own in the community center, and it can feel like a mess," said Noam Bar Levy, a community center manager. "In the past two years, everyone in city hall started wanting to deal with early childhood. It went from being something no one cared about to being the hot issue."

The pace of implementation also raised issues for workforce expansion and coordination between programs. The rapid hiring of new city workers to administer workshops and programs in the community centers and clinics and the training of existing workers proved difficult, and in some cases, the early childhood positions did not even exist. In addition, some services overlapped or crowded one another out. In the municipality's rush to embrace early childhood development, some were now worried the city had moved too fast without stopping to consider where it was going.

No one questioned that the private-day-care issue demanded attention. But some observers wondered whether some of the other Urban95 programs, such as reshaping public spaces for young children, were beneficial. "I'm afraid that focusing too narrowly on one age-group will lead to public spaces we don't want," said architect and Urban95 consultant Els Verbakel. "We need to make sure every public space is accessible to as many people as possible. Of course, you have specialized areas, but we don't want to create ghettos of only families with young kids."

To make a lasting impact in the city, some municipal officials said Urban95 now needed to focus. "We're spread out across many different pilots that came from the bottom up. That's worked, but I think now it needs to be more top-down. We need to understand what are the one or two big priorities and scale them," said Vole. There was another open question: Now that the city had early-childhood-development policies, who would be in charge of them? The CEO had yet to say.

Further, there was no institutional mechanism for ensuring that intramunicipal collaboration—a key to Urban95—would continue. Tel Aviv's Copenhagen Committee coalition was enshrined in the community administration's work plan, but it remained informal and unstructured. And key

champions, many of whom sat on the committee—including the city engineer, parks and gardens director Yoav Ben-Yehuda, Deputy Strategic Planning Director Hedva Finish, and Vole—would soon take on new responsibilities as they moved up through the city hierarchy or retire.

And though the committee was useful, the real collaboration mechanism was in the person of Sfadia-Wolf. "It's not yet institutional. Collaboration occurs mostly because Bosmat brings people together ad hoc," said Ben-Attar. In defining the terms of the new Urban95 contract with the city, Ben-Attar planned to push the CEO to make Sfadia-Wolf's former position permanent—possibly even paid for by the municipality—because she knew that this type of commitment would increase chances for sustaining the impact of Urban95 long term.

Though Urban95 had to some degree prioritized marginalized communities, inequality remained a challenge. "We need to take the apparatus we and our colleagues built and use it where there is the greatest need in the city. And though my cute nine-month-old daughter has real needs from the city, she also has supportive parents and a community," said Vole. "It's the disadvantaged groups that need us most, and that's where we should enhance the drive to invest."

Exhibit 1: Metrics and early results

Metric area	Performance indicators	Results to date	Data collection
Child development outcomes	Parent-reported measure of language use/vocabulary (children 18- to 47-months) Physical development [Socioemotional development indicators under development]	Parents reported reading more books to children after reading workshops 26 new topics added to reading workshops	In progress
Caregiver behavior	Reading to a young child at least once a week Increasing parents' self-perceived ability Increasing time spent with infants or toddlers outdoors More walking or cycling in daily routes Increasing caregiver–infant playtime	In surveys, 91% parents who have participated in workshops report they read more to their children than they had before the workshops they attended. 75% of parents said the workshop "provided me with information I did not have before" 100% of participants said that "the workshops provided me with new tools I will use in the future"	Parent self-reports
Caregiver well-being	Reduction in depression (particularly post-natal) Stress reduction Increased sense of self-efficacy Increased sense of security Increased sense of community	Improvement in ease of making appoints with well-baby clinics 3000 views of child development broadcasts Positive feedback on parenting, sexual wellbeing, and mental health workshops for women	Working on detailed, concrete indicators for the evaluation program Urban95 research coordinator Municipal survey through Digitaf
Parent coaching	Number, length, accessibility, affordability, and quality of parent coaching on different issues Number of parents participating Level of satisfaction with parent coaching among participants Knowledge and new tools gained by parents	In evaluations of brain-building workshop, 62% of parents said it exceeded their expectations; 75% said it introduced new knowledge; and 100% said it provided new tools they planned to use in the future.	Urban95 progress report, Mesila progress report
Public space	Significant increase in the number of playgrounds designed for ages birth to three years Increased infants-caregiver interactions (specifically play) Number of infant- and toddler-friendly walking routes, especially in poor areas An increase in community/public events focused on infants and their families	Creation of 150 new facilities/public-spaces elements; 20 new sandboxes 4 imagination playground blocks by Urban95 5 imagination play blocks purchased by municipality	Progress reports

Mobility	Accessibility of services and facilities for ages birth to three years	Baseline mapping showed high automobile usage but high interest by parents in walking.	Mobility mapping of Tel Aviv
	Increased safety and ease of travel		Progress report
	Reduction in travel time on daily routes	Mobility pilot in progress	
Sustainable data collection	Effective and up-to-date data collection and preservation	A coordinator for research and measurement joined the team.	Progress report
	Data sharing (accessibility of relevant, unified data to all units)	Expansion of metric and data collection scheduled for 2019	
	Allocation of human resources and funds for the purpose of data collection and use		
	Actual use of data in decision-making		
	Monitoring and evaluation integrated into units' regular work		
Sustainable finance	Allocation of funds for implementation of Urban95 projects	Provision of €1.3 million (US$1.2 million) in matching funds—and leveraged further without other sources of support	Tel Aviv Foundation report
	Funding allocated to appropriate units to complete scheduled projects		
Sustainable management structure	Appointment of human resources for early childhood development advancement	Copenhagen Committee established	
	Changes in work plans and structures of units that implement Urban95 projects	New unit on early childhood education, and a senior manager was hired.	
	Establishment of collaboration mechanisms and procedures	New deputy mayor for early childhood hired	
	Implementation of training courses	Series of Urban95 training course implemented	
	Agreement on shared language and goals		
	Steps to mainstream Urban95 ideas into decision making		

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