

War on Israel's Southern Population: Responding to Crisis Among Vulnerable Populations

Since Operation Cast Lead began on Saturday December 27th, the Jewish Agency has been utilizing core funds and IEC funds previously allocated to us to address the immediate needs of several vulnerable populations in the region – children and families at risk, new immigrants, the elderly and victims of terror. Now, on its 10th day, with IDF forces in the midst of a difficult ground campaign, the population under rocket attack is in need of immediate assistance in order to ease their extreme discomfort and anxiety. *Without additional resources we will be unable to undertake these interventions.* To this end, the Jewish Agency has appealed for help from Israeli companies and individuals, and Keren Hayesod communities, and we are now turning to individuals and federations under the umbrella of the United Jewish Communities.

We would like to stress a number of guiding principals;

1. While everything described below can be implemented immediately, the programs are necessary only as long as conflict continues. While we are looking today for solid financial commitments, cash can be submitted within two or three weeks. However, in the event of a complete cessation of hostilities, we will not need these funds (with the exception of signed contractual commitments).
2. The Winograd Commission that followed the Second War in Lebanon criticized the Government of Israel for its lack of coordination of services needed by the civilian population. As a lesson learned from the past, an Emergency Coordinating Forum (R"ACHEL) headed by Minister Matan Vilnai, has been mapping and vetting needs and streamlining requests for assistance. The Jewish Agency has been an active member of this Forum (along with UJC, JDC, ITC and others); everything we are seeking to implement, as detailed below, has been endorsed by the Forum.
3. Given the limited resources, the interventions detailed below will be implemented according to two criteria: (i) geographical proximity to Gaza border and (ii) relative weakness of population as determined by welfare authorities.

Your partnership is critical to help us implement the following emergency response programs for residents living in southern Israel:

- Single-day respite activities to evacuate children from the front lines
- Immediate provision of basic computers for children at home, without school and without resources, and stuck at home or in bomb shelters
- Critical support packages for residents seeking refuge in bomb shelters across southern Israel
- Urgent interventions to help new immigrants in Jewish Agency absorption centers in the south cope with the fear and anxiety of war

I. SINGLE DAY RESPITE FOR CHILDREN

According to a study conducted by NATAL, the Israel Center for Victims of Terror and War, between 75 percent and 94 percent of Sderot children aged 4-18 exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress – and that was back in January 2008. Today, as the war intensifies across southern Israel, thousands of children and youth living within 20 kilometers are spending days on end without school, access to playgrounds, and freedom to play. Their anxieties and fears mounting as the days of uncertainty wear on.

There are 12,000 children and youth, in grades 1-12, living between 0 and 7 kilometers from Israel's southern border. Like those from Sderot, all these children are susceptible to the lasting impact of trauma and terror. They are desperate to escape the frightening reality of their every day lives; and we are desperate to offer them an alternative experience for their childhoods - one that is filled with joy and laughter, not sadness and fear.

Responding to the urgency of this crisis, the Jewish Agency proposes to operate a range of enriching and educational daily retreats for children and youth across Israel's southern region. The daily breaks include trips, attractions, and fun activities, including enriching and educational programs, and small group workshops and discussions about how the war is affecting them and their families. The goals of the daily respite programs are multidimensional: addressing the acute need for release and escape among children and youth; relieving mounting levels of stress and fear; revitalizing spirits with games and fun.

Daily respite activities cost approximately \$53 per child per day, including fees for all program activities, related materials (sweatshirts), entrance fees to parks and sites, adult supervision and staff, meals, snacks and transportation. The Jewish Agency will implement the respite activities in close collaboration with local municipalities for increased efficiency and impact regarding the particular needs of communities under fire. This program is modular and can be carried out in several stages for various groups, according to community, age range or other variable.

Our initial priority is to offer daily respite activities to children and youth from the following:

First Priority Region Communities:

| Community | Number of Children and Youth |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Hof Ashkelon | 1,500 |
| Eshkol | 2,400 |
| Sedot Negev | 1,900 |
| Shaar HaNegev | 1,200 |
| Sderot | 5,000 |

Funding Request for First Priority Region: Up to \$636,000 for a total of 12,000 children and youth at a cost of \$53 per child per day

As the danger zone widens to include cities like Ashkelon and even Beer Sheva, so too does our target population. The following children and youth from cities 10-20 kilometers from Israel's southern border are part of our Second Priority Region for operating daily respite activities.

Second Priority Region Communities:

| Community | Number of Children and Youth |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Netivot | 6,000 |
| Kiryat Gat | 12,000 |
| Beer Sheva | 40,000 |
| Ashkelon | 32,000 |
| Ashdod | 47,000 |
| Ofakim | 5,500 |

Funding Request for Second Priority Region: Up to \$7,552,500 for a total of 142,500 children and youth at a cost of \$53 per child per day

II. PROVIDING COMPUTERS TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN SOUTHERN ISRAEL

As the war rages on, schools across southern Israel remain closed; playgrounds still empty. Children and youth in southern Israel whittle away their days indoors – running between their homes to their bomb shelters as the 'Red Alert' sirens wail. Teachers worry how they will manage to teach all this year's curricula as they days without teaching increase. Local authorities wonder how their students will advance onto the next grade, should the war continue to wage on for longer. A recent article from leading Israeli newspaper, Haaretz, identified 300,000 students across the South who have been without school or an educational framework for ten days – and counting. For children and youth who display special needs for educational attention or enrichment programs, the lack of creative or educational outlets further threatens their future advancement, not to mention their overall mental and physical wellbeing.

According to assessments by the Ministry of Education, approximately 10% of all children and youth in the South, do not have computers in their homes; while this statistic varies from city to city, owing to various socioeconomic factors, that means, of the 155,500 children and youth in the south (as per the tables above), nearly 16,000 children and youth are without any form of educational or recreational opportunity in their homes. For more than ten days, these children and youth have been without basic means for research, inquiry, reading, investigation, contact and communication with current events, family, friends and more.

Responding to inquiries and needs from communities across southern Israel the Jewish Agency proposes to work in cooperation with local authorities to supply basic, inexpensive computers to children and youth to use in their homes for the duration of the war. Our goal is twofold: to enable their participation in distance learning programs and online educational activities while showing our solidarity for their plight and demonstrating our support. Even though children and youth in the south are spending critical school days in their homes and bomb shelters, we will ensure that they can continue to pursue their interests and ideas while also staying safe.

At a cost of \$650 on average to provide a basic computer, including installation and delivery, and to upgrade basic connectivity, your support can make a direct impact on a child's life: enhancing their current situation and ensuring a future of hope. Upon cessation of the war, these computers will return to the possession of local authorities to be allocated to educational programs or children in need, according to their evaluation.

We have identified priority communities for first and second stages of supplying basic computers, according to the following criteria: (i) proximity to Israel's southern border, ie. increased threat level of Kassam attacks from Gaza; (ii) lacking in resources for basic computers.

Our initial priority is to provide inexpensive, basic desktop computers in homes and shelters for children and youth from the following priority areas to use:

First Stage Communities (in order of need):

| Community | Approximate Number of Children and Youth Without Computers |
|------------------|---|
| Sderot | 500 |
| Netivot | 600 |
| Ofakim | 1,400 * |

** Haaretz reported that close to 45% of children in Ofakim are without computer resources in their homes because of the community's low socioeconomic situation, including higher rates of poverty, unemployment and low income earning families.*

Funding Request for First Stage Communities: Up to \$1,625,000 to supply a total of 2,500 computers at a cost of \$650 per computer per child/ household

As the danger zone widens to include cities like Ashkelon and even Beer Sheva, so too will extend the provision of computers to our second priority areas:

Second Stage Communities (in order of need):

| Community | Approximate Number of Children and Youth Without Computers |
|------------------|---|
| Beer Sheva | 4,000 |
| Ashkelon | 3,200 |
| Ashdod | 4,700 |
| Kiryat Gat | 1,200 |

Funding Request for Second Stage Communities: Up to \$8,515,000 to supply a total of 13,100 computers at a cost of \$650 per computer per child/ household

III. SUPPORT PACKAGES OF BASIC EQUIPMENT AND EDUCATIONAL GAMES FOR RESIDENTS BOMB SHELTERS IN SOUTHERN ISRAEL

In southern Israel, safety can only be found indoors: in a bomb shelter or protected space. Homes; schools; community centers; hospitals; shopping centers; they're all under attack. Streets are empty as residents seek cover. Yet, the atmosphere in the shelters is anything but safe. For those crowded together in very close proximity for days on end - physical discomfort is combined with intolerable anxiety.

It is the little things that count: a new game, an extra blanket, a new heating unit. All these 'little things' would mean a great deal to those sitting hours on end in bomb shelters across southern Israel. Not only would they alleviate discomfort and provide relief, but they would also show our support for their situation and how much we care for their quality of living.

Working in collaboration with local authorities, the Jewish Agency has identified 630 bomb shelters in southern Israel in need of extra equipment and basic necessities. Some of these shelters are municipal and others belong to large, hi-rise residential facilities – both designed to accommodate large masses of people seeking refuge from Kassam strikes. Among the residential shelters, are the below-ground shelters that serve hundreds of residents living in the Amigour Public Housing Facilities. Typically, residents living in Amigour Public Housing facilities are from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite government housing subsidies, many Amigour residents struggle to make ends meet: many are unemployed or earn low incomes that are insufficient to support their large families. Housing options are restricted such that many individuals inhabit small or tightened quarters, rendering living conditions

stifling. Further exacerbating their current situation is the fact that these large residential apartment buildings lack modernized and fully-equipped bomb shelters – and are nowhere near suitable for the number of residents in need of safety.

Our provisions would provide critical assistance to thousands seeking refuge and safety from the terrorizing war on their homes. Ranging from basic cleaning and hygiene products to first aid kits, from heaters and electric water kettles to blankets and mattresses, our support packages supplement basic equipment with diverse educational and enriching games for children and youth. Our goal is to provide for those in need while they struggle to survive, improving their situation as much as possible through physical provisions in order to alleviate their mental burdens. Equipment is purchased and distributed according to guidelines established by the Home front Command to ensure the bomb shelters' security and safety.

Targeted bomb shelters are in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods of the following cities according to the following breakdown of priority regions:

First Priority Region: 0-7 km from Israel's southern border

| Community | Approximate Number of Bomb Shelters |
|------------------|--|
| Shaar HaNegev | 35 |
| Eshkol | 50 |
| Hof Ashkelon | 50 |
| Sedot Negev | 30 |

Funding Request for First Priority Region: Up to \$59,895 at a total cost of \$363 per package (\$320 for basic equipment and \$43 for educational games) per bomb shelter

Second Priority Region: 10-20 km from Israel's southern border

| Community | Approximate Number of Bomb Shelters |
|------------------|--|
| Netivot | 50 |
| Ashkelon | 100 |

Funding Request for Second Priority Region: Up to \$54,450 at a total cost of \$363 per package (\$320 for basic equipment and \$43 for educational games) per bomb shelter

Third Priority Region: 20-30 km from Israel's southern border

| Community | Approximate Number of Bomb Shelters |
|------------------|--|
| Ofakim | 40 |
| Kiryat Gat | 60 |

Funding Request for Third Priority Region: Up to \$36,300 at a total cost of \$363 per package (\$320 for basic equipment and \$43 for educational games) per bomb shelter

Fourth Priority Region: 30-40 km from Israel's southern border

| Community | Approximate Number of Bomb Shelters |
|------------------|--|
| Ashdod | 100 |
| Beer Sheva | 115 |

Funding Request for Fourth Priority Region: Up to \$78,045 at a total cost of \$363 per package (\$320 for basic equipment and \$43 for educational games) per bomb shelter

IV. ISRAEL URGENT INTERVENTIONS TO HELP NEW IMMIGRANTS IN ABSORPTION CENTERS IN THE SOUTH COPE WITH FEAR AND ANXIETY OF WAR

Approximately 3,000 new immigrants, from the FSU, Ethiopia, South America, France and elsewhere, currently reside in ten Jewish Agency Absorption Centers in the region. These newcomers to Israel are unfamiliar with Hebrew language and unable to understand enough of their surroundings to grasp the immediate danger surrounding them. For those still living in Absorption Centers, local staff serve as information headquarters. As much as they strive to put new immigrants of all ages at ease, however, staff is still unable to fully communicate the situation to many and unable to completely assuage the fears and anxieties of those who came so far just to live in Israel. The tension is palpable and difficult in absorption centers as the new immigrants struggle to communicate their mental, physical and social needs.

Drawing on its decades of experience supporting new immigrants the Jewish Agency proposes a range of therapy programs to alleviate the growing fears and tensions among new immigrants in light of the escalating war. Creative therapies such as drama therapy and bibliotherapy alongside more traditional group therapy and call centers create a comprehensive approach to treating anxieties and trauma as they rise among new immigrants in the south.

Currently we are responding to the crisis facing the following Jewish Agency Absorption Centers:

- 60 young adults, living in Israel without their families from such countries as North and South America, Ethiopia and the FSU in Calanit Absorption Center in Ashkelon
- 40 young adults, studying in colleges in southern Israel, all without their families in the country, living in IBIM Student Village in Sderot
- 92 new immigrants from around the world, including at least 15 children, living in Beit Canada Absorption Center in Ashdod
- 321 new immigrants from Ethiopia, including 100 children, living in Shoshana Absorption Center in Kiryat Gat
- 487 new immigrants from Ethiopia, including 230 children, living in Barnea Absorption Center in Ashkelon

Should the danger zone increase to include Beer Sheva Absorption Centers, we would be forced to include at least 500 more new immigrants into our response framework.

Funding Requests:

Drama therapy: Providing on-site alternative therapy options for residents in absorption center bomb shelters. In small groups, drama therapists help participants explore their fears, traumas and anxieties about their situation. Together, they find ways to improve communication and coping skills.

Total cost: \$66,000 to fund 6 groups of 20 participants each, \$11,000 per group, 120 participants total

Bibliotherapy: Providing on-site alternative therapy options for residents in absorption center bomb shelters. In small groups, bibliotherapists help participants explore their fears, traumas and anxieties about their situation through imagining ideal and real scenes, enacting role play and telling stories. Together, they find ways to improve communication and coping skills.

Total cost: \$22,500 to fund 15 groups of 24 participants each, \$1,500 per group, 360 participants total

Small group counseling: Providing on-site counseling for residents in absorption center bomb shelters. In small groups, mental health professionals will help participants explore their fears, traumas and anxieties about their situation. Together, they find ways to improve communication and coping skills.

Total cost: \$48,000 to fund 8 groups of 40 participants each, \$6,000 per group, 320 participants total