



Sifriyat Pijama: Now for Young Toddlers

Israel's innovative program for schoolchildren now reaches its youngest audience yet.

BY ANDREA ARBEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF KEREN GRINSPOON ISRAEL

Ever since Noa Pe'er's daughter, Gaia Avraham, received the book, *Why Does the Zebra Wear Pajamas?* at her day care center in Israel, it's been the 2-year-old's favorite.

"She asks me to read the story to her every night before she goes to bed," says Noa, who lives in Kiryat Malachi, a town in Israel's southern district. "At a certain point, she started to tell me the story. We play a sort of game where she 'reads' a sentence and I read a sentence. I am filled with pride that my daughter, who is not yet 3 years old, loves a book and can learn so much from it."

Noa's story is not uncommon among parents in Israel, where PJ Library's sister program, Sifriyat Pijama ("Pajama Library"), delivers more than 2.5 million books about Jewish and Israeli culture to children each year.

Sifriyat Pijama recently expanded book distribution to children ages 15 months to 2 years.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KGI PR

Founded in 2009 through a partnership between Keren Grinspoon Israel (the Harold Grinspoon Foundation's presence in Israel, also known as KGI) and the Israeli Ministry of Education, Sifriyat Pijama gives the gift of high-quality books to about 330,000 children ages 3 to 8. Sifriyat Pijama for Little Kids (SPLK), an extension program established in 2015, offers vibrant picture books to some 21,000 children ages 2 to 3 (including Noa's daughter) in nearly 900 day care centers across Israel.

Like PJ Library, Sifriyat Pijama and SPLK offer children enriching books that spark joy and wonder. Unlike PJ Library, these books are distributed in the classroom and come with resources and activities to help teachers bring the stories to life. Each child receives their own copy of the book, allowing parents to share in the fun and learning at home.

The goals of Sifriyat Pijama and SPLK are

Program	SPLK for Young Toddlers	Sifriyat Pijama for Little Kids	Sifriyat Pijama
Distribution:	Day care centers	Day care centers	Classrooms
Age range:	15 months to 2 years	2 to 3	3 to 8
Number of children reached:	2,260	21,360	331,580

to inspire meaningful connection with children’s literature, enrich children’s language skills and vocabulary, nourish their imaginations, and help them develop a love of reading.

“Book-distribution day in kindergarten is really a holiday,” shares Laly Avraham, who has four daughters who have received books at school in Jerusalem. “The stories are a source for the children to do so many creative things in the classroom. We also have wonderful one-on-one time [at home] that enables us parents to be involved in the content. This is a blessed program that creates dialogue and quality time with the parents.”

Once the Sifriyat Pijama extension, SPLK, was solidly established in day care center networks such as WIZO, Naamat, Emunah, and the Community Center Association’s Smart Beginnings centers, day care center leaders began to ask: Can SPLK expand to include even younger children? These early-childhood experts understood the importance of creating a culture of reading early, starting with the youngest toddlers.

It was an irresistible idea, and KGI got to work. This past academic year, under KGI’s leadership and with support from the Wiener Philanthropy and the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation, SPLK launched a pilot program to include young toddlers ages 15 months to 2 years.

How does it work? Based on Sifriyat Pijama’s successful model of programming, SPLK books for young toddlers arrive in day care center classrooms, where educators read the stories aloud and lead interactive book-related activities, including conversation starters and age-appropriate games, before sending a personal copy of the book home with each child. In addition, SPLK provides two more copies of every book to help day care centers across Israel build their on-site libraries. SPLK also conducts professional training sessions for day care center leadership and

staff to help them get the most out of the program. The pilot phase has been so well received so far that SPLK organizers hope to double the program’s reach over the next three years with donor support.

“Keren Grinspoon Israel’s recognition of the importance of reading at the youngest of ages is inspiring. There is clear and strong evidence that reading books to babies and toddlers contributes to their linguistic development and social-emotional learning and promotes the habit of reading and love of books in the family,” says Dorit Aram, Ph.D, a professor at Tel Aviv University who studies early childhood literacy. “It is critical that young children experiment with books, hold them in their hands, and listen to the story over and over again while participating in the reading. The SPLK program makes a vast and unique contribution to the world of literacy among Israel’s youngest children and their families.”

As Israel celebrates its 75th birthday this year, KGI’s leadership says the organization is proud to advance literacy among Israel’s newest generation in this innovative way. And families are grateful. Says Noa, “For me, this is an experience of true quality time and learning that is worth everything.”

WITH THANKS

Committed donors came together to enable Sifriyat Pijama for Little Kids (SPLK) to reach more children sooner. Funding comes in part from the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, the Wiener Philanthropy, and the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation – with parents and other sponsoring organizations generously contributing to help this program grow.

“The Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation is thrilled to support Sifriyat Pijama for Little Kids,” says CEO Jennie Schaff, Ph.D. “The importance and promise of early literacy support cannot be underestimated when thinking, dreaming, and planning for positive outcomes for youth into adulthood.”