

Responding to the Coronavirus Crisis: Jewish Agency for Israel Relief and Engagement Activities – as of May 19, 2020 –

Introduction

The Coronavirus crisis surprised Israel and the world, bringing us into an unexpected state of emergency. The pandemic forced society into a period of lockdown and self-isolation, creating restrictions with subsequent ramifications on social and business activities. Necessary and lifesaving safety measures triggered new challenges to Israel and world Jewry, specifically to vulnerable and higher-risk populations. The Jewish Agency immediately responded to the crucial challenges that arose in Israel and around the world, finding creative new ways to facilitate support and action, while adhering to the safety guidelines necessary to reduce transmission of the virus and end the crisis. We are pleased to present this update on The Jewish Agency's program activities and immediate responses to human and community needs during this crisis.

Program Activities

Taking Responsibility for People's Lives 24/7

The Jewish Agency takes responsibility for the lives of its beneficiaries—among which are newly arriving olim (immigrants) and those in absorption centers, children in youth villages, participants in our flagship Youth Futures program, older adults living in our Amigour sheltered housing facilities, and participants in our Israel Experience programs—all of whom depend on the work we do and the support we extend. During this time, our role of ensuring the welfare, health, and safety of each person under our wings is more complex and critical than ever. We have worked tirelessly, responding quickly and immediately to all emerging needs:

- ❖ **Olim in our Absorption Centers:** In March 2020, close to 1,300 olim arrived in Israel and were brought to Jewish Agency Absorption Centers for isolation. The Jewish Agency has been meeting all of the needs of these olim—from basics such as food and medicine to toys for children. 6,000 olim in absorption programs continue to receive services and mentorship.
- ❖ **Teens at Risk at our Youth Villages:** Approximately 220 teens from unstable homes studying at Jewish Agency Youth Villages (boarding schools for adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral problems) have remained on-site and have been provided with room and board, counseling, therapies, activities, and other support to get through the crisis.
- ❖ **Disadvantaged Children in our Youth Futures Program:** Approximately 300 mentors (trained professionals who serve as guides, advocates, and role models) have continued their connection with over 4,000 children and their families from afar in order to ensure that the children receive the emotional and mental support that they need, and that the families are guided and supported in these unique circumstances.
- ❖ **Frail Elderly and Holocaust Survivors in our Amigour Sheltered Housing Facilities:** 7,000 older adults living in 57 Amigour facilities are at the highest-risk facing the virus. As we saw similar facilities throughout the world failing to protect its older adults, The Jewish Agency successfully ensured that residents were not exposed to the deadly virus. Each individual received the highest level of protection and staff ensured that essential needs came right to residents' doorsteps—providing medicine, food, and even challah and flowers for Shabbat. 10 tons of fresh produce were donated by farmers and given directly to residents. We maintained a connection with family members—even installing mechanical lifts that allowed family members to “visit” their loved ones who could see them from their balconies.

Acting as a Global Platform

The Jewish Agency provides a global infrastructure for the Jewish people—with feet on the ground in over 40 countries throughout the Jewish world. The Jewish Agency's representatives communicate with local organizations and leadership and assist Jewish communities with their unique needs. The following are the ways in which The Jewish Agency worked on behalf of Jews around the world:

- ❖ **Giving Special Assistance to Jews in Italy:** The Jewish Agency is working closely with local leadership to ensure the safety and needs of those affected. Former Shlichim that were stationed in Italy are holding a “Heart to Heart” campaign through “The Spirit of Israel,” a subsidiary corporation of the Jewish Agency in order to support the Jewish communities that have been affected by the crisis. Care packages were sent as an expression of moral support and solidarity.
- ❖ **Maintaining the Well-being of Jews in Ethiopia Waiting to Make Aliyah:** A local NGO requested humanitarian support for those living in Gondar and Addis Ababa waiting to make Aliyah. We responded by securing the funds needed to meet the urgent nutritional and hygiene needs.
- ❖ **Supporting our Shlichim—Our Feet on the Ground:** The Shlichut Institute is working to support and empower their Shlichim (Israeli emissaries) who have remained in their host communities abroad during the crisis—guiding and mentoring them on using the virtual world to continue their educational programs in a remote and online format. Our Shlichim continue to hold a rich and diverse set of more than 2,500 activities for the communities, including Israeli cooking demonstrations, lectures, and other cultural and educational programs.
- ❖ **Establishing a Loan Fund for Jewish Communities at-Risk Around the Globe:** The Jewish Agency has launched a \$10 million, four-year, interest-free loan fund for Jewish communities on the verge of financial collapse—which include those in Italy, France, Brazil, South Africa, and Argentina. The loans enable the continued functioning of the institutions and organizations that make up the infrastructure of these struggling communities. The loans—capped at \$350,000 in most cases but up to \$500,000 for the most extreme cases—will be distributed to communities, and the Jewish Agency is actively fundraising to cover interest costs while working to minimize losses and loan defaults.

Focusing on the Broader Israeli Society

The current situation has created a deep and far-reaching crisis for Israel's non-profit and voluntary sectors that are critical for the resilience of the nation—organizations that provide the bulk of the social, welfare, community, and health services to those in need. The 16,000 non-profits in Israel comprise 15% of the workforce and 16% of the GDP. They are a vital part of the Israeli tapestry, and rely heavily on donations and governmental funding. Since the beginning of the Coronavirus crisis in March, tens of thousands of employees at nonprofit organizations have been laid off. There has been a dramatic surge in the number of organizations in Israel that are experiencing severe financial distress—including nonprofits that serve youth at risk, victims of domestic violence, older adults, and individuals with disabilities. The Jewish Agency has made it a priority to provide support to this backbone of Israel's existence, partnering with organizations in the following ways:

- ❖ **Convening the Nonprofit Sector Emergency Forum:** The Jewish Agency, together with The Civic Leadership (the umbrella organization of the third sector), convened all of the nonprofit organizations to identify needs and strategize solutions to support the third sector and ensure that they remain powerful and meaningful players in the field.
- ❖ **Creating a Loan Fund and Mentoring Services for Nonprofits:** We have partnered with Ogen—the Israel Free Loan Association—and the Israel Venture Network (IVN) to implement an emergency plan to support and assist the third sector in Israel by offering immediate loans, financial assistance, counseling, and mentoring, which will help them maintain financial strength during and after the crisis.
- ❖ **Joining National Volunteering Efforts for Senior Citizens:** Nearly 200 Shinshinim (young adults serving year abroad as Shlichim before entering the army) returning to Israel went directly into quarantine, and were recruited to maintain phone contact with older adults isolated during lockdown. Once out of quarantine, the Shinshinim not only maintained their work with their communities abroad, transitioning to online platforms, they joined community volunteering initiatives—which, in addition to those for older adults, included national initiatives involving the Ministries of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services, the Homefront Command, and agricultural initiatives.

Finding New Ways to Connect with Global Jewry

The Jewish Agency recognizes the importance of maintaining continued communication and engagement in order to foster a sense of community and togetherness. For that reason, our educational and communal activities have been transferred onto online platforms in order to maintain the link with program participants and community members, proving that meaningful *mifgash* (encounter) experiences can continue online. The following are ways that The Jewish Agency has facilitated the transition to online activities:

- ❖ **Shlichim Stationed in Jewish Communities Abroad:** Most of our Shlichim remained in their communities, campuses, and youth movements, continuing their work—with some initiating emergency round-tables with representatives of organizations and institutions to develop plans-of-action for their communities. Those that have returned to Israel have continued their work with their communities from afar, creating virtual educational activities that maintain a sense of unity and maintaining their educational routines around Pesach, Yom HaShoah and Yom Ha'atzmaut and ongoing.
- ❖ **Partnership2Gether (P2G) program:** P2G launched the *#FacingCorona2Gether* campaign on social media where participants could share photos and videos to create a sense of solidarity, uplift spirits, and support each other. P2G's School Twinning Network held Zoom *mifgash* meetings, giving an opportunity to connect, and share letters, videos, stories, and pictures. The School Twinning website uploaded materials, methodologies, and inspirational videos, garnering more than 15,000 views.
- ❖ **Educational Programs in the Former Soviet Union (FSU):** The crisis accelerated the development and expansion of activities that were already underway. All formal and informal educational activities in Sunday schools and Ulpanim (intensive Hebrew language courses) have transitioned to virtual, online formats throughout the Jewish communities in the FSU.

Increasing Communication and Connectedness

The Jewish Agency has utilized its platform for connecting Jews worldwide by holding mega global events, enabling encounters between thousands of people around the world—connecting them through holiday events, commemorations, and celebrations for Passover, Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom Ha'atzmaut. The Jewish Agency's efforts in this area have included:

- ❖ **Maintaining an Up-to-the-Minute website:** The Jewish Agency website is constantly updated to serve as the central hub for showcasing ongoing activities; share information on initiatives; recommend opportunities for volunteering and engagement; and inform everyone of the most current and important information available.
- ❖ **Creating Online Mega-Events and Activities:** Online mega-events taking place on The Jewish Agency's Facebook page have ensured a virtual connection and fostered unity. Among the activities were: a free online performance by renowned Israeli singer **Idan Reichel**— broadcast to several countries simultaneously, reaching over 600,000 views from around the world, and showcasing our Shlichim—the Masa annual Yom HaZikaron commemoration—broadcast live this year with over 200,000 people participating virtually.
- ❖ **Expanding Partnerships and Collaborations:** A six-hour Yom Ha'atzmaut online event—including workshops on Israeli cooking, culture, fashion, and technology; a global quiz about Israel for families; and a sports achievements event—was held in collaboration with Jewish Federations of North America, Keren Hayesod, and many other partners. The celebration included a virtual tour of Israel featuring Jewish Agency Chairman Isaac Herzog bringing viewers to his favorite spots in in the country. The broadcast concluded with an “after party” dance with an exclusive performance by Matisyahu.

Ensuring the Welfare of Jewish Agency Employees

The Jewish Agency is making sure that their employees in Israel and abroad are healthy and safe—working to maintain their emotional and mental health as well as their physical health. At the same time, Jewish Agency employees around the world have volunteered for programs and activities both within and the organization and outside of The Agency. The Jewish Agency has taken the following steps to provide a safe working environment and to meet the personal needs of employees during this difficult time:

- ❖ **Receiving Up-to-Date Information and Guidance:** The Jewish Agency's Coordination Forum meets every evening in order to analyze events, discuss responses, and issue instructions. We are in continuous contact with relevant professional bodies in Israel—including those who specialize in advising organizations large and small (including El Al) on medical related questions—as well as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, and the National Security Council.
- ❖ **Being There for our Workers and Their Families:** Within the Jewish Agency's ecosystem, we are providing programs and activities for our workers and their families as well as abundant opportunities to volunteer their time and expertise.
- ❖ **Maintaining a Safe Work Environment:** We have modified our physical work-space to enable those returning to the office to maintain social distancing protocols. We have purchased protective gear for staff in order to further prevent the spread of the virus

Responding to Urgent Human and Community Needs in Israel

Frail Older Adults in Amigour Housing Facilities

- ❖ **Passover and Emergency Food Baskets:** Food Baskets for older adults living in Amigour facilities. **Amount raised to-date: \$489,373**
- ❖ **Additional Amigour Staffing:** Lockdowns and social isolation cause social and psychological distress. We must not only maintain the previous level of care that we offered to Amigour residents, but we must also respond to new issues that have resulted from the ongoing crisis. **Amount raised to-date: \$90,000**
- ❖ **Disinfectant Supplies and Additional Cleaning:** In order to ensure the safety of Amigour's residents, we guarantee that the highest standards of hygiene are upheld, requiring:
 - Additional Cleaning Time: **Amount raised to-date: \$71,688**
 - Additional Cleaning Supplies: **Amount raised to-date: \$229,500**
- ❖ **Cultural and Entertainment Programs:** In order to maintain the quality of life for older adults and provide cultural enrichment during lock-down, "balcony concerts" have been arranged in each Amigour building. **Amount raised to-date: \$25,000**

Total Raised for Urgent Needs of Older Adults in Amigour Facilities: \$905,561

Struggling Nonprofits and Businesses

- ❖ **Emergency Loans to Israeli NGOs:** NGOs and social organizations are reaching the point of no return in maintaining their viability. On the one hand, they are having difficulty securing government funding sources. On the other hand, the institutionalized banking system is either reluctant to provide financing solutions or they are offering difficult lending conditions. The Jewish Agency has established an Emergency Loan Fund for Israeli Nonprofits to provide funding for their working capital needs during the crisis. **Amount raised to-date: \$775,000**
- ❖ **Emergency Loan Fund for Israeli Businesses Impacted by the Crisis:** The Jewish Agency has received a number of new requests for its loan fund from those that have suffered tremendously during the crisis and need working capital to remain viable. **Amount raised to-date: \$400,000**
- ❖ **Emergency Planning and Mentoring for Israeli NGOs:** The Jewish Agency has partnered with Keren Shemesh from the Ogen Group (formerly the Israel Free Loan Association) and the Israel Venture Network, to mentor Israeli nonprofits so that they can create tailored emergency recovery plans in order to ride out the storm over the next 18 months. **Amount raised to-date: \$100,000**

Total Raised for Urgent Needs of Nonprofits and Jewish Communities at-Risk: \$1,275,000

Youth At-Risk and Disadvantaged Families

- ❖ **Emergency Financial Assistance for Youth Futures Beneficiaries and Staff:** Youth Futures children come from families now in severe economic distress. In addition, after Passover, most Youth Futures employees, many of which are members of the communities in which they work, were sent on unpaid leave through the end of May. Emergency assistance was provided to these families. **Amount raised to-date: \$110,277**
- ❖ **Youth Village Residents:** Youth Villages provide boarding school settings for disadvantaged youth struggling with severe emotional, behavioral, and family problems. Boarding schools are closed in Israel, but those who lack family support and housing remain on campus—upset and isolated from their classmates and in need of support and food baskets. **Amount raised to-date: \$137,153**

Total Raised for Urgent Needs of Youth at-Risk and Disadvantaged Families: \$247,430

Lone Soldiers

- ❖ **Emergency Living Stipends for those Awaiting IDF Induction:** Young Adults from around the world volunteering as Lone Soldiers completed their time in Ulpan or absorption programs and were either employed or looking for work awaiting their induction into the IDF. Now unemployed and unable to find work, they need living stipends until they enter the IDF. **Amount raised to-date: \$300,000**

Total Raised for Urgent Needs of Lone Soldiers: \$300,000

New Immigrants

- ❖ **Emergency Food Kits for New Immigrants in Lock-down:** Food baskets for new immigrants in quarantine for a two-week period. **Amount raised to-date: \$95,700**
- ❖ **Living Stipends for New Immigrants:** One-month living stipends for new immigrants that were ending their absorption programs at the time the crisis hit. **Amount raised to-date: \$279,778**
- ❖ **Living Stipends for Ethiopian Immigrants in their Second Year:** Many Ethiopian immigrants in their second year after arrival in Israel have lost their jobs and need extra support. **Amount raised to-date: \$208,046**
- ❖ **Food Baskets for Elderly Ethiopian Immigrants:** Food baskets for Ethiopian older adults for a two-week period. **Amount raised to-date: \$25,201**
- ❖ **Activity Kits for New Immigrant Families in Absorption Programs:** These kits for families with young children help to relieve some of the stress experienced during the lock-down. **Amount raised to-date: \$36,627**
- ❖ **Wi-Fi in Absorption Centers:** In order to enable children to maintain their academic studies online and remain connected to teachers, classmates, and friends, Wi-Fi capabilities in the Absorption Centers need to be upgraded and improved. **Amount raised to-date: \$228,000**

Total Raised or Donated for Urgent Needs of New Immigrant Families: \$1,173,352

Educational Needs of children at-risk

- ❖ **Tablet Computers for Children in Absorption Centers, Youth Villages, and Youth Futures:** New immigrant children in Absorption Centers, at-risk adolescents in Youth Villages, and disadvantaged Youth Futures participants need resources to allow online study and remain connected to their peers. Tablet computers allow at-risk children and teens continue to be engaged in their educational studies and with their friends. **Amount raised to-date: \$196,816**

Total Raised for Urgent Educational Needs of Children at-Risk: \$196,816

Responding to Urgent Human and Community Needs Globally

Struggling Jewish Communities Around the World

- ❖ **Emergency Loans to Jewish Communities at Risk:** Jewish communities experiencing severe financial distress as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic are struggling to meet their fixed costs and maintain their infrastructure, while trying to adapt and provide some modified activities during the pandemic. An Emergency Community Assistance Loan Fund has been established to meet the critical financial needs of Jewish communities facing financial distress. Philanthropic dollars will be used to cover interest charges and to mitigate the risk of defaulted loans. **Amount raised to-date: \$695,000**
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Italy and Spain

Italy and Spain have been hit particularly hard by Coronavirus with the highest death tolls in the world other than the United States. With movement highly restricted, the Jewish community has not escaped the effects of the crisis. Among those most in need are the elderly who are facing food insecurity and cannot leave their homes, and children who are faced with educational systems that are ill-equipped to handle remote learning, and the general population facing severe shortages of hygiene and cleaning products to halt the spread of the virus. The Jewish Agency has provided the following:

- ❖ **Emergency Food Baskets: Amount raised to-date: \$155,535**
- ❖ **Educational System Support for Online Instruction: Amount raised to-date: \$10,000**

Total Raised for Urgent Needs in Italy and Spain: \$165,535

Ethiopia

Some 8,000 Falash Mura are awaiting permission to immigrate to Israel. The overwhelming majority live in conditions of abject poverty, with mounting health and welfare needs. Most live in single-room mud huts and have no running water, gas or electricity, and share common latrines and fire pits for cooking with their neighbors. The World Health Organization is concerned that sub-Saharan Africa will be particularly badly hit because of the lack of health facilities, and we are most worried about the extremely vulnerable young children and frail elderly. The Jewish Agency has provided the following to its local NGO partner:

- ❖ **Personal Hygiene Supplies: Amount raised to-date: \$52,000**
 - ❖ **Food Packages for Older Adults: Amount raised to-date: \$87,218**
- Total Raised for Urgent Needs in Ethiopia: \$139,218**

With Our Appreciation

Israelis and Jews around the world are faced with the unprecedented challenge of coping with and containing Coronavirus as countries around the world attempt to manage this unseen, aggressive enemy and support their citizenry.

As you work tirelessly to help your own families and communities, we deeply appreciate your partnership in our shared efforts. Together we have secured almost \$5,000,000 to support those people, communities and organizations who have been significantly affected over the last months and this report encompasses much of the Jewish Agency's actions during this time.

The Jewish Agency remains alert and can be counted on to meet ongoing needs and tackle new challenges related to the Coronavirus as they arise. The need to look after our vulnerable populations is our highest priority and we are doing our utmost to ensure their safety and good physical and emotional health during this crisis.