



Association for Planning & Development of Services
for Children and Youth at Risk and their Families
Established by JDC-Israel and supported by the Government of Israel,
JDC-Israel and UJA-Federation of New York

Emergency Update

September 2006

Dear Friends,

Our work at Ashalim took on new dimensions during the wartime experience of this past summer. In this Emergency Update we share with you highlights of Ashalim emergency efforts to address the immediate needs of Israel's young vulnerable people in the heat of the war, as well as their needs today as they return to their homes and schools.

With the outbreak of hostilities, Ashalim's dedicated staff rallied together to reach children and youth in war-torn areas. As you will read below, our staff's emergency efforts helped thousands of children and youth at risk caught in the middle of a war to make it through very trying and uncertain times.

We are very grateful for the July 31st JDC Board Solidarity Mission, with Judge Ellen M. Heller, President JDC, Steven Schwager, Executive Vice President JDC, Ron Grossman, Israel Chair, Ken Witover, Ashalim Sub-Committee Chair, Michael Levinson, Voluntarism and Philanthropy Sub-Committee Chair and JDC board members, who traveled to Israel in the midst of the war to witness firsthand the suffering and destruction faced by our civilian population.



JDC Board Solidarity Mission with Mrs. Aliza Olmert, Mr. Arnon Mantver, Director-General JDC-Israel, and Dr. Rami Sulimani, Director-General Ashalim

Our visit to the north and to the south was "uneventful" – without sirens or rocket barrages. Yet, the Ashalim children and youth that we met were not always so lucky. The mission's support and thoughtful gifts gave these young people strength and encouragement.

At JDC-Israel emergency meetings we began to plan ahead for the "day after," recognizing the war's especially strong impact on the country's most vulnerable populations – immigrants, children living in poverty and those who feel alienated from society. JDC funding is enabling us to now implement these plans and provide support to 20,000 at-risk young people. Ashalim "day after" programs will reach these youngsters in school, at home and in their communities, and will help them deal with post-traumatic stress, overcome fears and return to a "normal" routine.



Ken Witover, Ashalim Chair, presents gifts from JDC to children in shelter in Hadar, Haifa.

Ashalim has also presented proposals to help Israel's social welfare, educational and health services respond to the anticipated needs of children and youth at risk for the longer-term. It is our hope that we will have the resources to bring these plans to fruition.

I would like to personally express my thanks for all the messages of support from overseas. We are one people who stand by each other - Am Yisrael Chai.



JDC Board Solidarity Mission brings handicraft kits to Ethiopian-Israeli immigrant children in Acco.

With wishes for peace,

*Dr. Rami Sulimani,
Director-General, Ashalim*

Ashalim Wartime Emergency Efforts

The generous support of JDC donors, foundations and UJC funds, enabled Ashalim to provide immediate help to children and youth at risk and their families from the North of Israel and those living along the Southern front. This emergency support included: **emotional support, respite and recreation** to families from the North, assistance to families of **children with special needs**, and support efforts on behalf of **high-risk children and youth**.

Emotional Support

During the war, thousands of children in bomb-shelters in the North of Israel, in temporary quarters in safer areas of the country, and in Southern communities surrounding the Gaza strip suffered from trauma. The constant rockets, sounds of army aircraft overhead or artillery fire, physical destruction and worry about what is to come all took their toll. Children and youth began suffering from nightmares, behavior changes, constipation, bedwetting, violent outbursts and anxiety attacks. Each day that Israel's civilian population was on the front lines in both the North and the South brought forth the immediate, critical need for psychological support.

Yael, a generally quiet and happy 7 year old, had become uncontrollable, constantly hitting her sisters and her mother since arriving at Niztanim. Yael's mother, a divorcee, and her daughters left Safed after sitting in bomb shelters for a number of days straight while hearing the constant shelling above. Yet Yael's mother was sure that her daughter was unaware of what had been going on outside. If the staff could not help, Yael's mother said she would have no choice but to send her daughter back to her father in Safed.

Yael, friendly and happy with the therapist, was asked to draw a picture of her last dream. She began to draw a pastoral scene in light colors complete with flowers and trees. Then Yael took the red and black markers and soon her lovely dream was ruined with katyusha rockets falling, blood streaming, and destruction all around. Yael's vivid imagination and suppressed feelings had let her emotions become exaggerated and overly powerful. Her mother was stunned to discover the extent of her daughter's trauma. Through a number of joint therapy sessions with Yael and her mother, they learned to express and share their worries. Yael's violent behavior quickly subsided as did her nightmares and anxiety attacks.

Since 2003, Ashalim has laid extensive groundwork for emergency trauma care with the Israeli Government's relevant ministries (including the Ministries of Health, Education, Welfare and the National Insurance Institute -Israel's counterpart to the U.S. Social Security Administration) and has developed a close working partnership with the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC). Over the past three years, a network of psychologists,

guidance counselors and social workers trained in trauma treatment was developed to ensure a quick response in times of emergency.

This network was at hand to step in with the outbreak of hostilities, identify children in need of care and provide the necessary help.

Thousands of children and youth suffering from trauma were reached in an effective and timely manner, thanks to cooperation between the various Government offices, ITC, the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), the United Jewish Communities (UJC) and Ashalim and the support of the Schusterman Family Foundation, JDC and UJC emergency funds.



Make-shift counseling center at Nitzanim Tent City

Trained professionals helped children deal with their fears, counseled parents, and referred severe trauma cases for further medical attention. Emotional support was provided in:

- ✓ Shelters in hard-hit Northern cities
- ✓ Tent city with 6,000 evacuated Northerners near Nitzanim
- ✓ Hotels and youth villages where families from the North were offered respites
- ✓ Communities around Gaza who have been under kassam attacks for a number of years

Throughout the emergency situation, Ashalim professionals maintained daily contact with government ministries and NGO's leading the efforts to help Israel's civilian population. The ongoing sharing and processing of information from the field enabled Ashalim, ITC, Government ministries, JAFI and municipalities to make real-time adjustments to the emerging needs of Israel's young people.



Children's drawings: On left, rockets and helicopters overhead. On right, injured person and soldier with writing on body "Nasrallah is stupid – IDF is strong"

Respite and Recreation

Ashalim offered short respites to hundreds of young children and their parents from hard-hit communities where Ashalim programs operate. These families did not have the financial means or support networks to help them relocate away from the stress of the frequent attacks. In addition, Ashalim supported recreational activities for hundreds of others relocated from the North. Those helped include immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union, Arab-Israelis and struggling young veteran Israelis.



Life in a shelter



Happy faces at a hotel pool

The smiles on the faces of both the parents and the children are heartwarming. The families expressed their appreciation for being able to remain together as a family unit and for the respite, trips and activities that they would not otherwise have been able to afford.



Bedouin parents & children from North in Negev

Ashalim was able to step in quickly in many Northern cities given its established relationships with the municipalities. And, in the case of Haifa, Ashalim and the local authority were extremely well-positioned to help at risk youngsters owing to the cooperative infrastructure created through the "Better Together" program (see below).

These efforts on behalf of at-risk children and their families were supported by JDC donors, the Steinhardt Foundation, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and UJC Emergency funds.

In the words of the parents and children:

"We were afraid to leave the shelter since many rockets landed close to our home." Family from Safed

"It is so nice not to hear all the booms" Child from Kiryat Yam at hotel in Jerusalem

"My second son celebrated his 1st birthday in the bomb shelter. His month-old brother spent two of his first four weeks of life hearing the sounds of war." Mother of three young boys

"When the rockets first hit I told my parents I'd rather die from one of Nasrallah's rockets than go in a shelter. But when a rocket landed on the next block, we dropped whatever we were doing and ran to the closest shelter. Now everyone feels a responsibility to know where their friends and neighbors are." 16 year old Christian Arab teenager, born and raised in Hadar-Haifa

Reaching Children and Youth through "Better Together" Program

Rocket barrages hit Haifa's Hadar neighborhood, one of the city's poorest, where Ashalim's Better Together program has operated since January 2005. Hadar is home to disadvantaged veteran Israelis, new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Arab-Israelis and former South Lebanon Army fighters.


Better Together's intense groundwork in bringing together and developing services for at risk youngsters paid off as soon as Haifa was under fire. Under dangerous and stressful circumstances, Better Together staff identified the children and youth, brought them with their families to bomb shelters and kept them occupied. Once opportunities for respite became available, Better Together staff and volunteers helped organized an orderly departure of children and families. **The Better Together organizational infrastructure served the municipality as a model for reaching children and youth in other areas of the city.**



Kiryat Malachi Mayor Motti Malka welcomes "Better Together" families from Hadar



Hadar-Haifa "Better Together" youth and Olympic Gold-Medalist Gal Fridman



With the emergency situation, came another positive feature of the Better Together program - comraderie between pilot cities. Better Together sister cities came to the aid of their counterparts in Haifa:

- ✓ Better Together volunteers in **Kiryat Malachi** arranged hospitality, complete with activities for the children, for six Hadar families, including large extended families. This initiative encouraged other local families to open their homes, and Kiryat Malachi was host to 80 families from the North.
- ✓ The **Hatikva-Tel Aviv** Better Together program, in collaboration with the Tel Aviv municipality, hosted over 110 Hadar parents and children for a day of fun at the Memadion water park. Olympic Gold Medalist Gal Fridman, a JDC volunteer who has worked with Hadar youth, joined the group, signed autographs and truly helped raise spirits.

Children with Special Needs

The challenges facing families with children with special needs grew exponentially with the outbreak of hostilities in the North of Israel.

- ✓ Many children who were scheduled to attend formal summer frameworks suddenly were home all day, placing an unexpected burden on parents and siblings.
- ✓ The back-and-forth to bomb shelters or protected rooms proved highly stressful – physically and emotionally – for families of children with special needs.
- ✓ Given the physical constraints of some of the children and the behavioral or emotional issues of others, home-hospitality was not an option for many.
- ✓ Even those few families with physically disabled children able to afford hotel stays found that only a limited number of rooms were available to accommodate physically handicapped guests.

Through its associations with non-profit organizations and Ministry of Social Affairs departments and with the generous support of JDC donors, Federations and the UJC, Ashalim was able to reach out to these families at risk and help them through this emergency crisis.

The following assistance was provided by Ashalim:

- ✓ Arranging for the **relocation of families** of children and youth with special needs and providing assistance to non-profit organizations in the relocation of hundreds of other families from the North to Central Israel and Jerusalem.

- ✓ Assistance to the Ministry of Social Affairs' Departments of Rehabilitation and The Care of Mentally Retarded People in **relocating young adults with special needs** from residential facilities.

- ✓ **Creating tailored activity kits for children with special needs** for distribution by JDC-ELKA to shelters and other protected frameworks.



Specially designed kit for children with special needs, in cooperation with JDC AMEN volunteers

- ✓ Supporting **operation of a hotline** that provided responses and support of various kinds to approximately 600 callers.
- ✓ **Augmenting the "A Friend to the Family" program** which provides trained volunteer home-assistance to families of children with special needs, by operating a hotline, increasing volunteer capacity and responding to immediate needs of families.
- ✓ Supporting provision of **recreational activities for youth with special needs**, in some cases together with their families. Many of these youth participated in programs developed by Ashalim, such as the "House of Wheels" recreational centers and the "Preparation for Life" residential program.



"House of Wheels" residents from the North in Jerusalem

"House of Wheels" youth express their thanks:

"The House of Wheels is helping me get through this difficult time and giving me a break from a painful routine...I came for a few days to forget what is happening near my home up North and to focus on being happy and enjoying myself."

"It is amazing that the camp was organized in just two days. When we are involved in activities, we forget about Nasrallah and the katyushas. We owe a tremendous thank you to everyone who made this happen."



■ Children and Youth at High-Risk

Some children and youth caught in the middle of the war could not go home. Such was the case for child victims of abuse or violence within the family who sought shelter at Emergency Centers, youth living in hostels or "locked" facilities operated by the Youth Protection Authority (YPA), and children removed from their homes and living in residential facilities. These youngsters do not have a support network to return to, and many are recovering from traumatic experiences at home. Some either require protection or pose a potential danger to others. **The emergency crisis presented these high-risk children and youth with new stresses, this in addition to their existing problems.**

Ashalim helped the Emergency Centers in the North of Israel, the YPA and the Ministry of Social Affairs to meet the urgent needs of their high-risk young charges by:

- ✓ **Supporting the evacuation of over 400 children** from residential facilities in the North to safer areas of the country, together with their staff.
- ✓ **Supporting YPA treatment of 100 relocated 13-18 year old delinquent or troubled youth**, enabling the YPA to 1) bolster its staffing needs, particularly in response to the acute need for emotional and psychological help and 2) provide the relocated youth with recreational activities, thereby taking their minds off the emergency situation and reducing the tension between the groups of troubled youth from the North and the Central regions now forced into a joint living arrangement.
- ✓ **Helping three Emergency Centers** – Kiryat Ata, Haifa (serving very young children) and I'billin (an Israeli-Arab regional authority in the western Galilee) – to cover increased staff costs and physical improvements to bomb shelters, relocate some of the children to safer areas of the country, offer enrichment and therapeutic activities for the children, and provide professional crisis support for the Center staff.

Ashalim "Day After" Efforts

With the cease-fire, the thousands of children and youth in the North who have returned home and left the bomb shelters need various types of support in order to recover from the trauma of the war. Similarly, their teachers, group leaders and other professionals need support and training so that they will have the inner-strength and necessary tools to help the children and youth in their care. Ashalim is embarking on a major effort in the first few months of the school-year to reach 20,000 children and youth between the ages of 5-16, with funding of \$15 million from JDC donors.

This "day after" program will provide a range of responses in school and during after-school hours and holiday vacations to help the youngsters return to a normal lifestyle and keep them occupied so that their parents can attend to family matters. Training and stress-reduction workshops are being offered to professional staffs.

Day after program elements include:

- **Community enrichment activities.**
Additional programming will help children and youth relieve the tension of the war, re-establish social bonds and a school routine. As many neighborhoods are physically being rebuilt, the after-school activities will also keep them in safe places.
- **Emotional treatments.**
Children and youth suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder will be identified at school and in after-school frameworks and will receive immediate intervention. Early treatment is essential to minimize long-term effects.
- **Informal educational rest and relaxation.**
During the school vacations for the Jewish Holidays, children and youth will enjoy special activities and trips with their peers, in part to make up for a lost summer vacation. These efforts will brighten the holiday season, and help the children and parents begin the new Jewish Year on an optimistic note.
- **Professional support.**
The war placed local professionals under supreme stress, as they too suffered from the war. With the cease-fire and in preparation for the new school year, group therapeutic sessions for staff in schools and informal educational -school frameworks were initiated for staff to process their own feelings and share concerns.

After-school Moadonit in Yarcha:

The new after-school enrichment center (Moadonit) in Yarcha, a Druze village in the Western Galilee, serves troubled youth in the region and is jointly operated by the Ministries of Education and Social Welfare, the National Insurance Institute, Ashalim, the municipality and local non-profit organizations. The war not only impacted the center's teenagers, but also its local staff who suffered from seemingly endless days under fire. At a workshop soon after the cease-fire, staff worked with a clinical psychologist and a movement therapist, sorting out their emotions and gaining tools to help the center's youth overcome the war's trauma.

"For me, this session was just a beginning. I see how much stronger I feel, but I also see how much I need more guidance going forward so that I will be able support our youth."

Ashalim Long-Term Efforts

This war's impact will be felt in the coming years, and Ashalim is planning rehabilitation efforts to assist those young people severely hurt by the war. These long-term efforts will include both program and capital projects. Included in these efforts are:

- ✓ Increased treatment and professional training programs to contend with **post-traumatic stress disorder**
- ✓ **Infrastructure improvements** to physical structures serving at-risk children and youth
- ✓ **Upgrading of services for children and youth at risk** in those cities that proved most vulnerable during the war.