

AMCHA

National Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support of Holocaust Survivors and the Second Generation

Summer 2014



Special Edition
Operation Protective Edge

Dear Friends,



Creative activities together release tension for AMCHA club participants.

As I write these lines, we are in the middle of a war. Despite the fact that the Jewish people have yearned for peace since Biblical times, we must fight when someone forces us to. The first task of the state is to protect its citizens and its sovereignty. The second task is to strive for peace with all of its neighbors.

No one understands this more than our dear Holocaust survivors: more than anyone else they have experienced the price of the helplessness of the Jewish people. They know too well what the struggle for survival looks like – an all-out war. And they appreciate independence and peace. We join with them in sending our best wishes to our brave soldiers, our condolences to the bereaved families, and our hopes for recovery to the wounded.

Our Mission: To provide a full range of psychological and social services to Holocaust survivors and their families, and an opportunity to unburden their hearts and share their stories with others.

The AMCHA organization was founded in 1987 to care for Holocaust survivors and help them to live in dignity. We believe that this is the highest moral obligation of the State of Israel and the Jewish people; to support the people who have suffered more than any other group on the planet, who were unfairly persecuted only because of their Jewish origins and who lost their families in horrific ways.

AMCHA is the Israeli psychosocial support center for survivors and the second generation. We provide survivors with psychotherapy in our clinics and in the homes of those with limited mobility, access to social-rehabilitation clubs, and the support and companionship of professionally trained volunteers.

Over 16,000 men and women regularly attend our activities, which take place in 14 branches around the country, from Nahariya and Haifa in the north, to Beersheva and Sderot in the south. We are convinced that in this way we are contributing to the longevity and quality of life of the survivors. This is sacred work in every sense of the word.

In this time of emergency, we are charged with a special task. We know that the survivors lived through the most difficult of times, and they are not overwhelmed by sirens or missiles. Yet, this often brings back the horrifying experiences they withstood in the past, and AMCHA is the place they can turn to for support, a home they can come to, to be together. We reach out to those who cannot come to us – home visits and telephone calls are a lifeline, preventing isolation and loneliness. AMCHA is there for any survivor who is in need.

We pray for calmer days and peace in our land.

**Yours always,
Aryeh Barnea, Chairperson, AMCHA Board of Directors**

Survivors, Once Again, in Sderot

For 15 years rockets and missiles have rained on Sderot. Last Thursday, on the 17th day of Operation Protective Edge, a missile fell on the house of two Holocaust survivors – Genya and Nahum Kablo. Tania Gordon, an AMCHA counselor, was the first to run to the Kablo's aid and call an ambulance.

"I looked out my window and saw that a missile had gone through the roof of the Kablo's home," says Gordon, who immigrated to Israel from Lithuania in 1973 and has been living in Sderot for 41 years. "I ran straight there and saw that Genya had lost consciousness. I immediately called the first responders and they arrived within minutes."

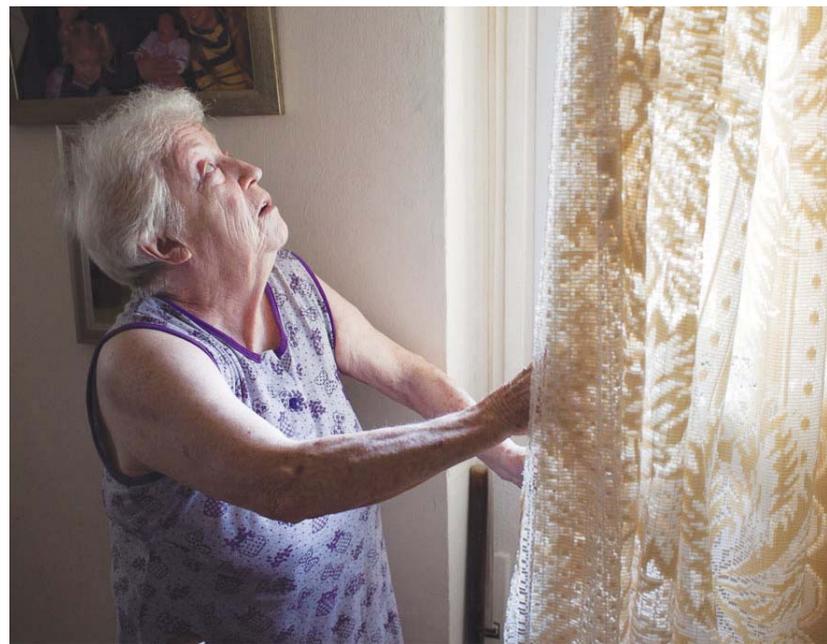
In addition, the Kablo's electricity line fell and their gas was cut off. With their limited Hebrew the Kablo's had no idea how to deal with their situation. Gordon was by their side to give them the ongoing assistance and support they needed.

"AMCHA assists 270 home-bound elderly Holocaust survivors in Sderot," says Gordon. "We are there for them during routine times and, of course, also during times of extreme stress."

AMCHA's Sderot staff of eight counselors and trained volunteers visits the survivors at least once a week. With the recent escalated attacks, the counselors call almost every day, making sure that each person, especially those who are living alone, have what they need.

"One woman has not gone out since Operation Protective Edge started," says Gordon. "She has no husband and no children, and spends 24 hours in her safe room. Our counselors visit her to make sure that she has food, medication and company."

Despite what they went through, the Holocaust survivors are resilient. Gordon tells of Esfir Gershman, an 80-year-old



Rita, shocked by the missile damage outside her home in Sderot.

Ukrainian ghetto survivor who saw her mother die in front of her and was left to survive on her own. Gershman felt that she needed to do something for the Israeli soldiers who are protecting the Jewish people.

Gershman organized a group of Holocaust survivors from Sderot and together they raised NIS 3000 (\$880) for the soldiers. They wrote a note with the care packages they sent to the frontline, telling them "we survived WWII, and are waiting for you to come home safely and in good health. Our doors are always open to you."

"I am so proud of these people," says Gordon. "In the midst of their stress and anxiety, their pain and illness, they are still reaching out to others."

The Holocaust Survivors with Bicycle Helmets

By Lili Galili, i24News (excerpted from a longer article, which appeared in English, French and Arabic)

After about the 100th rocket was fired on the seaside town of Ashkelon, the social worker of "AMCHA," an Israeli support center for Holocaust survivors, decided to visit one of the couples of Holocaust survivors he knows well. Yet even the experienced worker was not prepared for the scene when he opened the door of their modest apartment. After all, just a few days earlier and dozens of rockets less, the elderly couple insisted they were doing just fine and needed no help. As he opened the door, the social worker noticed the couple sitting frozen on the

couch, wearing bicycle helmets. Bicycle helmets as anti-missile protection. That's the lesson they derived from surviving the Holocaust as children: you're on your own, do something. So they bought helmets.

The 400 survivors living in Ashkelon, a city among whose first residents were Holocaust survivors, often see the AMCHA social club as their first home. Now they need it more than ever. Since the pretty but old building where they meet regularly has no shelter, they are now forced to move from location to location, often under sirens and rockets. But they do. The need for comradeship is much stronger than their fear. Fear, is not really a factor. "We are amazed by their strength," says Marlen Maor, a psychologist and director of AMCHA Ashkelon. "They share this amazing strength with others. A lone soldier from Ashkelon, Jordan Ben-Simon, was killed in this war. His parents arrived from France and sat shiva (in a local hotel). A group of survivors went to pay their condolences. They know a lot about loneliness."

For Holocaust survivors, this war is the same, yet slightly different. One survivor summed it up in a simple sentence: "During the Holocaust I was haunted; today I have a country and an army and grandchildren to protect me."



Together at one of the many AMCHA clubs.

Taking a Deep Breath

In wheelchairs, with walkers and with their caretakers, 60 Holocaust survivors arrived to AMCHA's social club meeting in Rehovot. For these determined seniors, ranging in age from 76-96, going to the AMCHA meeting was worth braving the possibility of a missile attack.

"AMCHA's support is vital for Holocaust survivors, and even more so during these difficult times," says Tammy Kahanov, director of AMCHA in Rehovot. "In order to cope with the constant anxiety of war, it is important to maintain a normal routine and not to be alone."

At a recent meeting, participants engaged in an experiential activity that helped them to better cope with the fighting raging close to their city. "We wanted to focus less on talking and more on giving everyone the opportunity to let their imaginations take over and relieve stress," says Kahanov.

Each participant was given a colorful balloon and told to imagine what the balloon is. They were encouraged to take deep breaths and work with their senses, touching the balloon, feeling its texture and stretching to throw it back and forth to their friends; giving them all a much needed release, physically and emotionally.

"I did not have a childhood because of the war," Shmuel told the group. "At the age of four I was already in a concentration camp instead of nursery school. I did not play. But I still have the child within me and I love to play games. I love to use my imagination. This brings me to the childhood I never had. I am thankful that I am able to come to AMCHA. Especially during this time, coming here and being together is so important. It gives me the



IDF volunteer soldiers share a special moment with survivors in Rehovot.



opportunity to simply let go and enjoy myself."

Two of AMCHA's volunteers, soldiers currently serving in Israel's Air Force, came to the club to be with the participants. They joined in the activity, inspired by the spirit of the survivors. The Holocaust survivors showered them with gratitude, encouraging them to continue their incredible work in defending the State of Israel.

From the Heart of Tel Aviv

Tel Aviv is the financial and cultural capital of Israel. No one thought that the missiles from Gaza would be directed toward them. But now, they too, are on the frontline.

At AMCHA's Tel Aviv branch, Tali Rasner, director of AMCHA Tel Aviv and Central Dan Region explains, "People are tired and anxious and stressed, but they are also determined to keep their routines as much as possible. Keeping routines is actually one of the most important coping strategies. They do not want to miss their social clubs or weekly therapy sessions," says Rasner. "AMCHA is their second home, and many say that they are not going to leave their home again, or hide, as they had to do during the Holocaust."

On any given day there is a group discussion, lecture, ceramic club or a yoga class. Special efforts are made to shape the activities to be beneficial at this time. Using imagination and creativity, and doing physical activity, all have tremendous therapeutic benefits.

Many survivors from the south left their homes and are staying with relatives in the Tel Aviv area. AMCHA has opened its doors to survivors from all over the country, welcoming them to a home away from home.

"When there is a siren, we all gather in the building's stairwell," says Rasner. "For some, this brings back terrible memories of running from the Nazi's. Halina Ashkenazy Engelhard, 90, started



Running to the stairwell at AMCHA when an incoming missile siren sounds in Tel Aviv.

to cry, obviously remembering her childhood when she said, 'there is no difference between blood; children need to sleep in their own beds, not run from their homes with only their dolls to hold on to.'

AMCHA's 180 volunteers visit 180 people at their homes each week. Over 2,000 people receive services in Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan, Petach Tikvah and Holon. "The most important thing for them is just to feel and know that there is somebody watching out for them now," says Yuval Dotan, a clinical social worker at AMCHA Tel Aviv. "The strongest experience of Holocaust survivors is that there was no one there for them, no one to see what was happening to them, to care. We are here to fill that void now."



AMCHA provides national training and support sessions for professionals working with trauma victims of all ages.

Passing it Forward on the Home Front

A conversation with Dr. Martin Auerbach, AMCHA's National Clinical Director

As children, Holocaust survivors faced danger, hunger, terror, fear and trauma. These memories stay with them all of their lives says Dr. Martin Auerbach, a renowned authority on survivors' mental health, who in recent days has been interviewed on television, radio and in the newspapers.

The constant barrage of missiles, the sirens warning people to take cover, the threats of terrorist infiltration via underground tunnels and leaving one's own home to seek refuge trigger reactivation of memories from the past, which is extremely frightening.

"Survivors share with our professional staff that they are not as worried about their own safety," says Auerbach. "They are more worried about their families; their children and grandchildren who are in the army and who are living on the frontline. They are deeply troubled about the world once again being a place of violence, as they care for all innocent people that are suffering. They worry about the existence of the Jewish state and Israeli society."

AMCHA is utilizing the wealth of knowledge accumulated based on years of caring for survivors, to reach out and help many other Israelis facing elevated stress and trauma. In collaboration with the Israel Trauma Coalition and the National Insurance Institute, AMCHA has provided hundreds of direct crisis intervention sessions for individuals and groups all over Israel and dozens of special training and support sessions for

professionals. "Working with professionals at this time is critical. We are providing additional tools and much needed support to hundreds of professionals, as they work 24/7 on the frontlines, responding to the most difficult situations," explains Auerbach.

Sessions have been provided to the Israeli Health and Immigrant Absorption Ministries, Local Councils, Kibbutzim, Health Institutions, Senior Residences, NGOs and large corporations in the hard hit areas. "We are taking the lessons learned through our work with Holocaust survivors and passing them on to benefit all Israelis," says Auerbach.



Israel's most popular TV channel runs AMCHA's emergency hotline number for Holocaust survivors on its daily news programs.

Please support us, so we can support Holocaust survivors.

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