

JDC-Israel's Operations in the Time of Corona

The Coronavirus emergency hit Israel in early-mid March and threw the country into a prolonged near-lock-down with tight restrictions on movement, intense social distancing and self-isolation, and closures of all but essential services and businesses.

These measures, while necessary in battling Corona, spiked new and extreme needs among Israelis – both those who were already vulnerable prior to the crisis, and those who are newly vulnerable as a result of it. Compounding this ongoing challenge was the sudden need to respond in a totally new context – that of social distancing and quarantine – and in totally new ways - remotely, or in person but with new practices that permit extreme caution.

The timeline of this crisis is also new. Unlike previous emergencies in Israel, the Corona crisis will not end soon after the immediate threat has passed. Firstly, any exit strategy from social distancing regulations will be multi-staged and lengthy in order to prevent a new COVID-19 outbreak. Secondly, the extended shut-down and slow-paced re-opening of the Israel's economy and its public and social services will have massive socioeconomic fallout for at-risk Israelis, as well as for the lower- and middle-classes.

JDC-Israel's Corona Emergency Strategy

JDC-Israel's Corona current strategy has three parts:

- **Maintaining existing programs while adapting them to the new reality:** Close to 90% of our 2020 program portfolio continues operating remotely by phone or via a range of online platforms. At the same time, we are leveraging well-established program infrastructure and networks to respond to new needs arising from the crisis.
- **Developing new responses to meet emergency needs:** Within the last month we have developed new interventions to meet the needs of the most vulnerable Israelis; to strengthen the capacity of local communities and of the country's social service system; and to provide vital information and training to hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people and professional and volunteer caregivers. *This report focuses on our emergency responses.*
- **Planning for the Future:** Alongside managing our current portfolio of pre-crisis

programs and new responses, we are engaged in planning for the "medium" term – the next 12-18 months in which Israel will be living in the “shadow” of Corona. This involves reexamining our pre-Corona strategy in order to align it with the new needs and realities of the Coronavirus aftermath, identifying the major interventions on which we will need to focus for this period, and making the necessary organizational adjustments.

Emergency Needs and JDC’s Responses

Emergency needs in Israel are surging in waves along the timeline of the crisis. The sections below describe these waves, and detail some of our main responses.

Wave 1 – Homebound Elderly and People with Disabilities

The first wave of emergency needs was apparent from day one of the crisis. These were the urgent, basic sustenance essential care needs of homebound elderly and people with disabilities who became cut off from their caregivers and families. **Some 350,000 frail or poor elderly living in the community require assistance, and approximately 250,000 people who receive disabilities benefits and have not been receiving services since the outbreak of the crisis.**

This is going to be a long-term, perpetual need throughout the Corona crisis, since self-isolation for those most vulnerable to COVID-19 is likely to stretch on for weeks or months. And additional needs generated by long-term isolation at home are already surfacing for these individuals. **Increasing and profound loneliness is a concern right now as it poses a major mental health risk.** The cessation or reduction of exercise and of medical treatments such as physiotherapy put physical health at risk, and **we expect to see a spike in functional deterioration among those confined to their homes** for the long-term. Also, many older adults and people with disabilities depended on income generated from work outside the home. **People at high risk of getting seriously ill from the coronavirus are not going to be able to return to work for a long time yet.**

In addition to older adults living in the community whose needs are related to their being stranded at home, there are **approximately 100,000 older adults living in geriatric facilities. These individuals are at the highest risk, at one point constituting 30% of COVID-19 fatalities.** They need unique interventions to reduce their risk to both the virus and the health consequences of being cut off from their families and regular routines.

JDC's Responses Include:

Meeting the basic needs of elderly living in the community: A comprehensive, cross-sector effort to meet the basic needs of 100,000 of Israel's most at-risk homebound older adults was launched on March 22. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services provided funding for 500,000 meals and meal delivery to local municipalities weekly. The National Council for Volunteering in Israel (a JDC-developed, accelerated, and handed-over program) coordinated some 100,000 volunteers to deliver these meals to vulnerable elderly confined to their homes.

With the support of the Schusterman Foundation Israel and other foundations, business organizations and Federations, JDC complemented this effort by offering 25 additional basic-needs services that were not funded by the government to 140 of Israel's poorest municipalities to meet needs in the first weeks of the crisis. These services included the delivery of medicines and hygiene products, laundry services, transport to a hospital/HMO clinic, protective gear for caretakers, telephone counselling, exercise kits and activity kits (knitting, embroidery, painting), and more.

Additionally, we distributed 23,000 activity kits to keep homebound older adults mentally stimulated and moving their bodies.

Caring for elderly quarantined in residential facilities: JDC is part of a national emergency operation to reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19 for residents and staff at 300 geriatric facilities across the country, and to maintain the residents' wellbeing during this crisis. The operation is a collaboration between the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and aims to fill dangerous gaps in safety and care measures, knowledge and training amongst personnel, and provision of psychological support to lonely, frightened elderly residents.

JDC is providing training and guidance to professionals and caregivers working in these facilities. The operation is a collaboration between Sheatufim, Zionism 2000, and the National Initiatives Fund.

Utilizing technology to identify elderly at risk: Scaling up the use of an app currently being piloted – Invisi.Care – that transforms existing non-medical data into an effective clinical prevention tool. Together with the Ministry of Social Services and Social Affairs, JDC is planning to offer the app to 2,500 older adults. Their cell phone data will be monitored in order to identify worrying signs of illness, depression, falls, and other physical and mental health crises.

Developing long-distance rehabilitation services: With JDC's eight multidisciplinary rehabilitation centers for older adults currently closed, JDC is working with its partners to shift the centers online – making use of digital technology to remotely provide the entire range of rehabilitation therapies/consultations (physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, psychology, dietetics, medical, nursing) for its clients in the social and geographic periphery. JDC is also developing remote therapeutic services for people with disabilities.

Launching a virtual Center for Independent Living: Launched on Facebook, the center provides information to people with disabilities, material that has been specially designed for different types of disabilities, videos and podcasts, online support groups, a fitness course every morning and a cultural/leisure course with a discussion every afternoon, training sessions on providing remote service for people who work with people with disabilities, and more. Some 3,116 people follow the site, with numbers continually growing - and the site's videos and posts have received over 164,000 views.
www.facebook.com/Cil.org.il

Providing information and disseminating knowledge on caring for the elderly and people with disabilities in times of stress – for professional caregivers, for family caregivers, and for individuals themselves.

For older adults, this effort includes infographics and a series of 21 short instructional public service videos for older adults and caregivers, in Hebrew, Russian, Amharic, Arabic, and English.

Guidelines on providing support for people with disabilities virtually have been prepared and distributed to professionals across the country, and a series of webinars training professionals launched and has reached more than 350 professionals to date. These resources are available in Hebrew and Arabic.

In addition, JDC is working with the Home Front Command in communicating effectively with vulnerable populations. Some of the materials produced can be found here:

https://www.eshelnet.org.il/en/COVID19_Materials

<https://www.eshelnet.org.il/NewMaterials>

<https://www.eshelnet.org.il/Corona>

Wave 2 – Vulnerable Families and Populations

The second wave of emergency needs became apparent after about the second week and are continuing to surge. These are the needs of vulnerable families – those who, in the first week of the crisis were able to keep their heads above water but who already sinking in the second week and today, they are in serious distress. They are contending with things like running out of money, having a child with disabilities who is no longer receiving professional care, or having a home situation that is troubled, overcrowded, or lacking outdoor space, computers or internet, toys and books, and basic supplies. **About 20% of Israeli families live in poverty, some 260,000 children in special education frameworks that were closed for a month and are only now beginning to open, and at least 25,000 young adults are defined as being at extreme risk.**

At this time, the unique needs of some of Israel's most at-risk populations – **Arabs, Bedouin, and ultra-Orthodox Jews, as well as its asylum seekers** – also began to surface. These populations are experiencing the same difficulties as those described above while also contending with unique challenges such as mistrust of the government, low-connectivity to news sources, minimal/no internet access, high-density living situations, low access to hygienic supplies, low levels of awareness of or compliance to crisis regulations. These elements increase the risk of a major COVID-19 outbreak and exacerbate the hardships of the crisis.

JDC's Responses Include:

Providing basic assistance to thousands of young adults and families at-risk: We are working to provide basic assistance to families in poverty, including hygiene kits, medicine/health needs, games/books for children, food, and computers. Our goal is to ensure that families in poverty are able to maintain some semblance of financial and emotional wellbeing during the crisis, and that children receive the necessary supports for their healthy development and emotional needs.

We are also providing a range of services to 1,250 young adults without family support who are at extreme risk as a result of the crisis. These are people aged 12-16 who have been laid off or sent on leave without pay, students in vocational or higher education studies who are coping with remote learning while also worrying about being able to continue paying tuition costs in the future.

Creating a 20 million shekel joint government-philanthropic aid fund for asylum seekers:

The fund brings NIS 5 million from the Schusterman Foundation and NIS 15 million from the GOI that will provide financial aid and food stamps for families and individuals. Distribution will take place in 10 municipalities that have large concentrations of asylum seekers, as well as through a number of NGOs that work with these populations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, Petach Tikva, and Eilat. We are partnering with the CIMI organization, which is setting up a hotline to relay information in Arabic, Tigrinya, and Amharic for people living outside the cities where the distribution will be taking place to coordinate receiving aid.

Facilitating GOI and cross-sector task forces for Bedouins and other sectors: One example is the JDC-facilitated national Cross-Sector Task-Force for the Bedouin Community in the Negev. Consisting of representatives from 65 leaders from agencies across sectors, including representatives from each of JDC's five divisions, this task force is mapping ongoing physical, emotional, financial, informational, quarantine, hygiene, and general compliance needs in nine local authorities, assigns responsibilities for meeting these needs to different agencies that team members represent, and develops rapid budgeting-financing-implementing mechanisms to respond quickly. The goals are to prevent widespread contagion by providing information, supplies, and enforcement, and to mitigate socioeconomic distress through service provision to target sub-populations (mothers, young adults, residents of unrecognized villages, people with disabilities, people who require quarantine).

Using existing program platforms to provide information, support, and increase awareness and compliance: We have a wide range of examples, the following are just a few.

- We are distributing vital information about social distancing and hygienic practices to the Bedouin community via the vast network of infancy and early childhood programs we have built through the "First 1000 Days Initiative".
- The “kosher” Wikipedia-style website offering an encyclopedic range of digital information and services for the Haredi sector that we built through our Digital Communities program (which aims to increase digital access and use in communities with the lowest digital participation) serves 400,000 Haredi users. The site is now offering the most current information about the Corona crisis: Ministry of Health guidelines (including a Yiddish-language explanatory video), online information and services, information about the Corona and Halacha, and more.
- We are training local activists who work with JDC's Better Together program in 10



disadvantaged neighborhoods to work as emergency volunteer squads. These squads are providing virtual training, mapping current needs, and working to increase volunteer responses to those needs. Similarly, we are training Arab national service volunteers in our Ma'ana program to raise awareness in their communities and help meet emergency needs.

- Our Mawared program helps poor Arab municipalities access and effectively utilize government funds by training high caliber individuals to hold a new professional municipal role that we developed, called “Integrators for Economic Development”. To date, this role has been filled in 34 of Israel’s neediest Arab municipalities. Since the Corona outbreak, these new municipal professionals have become a crucial link in coordinating between the GOI and their municipalities and have helped lead local emergency responses, including recruiting and managing volunteers, mapping needs, distributing supplies to needy community members. The GOI has defined the Integrators as “essential staff” who are required to work during this crisis. This designation is applied to only 30% of workers. JDC continues to train and support these professionals through online platforms.

Helping the weakest municipalities manage the crisis through digitalization: The urgent need for municipalities to continue providing services remotely to vulnerable Israelis during the crisis created the willingness to prioritize a process that JDC initiated to map the digital maturity of 160 of Israel’s weakest municipalities. Because of the crisis, this process – which could have been stalled over years since digitalization is typically viewed as important but not urgent – took just a few days. And it produced the data necessary to identify where the needs are right now, to determine how serious they are, and to guide us in setting and prioritizing our targets, and in focusing our wide range of digitalization programs to help these municipalities optimize their remote working capacity.

Training social and public service professionals to work remotely: JDC is training thousands of professionals on how to continue providing counselling and therapy to children, youth, and families remotely. For example, we are working with the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services to identify the most urgent needs and to make sure that staff working with the public, such as social workers, are capable and equipped for remote service provision. We also created a Facebook page through which we provide content and training on remote work that serves 780 civil servants, and run virtual webinars on working remotely for professionals in Hebrew and Arabic. We are helping the GOI's Psychological Services take their work online, so that they can continue providing school-based

counseling services to children and youth. We created and are administering a local government telework site serving over 1,500 municipal professionals.

Wave 3 – Employment and Civil Society Crises

A gigantic wave of needs on the horizon relates to the expected increase in unemployment, substantial salary cuts, and shrinking labor market. **To date, over one million Israelis are collecting unemployment benefits.** About 90% of people applying for unemployment since the crisis began are those who have been placed on unpaid leave. How many of them will be able to return to their jobs is uncertain, with social security experts estimating that the unemployment rate in Israel will be triple its pre-crisis rate (of 4%) by the end of the crisis. Many of the newly unemployed are middle- and lower-earning workers, and many of the latter were already living near the poverty line.

The NGO sector has been particularly hard hit during the crisis. While experiencing soaring demands for critical services as Israel reels from the crisis, many of the country's NGOs are experiencing massively reduced capacity following major budget cuts, cash flow issues, workforce challenges, and technical barriers to working remotely. These organizations are struggling to survive at a time when they are needed more than ever - and the situation is only expected to get worse in coming weeks. This is terrifying, given the length of time expected for the Coronavirus crisis and its aftermath to run their courses.

JDC's Responses Include:

Taking technological and vocational training online: Ensuring that technical colleges and vocational training agencies can continue and upgrade their courses during the crisis, by helping them deliver their training online. This involves training hundreds of staff members in 30 technological colleges and in vocational training agencies, adapting pedagogical materials for distance learning, and building technical skills and tools for teaching online. Tens of thousands of students will be able to continue training for employment because of these endeavors.

Developing a virtual job center: Our virtual job center model will soon launch. It is a one-stop shop that provides everything from aptitude testing, to coaching for interviews, to placement, and liaising with businesses and corporations. The online center is more versatile than its physical counterpart, and integrates online tools and platforms in a way that makes them more accessible to people who are currently homebound by COVID-19,

those who live far from the city, and for people with disabilities. The online format also mirrors the actual computerized workplace environment. The virtual job center will be offering free online learning modules and videos, skills training, and guidance and coaching via video chat. This center will be essential for helping people who have already or will soon either lose their jobs or go on unpaid leave.

Developing pathways back to employment: We are working with Israel's Ministry of Labor to accelerate vocational training reform and develop immediate interventions to ensure that new training programs are readily available to tackle the changing demand of the work force resulting from the Coronavirus crisis. From our vast experience in the field we know that vocational training, including engineering certification, is the most effective path to economic security for the country's most vulnerable populations and many thousands of Israelis rely on this pathway towards a better life for them and their families.

Facilitating emergency planning support for employers: Employers, as well as their employees, are facing multiple new challenges during this period. JDC and partners are developing an emergency plan to convene a network of employers to identify needs and implement solutions for "the day after" the crisis. While some businesses will be able to cope in the interim, many others lack the tools, knowhow, or resources to sustain themselves. This initiative is connecting stronger businesses with smaller, peripheral employers to offer support to them, including building a platform for sharing information and best practices. We will then move on to identifying the unique needs of these businesses and developing plans for rehabilitating the market to ensure available employment pathways for our clients to return to work as quickly and smoothly as possible.

Helping civil society organizations stay afloat: JDC is looking into different ways to help Israel's nonprofits weather the storm, both for the benefit of their clients, and for their employees. Examples of our work in this area include:

- **Establishing a 40 million shekel joint government-philanthropy fund.** The government has committed NIS 30 million and JDC is working to raise the rest through donor funds. The money will go towards dealing with immediate needs and with protecting the basic infrastructure of these organizations so that they can stay afloat throughout the crisis and make it to the other side.
- **Matching corporations willing to help NGOs with existing needs.** JDC together with

12 other organizations, is working to help the nonprofit sector (such as Civic Leadership, Matan, Sheatufim, and more) collect needs from about 170 nonprofits across the country. These needs were presented to a virtual "table" of over 65 of Israel's leading corporations (including Microsoft, Unilever, Intel, Teva and more) who expressed interest in providing assistance. Almost all of them have already pledged volunteers, and many of them have agreed to provide in-kind assistance (from computers to medicine and hygiene products). In addition, they all asked to continue looking together at emerging needs and committed to bringing additional corporations on board. This "table" will meet regularly to assess progress and continuing needs.

- JDC has set up an **online peer learning forum for Israeli lay leaders on how to lead their organization during the crisis**. A number of sessions and webinars have already been held on the governance and fiduciary responsibilities relevant to the crisis, with over 350 participants (Chairs, board members, and professionals).