



JEWISH AGENCY FOR ISRAEL PROGRAMS FOR

RESCUE AND RECOVERY in SOUTHERN ISRAEL

A REPORT TO OUR DONORS AND PARTNERS

FEBRUARY 2009/ SHEVAT 5769



הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל
Jewish Agency for Israel

RESCUE AND RECOVERY in SOUTHERN ISRAEL

The Jewish Agency has been standing by the citizens of Sderot and the Gaza Perimeter for the past several years. As tension mounted, we responded. As the range of rocket fire widened, we were there. When **Operation Cast Lead** began in late December we mobilized our partners and professionals and began implementing programs for the residents of Southern Israel. And as the cease fire took effect on Sunday January 19, 2009, we were ready with plans to help the citizens of the war-torn region rebuild their communities and recover their lives.

None of these programs would have been possible without the generous support of the **United Jewish Communities' Israel Emergency Campaign** and the dedication of donors and partners from around the world, including Israeli donors. Together, we helped rescue thousands of citizens during the war and now, in its aftermath, we are working toward recovering and repairing, encouraging perseverance among individuals, families and communities across southern Israel.

Drawing on the impact and success of our wide-reaching efforts to rebuild northern Israel in the wake of the 2006 Second Lebanon War, and as a result of our ongoing work in the southern war-torn region, we are a familiar face to the residents; they know who we are and are confident in what we do.

Our plan is a comprehensive approach that galvanizes affected residents and communities and maximizes our expertise, affording real relief. We are the driving force in the rehabilitation of southern Israel, and our work has made, and is making, a difference. We are pleased to update you on the elements of our rehabilitation efforts. These programs and initiatives are based on the reported needs received from mayors, local authorities, and our field professionals for the recovery and rehabilitation of the south's residents.

PARTNERING WITH PURPOSE, ALL OVER THE WORLD

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RESPIRE PROGRAMS FOR SOUTHERN YOUTH

Over the course of the last eight years, for all the residents of Sderot and Gaza Perimeter, life has been a harrowing combination of survival, maintaining a sense of normalcy, and ensuring emotional wellbeing. But for the young people in these communities the situation was even more difficult. As they watched the adults in their lives struggle to “be strong” and persevere, these children faced the fears and anxieties of living on the frontlines.

To address this need, and to ensure that these young people were given the opportunity to recharge their batteries, regain their strength, and refocus their energies, the Jewish Agency implemented respite programs for youth throughout the region. By the end of Operation Cast Lead, more than 35,000 children had enjoyed daily and overnight activities which included field trips, nature hikes, tours of historical sites, and cultural events. On January 12th, 1,500 children filled the plaza of the Jewish Agency’s main offices in Jerusalem for a concert with rising Israeli star, Shai Gabso.

Recognizing that the participants of ongoing Jewish Agency programs, such as Net@ and Youth Futures, operating in the war-torn region were also in need of respite, we implemented special “hosting” sessions in which program participants from other locations hosted their southern peers. Program participants also enjoyed overnight camping at the Nitzana Ecological Village, one of the Jewish Agency’s residential educational facilities.



Left: Children boarding a bus for a day of fun and respite outside the range of rocket fire.

Right: Children visiting the Safari.



WORKING WITH THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY AUTHORITY (RACHEL COMMISSION)

The RACHEL Commission, which was set up at the Ministry of Defense, coordinates all the civilian bodies that operate during emergency situations: NPOs, social organizations, etc. with the intention of synchronizing activities of the various bodies, avoiding duplication, and allowing reciprocal updating. This cooperation also allows for a pooling of resources to generate maximal impact for citizens in need. The Jewish Agency, along side the UJC and JDC, were leading figures in the RACHEL Commission during Operation Cast Lead, receiving much praise and appreciation from the administration and its members.

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COMPUTERS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

The hostilities caught the region's children in the middle of their school year. While almost all of the children had become used to an academic day that is consistently interrupted by air raid sirens, dashes to the bomb shelters, and overall anxiety, the crisis meant that schools were not in session. The Jewish Agency realized that a prolonged absence from regular scholastic activities would yield perilous educational gaps for region's youth. In order to facilitate a distance learning program, initiated by the Ministry of Education, the Jewish Agency solicited funds that allowed us to purchase lap top computers and distribute them to the youngsters who did not already have a computer available for this purpose. Israeli companies responded generously to our efforts and more than 160 computers were delivered throughout the southern region. Most recently, the Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore informed us of their contribution of 400 additional computers that will be distributed to the children of Ashkelon to help them with their studies.



Left: A victim of Kassam missile attack receives help as she fills out insurance papers for compensation.



Center: Chairman Zeev Bielski hands a check to Maid Abu Sahiban from Rahat. Maid was wounded in a missile attack.



Right: Rivka Cohen of Sderot deposits her much needed S.O.S. relief money so that she could rebuild her damaged home.

S.O.S. EMERGENCY FUNDS FOR VICTIMS OF TERROR

In November 2007, in response to heightened emergency needs throughout the country, the Jewish Agency established the S.O.S. Emergency Fund as part of the Fund for Victims of Terror supported primarily by the UJC IEC allocations, Keren Hayesod and donations from around the world. The Emergency Fund responds immediately with a \$1,000 allocation to individuals and families who have been victimized by an act of terror. This initial financial assistance is meant to help recipients address immediate needs including replacing personal property that was destroyed or repairing damages. Jewish Agency field representatives maintain contact with grant recipients to help them file for further resources and to ensure that they fully exercise their rights, in accordance with the Fund's procedures.

REFURBISHING BOMB SHELTERS

Many of the region's bomb shelters were in dilapidated condition and were unsuitable for residents' use. Responding to this need, the Jewish Agency stepped in to refurbish and renovate more than 500 shelters. The Amigour company, a Jewish Agency subsidiary, provided basic amenities, first aid supplies, as well as carrying out electrical and plumbing work as needed. The Ministry of Housing provided funding for this project, which helped leverage the funds made available by the IEC and other donors.

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ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES FOR NEW IMMIGRANTS

For Israel's newest residents, the emergency situation presented a host of traumatic realities beyond the experience of adjusting to a new country, language, and lifestyle. In order to ensure that these 3,000+ vulnerable citizens would be well taken care of, the Jewish Agency's absorption center professionals, together with the Mashabim organization, worked tirelessly giving them the life skills and tools they needed to persevere through the crisis. Workshops and respite outings were implemented and hotlines were set up for both absorption center residents and staff. For the young immigrant children, alternative forms of therapy were used to help them address through their emotions and anxieties, including bibliotherapy, drama therapy, and small group counseling. Programs were also held in Hebrew for children, to ensure that despite the crisis they would not fall behind in their language attainment, and thus be able to resume their transition to Israeli life just as soon as the crisis was over.



Left and right: Young Ethiopian immigrant children benefitting from therapy sessions in absorption centers.

SPECIAL TRAINING FOR YOUTH FUTURES TRUSTEES

More than 1,200 Youth Futures participants and 80 Trustees, were affected by Operation Cast Lead. The Trustees underwent special training seminars on how to help the children, and their families, deal with the war. Among other topics, the Trustees were instructed how to conduct a home visit, most of which would be held in bomb shelters, how to identify trauma, and what resources to suggest to families in need of assistance. Many of the Trustees, themselves residents of the region, took on extra responsibilities during the hostilities to ensure that the children and their parents were safe, had enough to eat, and were managing well. As of the fourth day of the war, trustees visited shelters and homes to provide some relief and comfort to residents. Throughout the crisis, the Trustees' role as mentor and role model was underscored and the remarkable relationship they have built with their charges was evident. Now as things are beginning to stabilize in the region, we are utilizing the existing Youth Futures platform to help the children as they work to overcome their fears, return to school, and resume normal childhood activities. Trustees are devoting nearly three hours every week, over the course of the next three months, to additional programming and learning experiences for whole groups of children, not just their Youth Futures participants. In this way, children will be able to enhance their personal potential, have positive educational experiences, and enjoy heightened one-on-one attention.

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VOLUNTEER AND COMMUNITY EFFORTS

The Jewish Agency's Global Center responded to thousands of calls from private citizens and public organizations all interested in helping out or receiving more information about assistance. The Jewish Agency became the coordinating body for many volunteers who wanted to do their part down south. As part of the P2K young leadership initiative, many of the region's young people mobilized to help their fellow citizens, distributing supplies in bomb shelters, offering support and assistance whenever possible, and tutoring school-aged children so they would not fall behind in school.

Many P2K professionals and other Jewish Agency employees also took part in the efforts, including helping out with new immigrants in absorption centers, distributing supplies, and hosting individuals and families who wished to relocate out of the danger zone.



Left: Members of the Jewish Agency's workers union distribute supplies to absorption centers in the south.

Right: Ofer Baram, Jewish Agency professional, responds to calls in real time.

YOUNG COMMUNITIES AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

The realities of post-war northern Israel have shown us that the best way to help ravaged communities is to infuse the region with people who are committed toward making a difference and becoming a part of the communal framework. Based on the success and impact of Young Communities in the north since 2006, the Jewish Agency is once again turning to Young Communities to help rehabilitate the war-torn south. In the southern region of Israel there are three Young Communities already in action, one in Beer Sheva Dalet, one in the Old City of Beer Sheva, and one in Yachini. These three communities have nearly 100 residents who have made an indelible impact on the south. They have a proven track record for action and effect. We are using the expertise and energies of these Young Community residents to work with youth from the ravaged region and enhance community life for everyone.

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ON BEHALF OF THE RESIDENTS OF SOUTHERN ISRAEL

THANK YOU

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