

The Kibbutz child — growing up unowned

By MAUREEN SMITH

Muki Tsur, Ein Gev kibbutz member and author of the information handbook *What is Kibbutz?*, said Monday the unique child rearing of the kibbutz rejects treating children as property.

Tsur attacked those psychologists who dismiss kibbutzim as a valid method of raising children on the grounds that "the worst mother is better than the best institution."

"These psychologists," said Tsur, "operate on the premise that one can have either family life, or an orphanage. What they fail to recognize is that the present-day nuclear family of the city is not the mother-child oriented group that they maintain, but rather one that encompasses a great variety of influencing agents."

"By the same token, neither is the kibbutz an institution without parental influence. The kibbutz child has many centres: parents, peers, nurse, his parents peer group, and the community at large. It is therefore invalid to operate on this 'either or' basis."

He described childhood in a kibbutz: from birth to three years the child lives as part of a group that includes five other babies. They are cared for by a nurse and by their mothers, who do not work for the first six months after the baby is born.

At three years the groups become larger and the socialization process becomes more intense. From this time forward the children spend several hours each evening in their parents homes. Parents also visit the children's house at breakfast.

At six years the children begin receiving formal education, and by nine years they are managing their own miniature kibbutz. At 14 they begin to play an active role in the adult community. They maintain this role until they are inducted into the army at age eighteen.

Tsur said while parents in a kibbutz have no objective function — the feeding or housing of their children, present North American families are not nearly as oriented towards taking care of their children as are kibbutzim. He pointed out that more than 70 out of 100 kibbutz-raised children return to the kibbutz after their army terms have expired.

Tsur was a featured speaker of Kibbutz Karavan, a touring information program of problems and perspectives in communal living sponsored by the Israeli government, and invited to York by the Jewish Students Federation.

Kibbutzim have been operating in Israel for more than 60 years, a span of three generations. Jaacov Lior, a representative of the Zionist Youth Movement, said information concerning kibbutzim is directed at



The children's houses on the kibbutzim were established to allow women to play an active economic role in the community. But roles are kept and women still raise the children.

Jewish North American youth whom the Movement would encourage to move to Israel to take up this unique way of life.

He noted that there is a certain appeal to the ideal of a productive working class where people work together to build something with their own hands, without resorting to outside cities.

The Zionist Youth Movement as part of this

information program operates a summer camp in Perth where 100 children from ages 10 to 20 years live in a kibbutz-like atmosphere for six weeks. According to Lior, success rates are not that high as far as real conversions to the kibbutz ideal are concerned. He added that most participants come away with a different attitude and approach to life.

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