



**TO THE BJF:
'YOU ALL
GIVE US STRENGTH'**

SELAH volunteer providing comfort.

One of the agencies the Birmingham Jewish Federation Annual Campaign funds in Israel is SELAH, also known as The Israel Crisis Management Center. We provide this funding through the BJF's Israel-World Jewry Bureau. SELAH provides services to new immigrants to Israel who've been affected by terrorism and other hardships. Ruth Bar-On, Executive Director of SELAH, wrote us an email this week thanking us for our support. Below are excerpts:

We are immensely grateful for the Birmingham Jewish Federation's wonderful grant to SELAH. These funds come to us during a period that is difficult for everyone, but most of all for Israel's most vulnerable.

Since we were last in touch, so many tragic events have intervened. We felt the deep concern and involvement of your Federation in all. The most difficult was, of course, the recent war, which had tremendous impact on all Israeli families, as so many soldiers were called up to serve.

Here at SELAH, our concern was first for the immigrant families in Sderot, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Beersheva, Ofakim and other towns that came under the terrifying rocket fire.

THE MOST VULNERABLE

Our first job was to identify the over 1,700 people from Sderot, Ashkelon and Otef Aza who had already been in our care from previous attacks. These were certainly the most vulnerable people of all, and we reached out to as many of them as possible.

From Day 1, our emergency teams immediately began traveling daily to the families who had just been hit, who lost loved ones, who suffered injuries, whose sons had been injured while fighting, and those in a state of extreme trauma from the attacks.

The teams, comprised of Russian and Amharic (Ethiopian language) speakers, social workers, a psychologist, and trained volunteers, were in hospitals and homes, and, unfortunately, standing alongside grieving immigrants at the cemetery. Our first job was to be there and to comfort, seeing to emergency needs, whatever they were, providing bridging aid and linking the immigrants to local resources.

TERRIBLE BUS ACCIDENT

Just two weeks prior to the war was the terrible bus accident near Eilat that today, because of the war, has perhaps been wiped from public memory. It is still very real for the victims, 13 of whom remain hospitalized in Israel. This was a real catastrophe, which hit people who had literally just arrived in Israel for a visit.

The bus that crashed, killing 24 and injuring 29, was filled with travel representatives from St. Petersburg who had come to develop tourism between our two countries. These people were not Jewish and had no relatives or friends in Israel. Here, too, our involvement was immediate and intense, as there was a need for crisis and trauma workers who could also speak Russian.

Our teams went to the hospitals where the victims were taken, were in touch with the families in Russia, and helped the Ministry of Tourism coordinate and run its hotline for emergency calls. We also were at the airport when the families of the victims arrived, and then accompanied them to the hospital bedsides where their loved ones were receiving treatment. Some of those injured have now returned to Russia, and some have even been in touch with us from there. Our involvement continues to this day, with frequent visits to the rehabilitation centers where 12 of the victims are recovering (the 13th remains hospitalized in intensive care). When the Gregorian New Year came, which is a holiday of great significance in Russia, we made sure there was a traditional holiday gift at the bedside of each survivor.

DEEPEST THANKS

In this busy, intense time, we at SELAH send our deepest thanks to you for the truly wonderful gift you have given us, and also for your ever-broadening concern for people throughout the world threatened by war, disaster, blind hatred and ignorance.

What I especially appreciate is the tremendous love for Jews and all people that you communicate in every message you send out. These are truly informative and heartening communications, and please continue. Please send our deepest appreciation to your Federation and your dedicated, involved leadership and volunteers. You all give us strength.