
HIPPY Program
Jerusalem
December 13, 1998

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

THE WHITE HOUSE
OFFICE OF THE FIRST LADY

Office of the Press Secretary
(Jerusalem)

For Immediate Release

December 13, 1998

**REMARKS OF FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT THE HIPPY PROGRAM**

YAD RACHEL, JERUSALEM

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much, Sara. I agree wholeheartedly with what Sara said about our day. It has been a wonderful day. I have personally enjoyed being with her and sharing our observations and our thoughts, particularly about children and family and peace and what we all want for those whom we love and hold dear. So it is a great pleasure for me to be here with her and to thank her for her concern and her work on behalf of children as well. It is true that I have a great friendship with both Nan and Avima. But it is also true -- as those of you who have worked with Avima know -- whatever Avima says, I do. She, within the last year or so, visited me in the White House to bring me up to date on what was happening with HIPPY both here in Israel and around the world, literally from New Zealand to Holland, to many parts of the United States. This program is one that is valued and respected. And I am just delighted that I could so quickly, in relative terms, fulfill my hope when I saw her last, to be able actually to come and see HIPPY in Israel, because I have worked with it primarily in the United States. And that is because of the wonderful commitment to this project that the National Council for Jewish Women has brought to it since its inception. Nan Rich, my dear friend, is a tireless and inspiring advocate for America's children, and a great spokesperson for HIPPY and what it can do for families and children.

It was about twelve years ago now, I think, that, totally by coincidence, I happened to be in Miami at a meeting that had nothing to do with children at the time. I was in my hotel room getting ready to go to the meeting, and I was leafing through the Miami newspaper and I saw a picture of Avima, and I saw a picture of a mother and a child, and it talked about this program that had originated in Israel and that was aimed at assisting

mothers to become the first teachers of their own children. It struck such a chord with me because one of the challenges we face in my country, as in any country, is how to help those parents without a lot of education themselves -- who perhaps are immigrants for whom, in my case, English, in your case Hebrew, would not be their first language. How do we help them prepare their own children to be successful, not only in school but in society? I was immediately taken with what I saw as the emphasis on assisting the parent to be someone who could then in turn support her child.

Sara and I talk about our children, and of course we try to do everything we can to prepare -- in my case my daughter, in her case, her sons -- so that they can be successful. But so many families don't have that support and need that extra assistance that comes from other helping members of the community. With the kind of structure that HIPPY brings so that parents can quickly learn how to read to their children, how to interact with their children. I saw transformations occur in the families that I worked with in Arkansas. So many of the families there did not have a mother or a father who had even finished what we call high school. They were not very comfortable with education; they had not been successful; they didn't know even how to read very well in many instances. Along came HIPPY, which convinced them that they could not only feel good about what they provided for their child, but also begin to feel good about themselves, and to understand the importance of education for a better future.

With the work that the National Council of Jewish Women has done all of these years, Hebrew University and the Center there have been able to disseminate the model of HIPPY literally throughout the world. So again I want to thank Nan, my friend, and I want to thank NCJW, and I believe that the President-elect of NCJW, Nan Schneiderman, is also with us. I want to thank her and all of you who are here as part of the NCJW mission.

Nan, Avima and I have talked many times, the three of us together, one of us with the other, about the importance of providing support for families. That is what I wrote about in my book, *It Takes A Village*, and to see that in action here is particularly gratifying. The White House recently held last spring a conference on early childhood development and learning, and what we talked about at that conference is what many of us have always known, because perhaps we had a parent or a grandparent who either read to us or sang to us or told stories to us, and so it came as something quite natural to those of us who had that experience to try to pass that on to our own children. We knew it was something we enjoyed doing. We thought it was something that was helpful. But now we have

actual scientific evidence that these kinds of activities with young children are not only a nice thing to do, but they literally build brain cells. By reading to babies, infants, toddlers, young children, you are helping to create more connections in the brain. You are helping to create vocabulary. You are stimulating the interest in and the ability for learning.

When you bring together the families, the mothers and children that I saw upstairs, they may come from different languages, they may come from different religious traditions, they may come from different ethnic or racial groups. But as each of them learns what they can do for their own children, they are helping to prepare better Israeli citizens. They are helping to create boys and girls who will do better in school, and feel that they have a stake in the future. That is certainly what I saw in the many times that I have spent with HIPYPY programs throughout the United States.

It is not only that you help prepare children to do better in school, as important as that is. I have also seen how it helps boost parents' self-confidence, particularly mothers. In fact, one of the reasons I became so interested in HIPYPY is through Avima's description of how it became a device for helping to integrate Ethiopians who had come to Israel. Many of those women, many of those mothers themselves were not very literate. They didn't have a tradition of going to school, and here they found themselves in a very modern society needing to have new tools and not knowing really where to turn, and feeling really quite lost about how to do this. But what HIPYPY does by structuring the relationship with the mother and the child, it gives the mother confidence that she too can learn. It boosts her sense that she can go out into the world. Not only here in Israel but at home in the United States, I've heard many stories of women who have gone back to finish high school, women who have gone on to university, women who have been able to be employed and thereby contribute to the family through raising the family's income, women who were once illiterate who become literate and who understand the importance of education in their children's lives.

I know that there was recently an official of a HIPYPY program visiting a neighborhood in Tel Aviv where the program first started, and a young man walked up to her and asked her what she was doing and why she was there, and she explained that she was interested in setting up a HIPYPY program in the local community center. The young man became very excited, explaining that he was HIPYPY graduate himself many years ago, and that it had been a very important experience in his life and in the life of his family. He is now an officer in the army. He runs an athletic program for children in the neighborhood because he felt like the HIPYPY program that had come to his neighborhood had given him so much that he

wanted to give something back to the children there as well.

I want to thank everyone associated with HIPPY. Certainly I want to thank Avima and her colleagues at Hebrew University. I want to thank Nan and all of her colleagues at NCJW. But I particularly want to thank the mothers who really take a leap of faith and participate in this program. I want to commend and congratulate them. And I want to thank the Ministry of Education and the various governmental groups that support this program and the communities that welcome it because of the difference that it can make in individual lives and in really changing the idea of what we can do by living and working together. There's a wonderful section from the Talmud that my husband, I think, quoted when he spoke last year at the NCJW meeting that I wanted to repeat today. It says that every blade of grass has an angel that bends over it and whispers "grow, grow." When it comes to our children, we all have an obligation to be those angels, to lean over, to whisper "grow and grow." And we also have an obligation to help families do the best job they can in helping those children grow.

So I thank you for giving such a gift to so many families here in Israel, in my country and around the world.

Thank you very much.