

Israel in Crisis: Aid to Residents of Western Negev

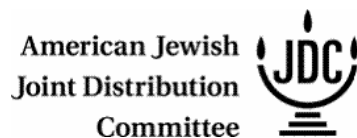
Programs Presented by

Jewish Agency for Israel

**American Jewish Joint Distribution
Committee**

Israel Trauma Coalition

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Executive Summary



The situation in Israel's Western Negev is deteriorating; the range of Kassam rockets is widening and more and more of Israel's citizens are facing the terror of life on the frontlines. **As 2008 began, the city of Ashkelon was presented with yet another security concern: a much more dangerous Katyusha rocket (the kind used during Israel's Second Lebanon War) landed in an open field.**

Thus the work of the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Joint Distribution Committee, and the Israel Trauma Coalition on behalf of the residents of Sderot and Gaza Perimeter, must now be extended to Ashkelon and the entire Western Negev.

Field representatives from several organizations and the Ashkelon municipality have identified several immediate needs that must be met, initiatives that must be taken to ensure the physical and emotional wellbeing of these vulnerable residents.

We are grateful to the United Jewish Communities, and all our partners, for their generosity in enabling us to make a difference in the lives of Israel's residents in crisis. In February, in response to the increased severity of the situation in the region, the UJC agreed to redirect \$3 million from the Fund for Victims of Terror for immediate intervention in Sderot and the Gaza Perimeter. After continued evaluation of the needs of the region, and considering the further decline of the situation, additional assistance is required.

In the pages that follow, we present the intervention programs for your consideration. **We thank you for all you have made possible thus far and look forward to your continued support as we stand by Israel's citizens in need.**

Program Rationale

For all the residents of Israel's Western Negev, life has become a harrowing combination of survival, stability, and uncertainty. All their energies are expended on ensuring their own safety and managing the day-to-day despite the air raid sirens and dashes to the bomb shelters.

The needs are complex and real; each resident requires individualized attention and assistance. The programs described herein are part of our joint efforts to meet the immediate and long-term needs of each and every individual living in the range of the rockets. Each program is designed to build critical resources for the residents and those charged with providing for them, allowing them to confront the ongoing emergency situation and build toward a strong, positive future.

Project Descriptions

Intervention for Children and Youth

1. Pesach Camps for Ashkelon Youth (JAFI)

For Ashkelon's children, already traumatized by the frightening reality they are now facing, playing and recreation have become increasingly limited. School outings and field trips have been cancelled because the region is not safe; outdoor recesses and activities have been moved to secure quarters. Local authorities have determined that it would not be in the children's best interest to disrupt their regular schooling at this time, but have indicated a need to provide safe activities for the children during the upcoming three week Pesach vacation. **By providing these children with Passover activities, outside of the range of rockets, we will be giving them a safe and exciting activity to look forward to and an opportunity to be the carefree children they deserve to be.**

Without safe and appropriate activities, the 12,109 school aged children (grades 5-17) will otherwise be cooped up in their homes. Furthermore, the positive and fun environment of these camps will help the children regain their mental strength and energies for the remainder of the school year.

Each three day session costs \$275 per person. Our working assumption is that 10,000 children will attend one Pesach activity camp for a total of \$2,750,000. Approximately 2,750 economically disadvantaged children will attend two sessions of activities over the course of the vacation.

Total cost: \$3,500,000.

2. The "Hibbuki" (Huggy Doll) Program (JDC)

The "Hibbuki" (Huggy Doll) Program will be established in kindergartens across the conflict region, where rocket strikes are most concentrated alleviating the stress of 4,000 children. The special "Hibbuki" doll, a stuffed animal with Velcro strips on its long arms, eases a child's trauma by actually 'hugging' the child in various ways, transferring therapeutic responsibility to the child. It further enables trained professionals to identify children suffering from severe trauma and establish intensive therapy regimens for them. **The cost of providing the Hibbuki doll program for 4,000 children is \$54,000 dollars; training and group therapy is also included in this program. Total cost: \$226,800.**

3. Red Color Song Program (JDC)

The Red Color Song Program will help 4,000 children cope with the stress they experience when the "Red Color" immediate danger warning siren is activated, signaling the need to seek immediate refuge in a secure area. By singing the Red Color song, children direct themselves to safety in an organized manner. Upon entering a protected area, the song then guides them through different relaxation steps in order to cope with the emotional stress caused by the traumatic experience.

To reinforce the therapeutic aspect of the song, art therapists and psychologists treat children and run professional training sessions in schools during periods of calm. Parents are also provided with intensive training in which they learn how to identify signs of trauma in their children. **Programmatic training is \$470 per location; the program will be instituted in 150 schools throughout the region. Intensive parental training will cost \$480 per day for 60 days. Total cost: \$99,300.**

Community Infrastructure and Resources

1. Renovating Bomb Shelters in Jewish Agency Absorption Centers and Amigor Sheltered Housing Facilities (JAFI)

Israel's newest immigrants experience a myriad of challenges that are associated with the transition to their new environment: learning a new language, acclimating to a new culture, finding appropriate housing, and securing a place of employment. All these are made more complex when these immigrants are thrust onto the frontlines of a crisis situation. Similarly, other vulnerable residents (including the elderly and disabled) in these locations, who live in Jewish Agency sheltered housing facilities need extra support and protection during this emergency.

While the Jewish Agency absorption and facility staff works diligently to ensure the wellbeing of Israel's newest and vulnerable citizens, providing unconditional and unrelenting support during both emergency and regular situations. In the absorption centers, a veritable first home for the immigrants, the residents take their first steps in Israeli society and rely on the aliyah and integration professionals for assistance every step of the way. The sense of security and "homoness" created in both the absorption centers and assisted living facilities notwithstanding, the physical condition of many of their bomb shelters are inadequate and not appropriate for long-term use.

Thus, the Jewish Agency is seeking to renovate and upgrade the bomb shelters in the absorption centers in the Western Negev region as well as the shelters in the local Amigour facilities. A total of 65 facilities will be upgraded.

The cost of renovating these shelters is currently being assessed; **costs of renovations may exceed \$2,500,000.**

2. Renovating Bomb Shelters and Securing Old Age Facilities (JDC)

For Israel's elderly residents living in JDC facilities in the conflict region the current situation is very difficult. Due to their limited mobility and agility, these residents are not able to get to bomb shelters in the 18 seconds "grace period" from air raid sirens and Kassam hits. Furthermore, the bomb shelters are not suitable for the needs of these elderly citizens. JDC proposes upgrading the shelters and reinforcing the building structures of two Elderly Day Care Centers and one Old Age Home in Ashkelon to ensure the safety and security of its elderly clients. **Total cost of these renovations and security upgrades: \$1,240,000.**

3. Helping the Municipalities and Local Authorities (JDC)

Local municipal and other government employees are experiencing an immense amount of stress as they work day and night to help traumatized residents across the region. In areas most recently impacted by the escalation, these employees are experiencing a great deal of sudden anxiety as they scatter to answer their region's new emergency needs. These professionals need additional labor and resources to enable them to provide consistent quality services to needy residents and to help them manage their own crisis-related stress.

JDC seeks to add 15 social and welfare workers to agencies meeting the needs of the region's vulnerable populations across the region for a period of one year. It also will create a basic pool of resources for the various needs of local municipal workers in the region. These funds will be allocated toward respite trips, psychological counseling, transportation, post-trauma workshops and family care. **Total Cost: \$850,000.**

4. Resiliency Program for Communities (ITC)

In the last week the southern port town of Ashkelon was bombarded with Grad missiles and Kassam rockets. In addition, according to a recent report by the Israel Defence Force the range of homemade rockets from Gaza will soon expand to 20 kilometers. Such an upgrade will provide an unlimited supply of rockets for targeting Ashkelon which encompasses a range of 10 to 17 kilometers (6-11 miles) from the Gaza strip and is home to 120,000 residents.

Mayor Ron Mehatzri in an interview with Army radio said, "The authorities were not ready to treat large numbers of shock victims... It's a city of 120,000 people with large facilities- a huge soccer stadium and a basketball stadium and a beach- no one is ready for this."

Following years of experience and expertise working with Sderot since the Intifada, the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC) proposes to develop a community-wide program in Ashkelon, to establish a Resiliency Center in order to strengthen the resilience of the community, identify gaps in the psycho-social field, advance projects for the benefit of both individuals and the community at large and establish the infrastructure required for emergency preparedness. This model uses existing community resources, strengthens cooperation with local agencies and establishes the methods and infrastructure for future community empowerment.

This program includes various components of training, seminars, and therapy. **Total cost of the program is \$1,770,000.**

5. Solidarity Events (JAFI)

The Sderot and Gaza Perimeter residents have repeatedly voiced a sense of disconnection and alienation from the central parts of Israel; they feel as though their government has abandoned them. Similarly, Israelis from all around the country want an opportunity to express their camaraderie with the Western Negev's residents and show them that they care. Thus the Jewish Agency is planning to hold several solidarity events for residents of the Western Negev region—events that will bring Israelis from all around the country to the region (in a settlement outside the range of the Kassam rockets), giving the people and the economy a much needed boost. These events will include live musical performances by Israel's leading musicians and artists, activities for children and adults alike, and other forms of entertainment.

With proper publicity and planning, it is hoped that tens of thousands of Israelis from all over the country will make their way to the region and show their solidarity with their fellow citizens—showing the residents of Western Negev that they have not been forgotten and are certainly not alone.

The estimated cost of each event is \$100,000. We hope to have at least three such events, scheduled to coincide with major Israeli national holidays including Passover and Israel's 60th Independence Day, as well as the summer months when children are on vacation. **Total Cost: \$300,000.**

6. Scholarships for Students at Sapir College (JAFI)

For the students of the Sapir College, the only institution of higher education in Sderot and the surrounding region, earning an academic degree has become even more stressful. The constant barrage of rockets disrupts their daily learning and makes consistent academic activity very difficult. Nevertheless, despite the Kassam attacks on the campus and the recent rocket-related fatality of their fellow student, the students want to carry on with their learning at Sapir.

But the ongoing security situation has reduced the number of applicants to the College and severely limited the ongoing activities of the campus. The College is the largest employer in the region and depends on the student body for its ability to function. The 8,000 students of Sapir have become part of the communal infrastructure, generating critical economic activity, building personal and professional relationships with the residents. If the College does not have enough funds, the detrimental realities will effect more than just the Sapir College community.

Thus the Jewish Agency is seeking to extend academic scholarships to the existing and potential students at the College. In this way, we will ensure that these young motivated individuals, students at the Sapir College, stay in the region and become permanent members of the region. We will also be maintaining the College's ability to provide higher education and simultaneously enable Sderot and the Gaza Perimeter communities to expand and develop.

Students will receive up to 50% of their tuition – or approximately \$1,500 – from the Jewish Agency. Scholarships will be issued for one year, during which time students will commit 4 hours a week of voluntary service in communities throughout southern Israel. By incorporating an element of community involvement, these scholarships encourage students to not only study in the south but also invest in the hard-hit community and contribute to its rehabilitation and vitality.

Several Israeli philanthropists have already expressed interest in partnering with the Jewish Agency for this important project. **We ask that the UJC consider an allocation of \$1,000,000 that will provide scholarships for nearly 650 students.**

7. Resiliency Programming for Teachers (JDC)

Teachers in the southern conflict region are under immense pressure, as they are charged with ensuring their student's physical safety and emotional health six days of the week. JDC seeks to offer these teachers an opportunity to get away from the conflict zone and learn how to cope with trauma. Divided into three phases, teachers will participate in post-trauma workshops as well as receive individual psychological and art therapy. Phase one will be respite getaways for 200 teachers; phase two summer workshops for 1,000 educators; phase three will be personal psychological intervention for traumatized teachers. **Total cost for all phases of the program: \$600,000.**

8. YUVAL - Helping the First Responders (JDC)

JDC's YUVAL program, a Hebrew acronym for Consultation and Support for Emergency Organizations, enhances the organizational resilience of first-emergency response crews. Run in partnership with the Israel Trauma Coalition, the program provides emergency personnel with the new skills and techniques needed to more effectively carry out their mission and avoid or cope with the "burn-out" and "compassion fatigue" that they may experience.

Israel's Home Front Command has asked JDC to establish the YUVAL program in three new southern locations and carry out follow-up activities in six already-established locations.

The YUVAL program will be implemented in Netivot, Ofakim, Kiryat Gat and Ashdod at \$30,000 per location. Follow-up activities will also be implemented in locations where the program exists at \$15,000 per location. **Total cost of program: \$210,000.**

9. Reinforcing Municipal Framework (JDC)

In order to help those charged with caring for southern Israel's residents, JDC will provide expert consultancy and operational assistance to directors of municipal services and volunteer organizations. This support will strengthen these agencies by helping local professional improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their emergency response as it is implemented.

JDC will also add volunteer staff to ensure that every single needy resident is provided with quality assistance. These volunteers will reduce the burden on professionals as they labor to meet the region's increased emergency needs.

A municipal crisis hotline will be established in Ashkelon to enable the city's emergency center to transfer resident's calls to different recipients simultaneously. This advanced communications system is critical to ensuring that the residents of Ashkelon receive timely, appropriate responses during crises.

Emergency consultation will be provided for Sderot, Hof Ashkelon, Ashkelon, Sedot Negev, and Netivot at a cost of \$30,000 per city. Additional volunteer training and support will be implemented in Ashkelon and Sderot. The Municipal Crisis Hotline will also be activated. **Total cost: \$300,000.**