**Transforming Expertise in Social Work into New Policy**

**The Rift in Israeli Society**

According to the National Insurance Institute (*Bituach Leumi*), almost 2 million people in Israel are living in poverty, including 860,000 children and 160,000 senior citizens. Phenomena such as domestic violence and sexual assault against children are intensifying. According to data from OECD, Israel has among the highest rates of inequality in the Western world, in terms of access to educational and employment opportunities, healthcare, and transportation. Services for welfare, mental health, and individual security are collapsing in the face of these problems.

**Social Workers as Social Experts**

Social workers are on the front lines of confronting this range of social problems. They are the ones entrusted with implementing social policy. They see the full picture, and can identify the trends, gaps, and failures in social policy. Therefore, they have the necessary expertise, motivation, and practical experience to design broad and comprehensive solutions to pressing social problems. However, they often lack the tools and economic resources that would enable them to translate their knowledge into change. The Incubator for Social Change Entrepreneurs has been created to bridge this rift.

**Example of a Policy Change Initiated by a Social Worker**

Chen Gilboa is a community social worker who founded a group of residents and activists in Bat Yam to address the issue of urban renewal. When she became aware of their plight, she initiated meetings with the city engineer and mayor. This process led to passage of a municipal bylaw, followed by a similar legislative amendment to National Outline Plan 38/1, according to which developers are required to provide alternate housing during construction to tenants over the age of 80 or those who are housebound.

**The Academic Homebase**

Over the past several decades, the social work profession has given rise to changes in social policies around the world. The Bob Shapell School of Social Work at Tel Aviv University is a major teaching and research institute, and its staff includes a broad and distinguished group of experts in social policy change and entrepreneurship for social change. Its faculty members, assisted by David Ben Ami and the Friends of Tel Aviv University Association, established the Incubator for Social Change Entrepreneurs.

**The Vision of the Incubator for Social Change Entrepreneurs**

The vision is to provide a place where social workers can receive support themselves and acquire the tools to initiate knowledge-based changes in social policy at the organizational, municipal, and governmental levels. This will develop a professional means for designing more balanced social policies in Israel.