

## Special Munchkins

Dubai, United Arab Emirates  
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Year Founded:

2013

**Organization type:**

for profit

Project Stage:

Start-Up

**Budget:**

\$250,000 - \$500,000

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### Project Summary

#### Elevator Pitch

**Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.**

Special Munchkins aims to provide a play centre for children with mental challenges. This would help them improve their social skills and interaction. The different sections provided are arts and craft, ball pit and sensory room. Also aims to be a learning resource centre and increase awareness.

**WHAT IF - Inspiration: Write one sentence that describes a way that your project dares to ask, "WHAT IF?"**

What if with the right exposure to social interaction, mentally challenged children can learn how to lead a normal life?

#### About Project

**Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?**

Taking care of children is a tough task, and when the child is one with special needs, the task can sometimes be even more taxing on the parents. Based on informal interviews, parents of children with special needs have cited a large number of services which are lacking in the country and the overall feedback has been one of frustration. One area identified was lack in social interaction for the special needs children.

**Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!**

Although play areas are common in Dubai and the UAE, none exist that caters to the needs of special needs children. Most regular play areas also require children to be supervised by a guardian. Special Munchkins aims to offer parents a few hours of relief and children some educational fun in a safe and caring environment by providing play supervisors who are qualified to handle special needs children. The proposed business will indirectly raise awareness and tackles one area of the existing social problem; to provide fun activities for special needs children and indirectly improving their quality of life. The availability of such a service also helps raise awareness about the issues faced by these children as well their parents.

### Impact: How does it Work

**Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.**

The primary activities are: 1. A play area staffed by qualified individuals where parents can drop off kids. The play area will have three different sections: a) Play and arts and craft section: area with soft padded play equipment such as swing sets, and an arts and craft corner. This helps the child to improve their motor skills b) A ball pit section. This helps to develop social interaction between the children in the pit by forming teams c) A dark or sensory room: research has shown that quiet areas with sensory lighting helps relax children with special needs. This helps to keep the children's outbursts in control 2. Events such as summer camps, birthdays and special activities. This helps to build awareness within the event.

**Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact for the coming years.**

By incorporating activities such as art, dance, simple gym exercises suitable for the children, this service aids the social development of the child or young adult; a vital component that is not catered to by educational or occupational therapy services. This would indirectly would improve the quality of life of the children as well as the parents. The availability of such a service also helps raise awareness about the issues faced by these children as well their parents. The social impact will be based on measurements of the following: 1. Frequency of the child playing/interacting with other children per month 2. Frequency of the child sharing with other children independently per month 3. Reduction of time child spends in isolation per month 4. Estimated % increase in motor skills of child

Sustainability

**Financial Sustainability Plan: What is this solution’s plan to ensure financial sustainability?**

The main source of revenue for the business will be through: 1. Fees that are charged per child, per day for use of the play area 2. Fees that are charged for special events such as summer camps or birthdays. 3. A membership system where parents pay an annual fee to join and in return are charged discounted rates for sessions at the play area.

**Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?**

There are many organisations in the UAE that offer services for special needs children. However the gap that is not addressed is social development for these children. Although play areas are common in Dubai and the UAE, none exist that caters to the needs of special needs children. Most regular play areas also require children to be supervised by a guardian. Special Munchkins aims to offer parents a few hours of relief and children some educational fun in a safe and caring environment by providing play supervisors who are qualified to handle special needs children.

Team

**Founding Story**

The team members have recently graduated from Hult International Business School in London. They have always been passionate about the social sector. After graduation, they moved to Dubai. Ijlal has had quite a few personal interaction with autistic children, her nephew being one of them. When Ijlal sat down with her sister one evening, her sister complained about the fact that she could not go out often because there were no qualified person to look after her autistic son. This struck a chord in Ijlal and she decided to do something about the situation. Ijlal then contacted her classmates, Anusha and Miaser, to work out a plan to help make this idea a reality. After a couple of informal interviews, they saw that this could actually work!

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