



THE GLOBAL
JEWISH
9-1-1

CORONAVIRUS
RESPONSE

National Council for Volunteerism

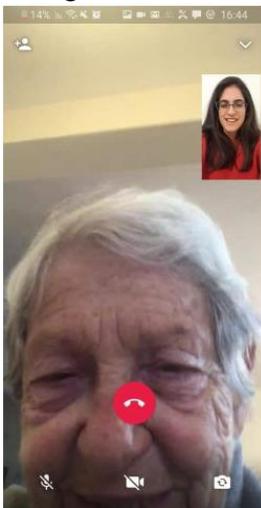
Throughout the Corona crisis, we have seen so many examples of solidarity-Israelis showing up for one another. **Volunteerism is of course a key example.**

The National Council for Volunteerism in Israel (rebuilt and developed by JDC less than two years ago and now run by former JDC staff) reports that 20.3% of the population over age 18 is currently volunteering, compared to 20.6% in pre-Corona times. This is incredible! **In spite of social distancing and the pressures and fears of the pandemic, Israelis are continuing to volunteer.** (You can see interesting statistics about who in Israel is volunteering and in what ways during Corona [here](#) - in Hebrew.)

We are proud that JDC has played a role in training many of the National Council's tens of thousands of volunteers, as well as volunteers from the IDF, and from corporations across the country. To bring just one example of some recent training:

- JDC is collaborating with the IDF's Home Front Command and the National Council for Volunteerism to recruit and train volunteers to visit with people with disabilities living in residential rehabilitation centers. These visits provide residents with social connection and give the staff a much needed break. A cohort of 50 volunteers, trained by JDC, is now visiting the residents regularly and will do so for the coming month at least.

Maintaining meaningful social contact is important for all of us during these isolating, anxiety-ridden times, but it is especially so for those who live alone, and particularly for those who are old and frail. We succeeded in moving about 90% of our programs to virtual platforms to continue serving our clients during this crisis. Here is an example:



- The JDC-developed Hand-to-Hand program is a national volunteer network that pairs volunteers with lonely, homebound Holocaust survivors for weekly visits. Some 5,000 volunteers are active in the program. Since the crisis broke out, these volunteers have maintained daily contact with the survivors they visit, by phone and/or Zoom. They also provide additional services like cooking, shopping and purchasing medicines. See the photo on the left of a volunteer visiting with her partner through an application on her phone. We could share tens of additional examples about how **JDC is utilizing Israelis' willingness to volunteer in order to help the most vulnerable weather the Coronavirus crisis.** Below are just a chosen few:



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- JDC's Better Together program has empowered teams of Corona emergency volunteers in distressed neighborhoods across the country. In Lod, these teams are locating vulnerable families, mapping their needs, and maintaining daily contact with them. They recruit and organize additional volunteers to deliver food and medicine, do home repairs, mentor children, and more. In Arraba, these teams are delivering meals, groceries, hygiene kits and/or activity kits to the elderly and families in need. Recently, a team of 16 volunteers with and without disabilities harvested and distributed local fresh fruit and vegetables (see picture).
- Soccer players, managers, and fans of the Beitar Jerusalem Soccer Club are now volunteering to teach digital literacy to older adults through an initiative launched by JDC, Digital Israel, and the Jerusalem municipality. Learn more in this [article from April 30](#)
- Senior professionals from the Maccabi HMO, which participated in JDC's Synergy program (training leaders from business and public sectors to serve as lay leaders on NGO boards), are beginning to provide volunteer consulting to major Israeli NGOs serving vulnerable populations. The purpose is to help these NGOs adapt their operations so they can continue serving the most vulnerable throughout the "new normal" that Coronavirus has created.



One thing that we know about Coronavirus pandemic is that the crisis will not end soon after the immediate threat of a COVID-19 outbreak has passed. In Israel, we are facing a multi-staged and lengthy easing up of social distancing regulations – many of which will remain in place for months for the most vulnerable, as we wait for a vaccine. We are also facing the terrible socioeconomic fallout from having the economy and public and social services shut down for nearly two months. We have a long haul towards recovery – **and as we settle into what is our new reality, we know that developing and maintaining volunteer networks such as those described here is more critical than ever.**

One of the most famous quotes from the children's television luminary, Mr. Rogers (actually, from his mother), is about how important it is to "look for the helpers" when confronted with scary news. Of course, that quote was meant to help young children experience safety in an uncertain and dangerous world. But the wisdom it conveys is important for us adults as well, not the least because it nurtures optimism. **All the people involved in the activities described above are the helpers. They are stepping up, showing up for others, and we are a stronger society because of them.**