

## NA'AMAT Israel takes creative approach to battling domestic violence

By Sharon Sutker McGowan

Olga is a 29-year-old woman who came to NA'AMAT's domestic violence shelter in Tel Aviv with her 1-year-old daughter after enduring emotional abuse and physical violence for three years. Today she is a professional at a firm that does architectural drawings, earning a salary that supports her and her baby.

Sara, a 32-year-old woman with two children, started studying information technology while she was at the shelter. Her original goal was to work as a Pilates teacher, but NA'AMAT counselors learned that she excelled in math in Russia, and recognized that she was capable of a much better opportunity.

In May, Sara was accepted into an accreditation program at the Israeli Center for Technology and Communication studying network management. She will complete the nine-month course in April 2025, and is guaranteed a job at a starting salary of 12,000 shekels per month, double the minimum salary in Israel.

Olga and Sara (not their real names) credit a new NA'AMAT program, called "The Day After" for preparing them to join the workplace. The Day After, and another new initiative called "My



*"My Sister's Keeper" trains call center operators to be alert for signs of domestic abuse.*

Sister's Keeper," are examples of NA'AMAT's leadership role in addressing domestic abuse of both women and children in Israel.

The Day After, which launched at the end of last year, provides women at the shelter with professional and financial counselors, individual and group therapy, and a social worker for their children. "We started to see amazing things happen," said Yali Ben-Ami Vitenberg, the director of the NA'AMAT Family Center. "The women started to dream; started to say, 'I want to go to work.' They didn't say that before." Something happened – we really can see the difference."

Olga called her counselor, Sharon, "a special gift... She helps me with work, gives me strength and lots of energy and helps me get my head straight and understand my options. ... She is amazing. I feel supported."

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## Centennial Celebration: Past, Present and Future

By Selma Roffman

Join us at the upcoming spectacular NA'AMAT Centennial Gala and conference from May 16 – May 18, 2025, in Toronto, where friends from the U.S. and Canada will gather to celebrate. Make sure your passport is up to date! Be prepared to have fun at this event as we mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Pioneer Women, the Labor Zionist women's organization in the United States and Canada — today called NA'AMAT. Pioneer Women strived to support Zionist women pioneers as they helped found a new nation. Golda Meyerson (Meir) and Rahel Yanait Ben-Zvi are just two early role models who blazed the way for women leaders. Brave women stood

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## Advancing women in the military

By **Randy Sable**, *Advocacy Chair*

As members of NA'AMAT USA, we all need to stay current about the advocacy work done in Israel for the women, children and families we serve.

This newsletter reported in Winter 2020 that NA'AMAT played an important role when five Israeli women petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court to allow them to apply for positions in top military units off limits for women, including land combat units. NA'AMAT filed a “friend of the court” brief in the case. As Hagit Pe’er, president of NA'AMAT Israel, said at the time, “Every struggle such as this one paves the way for other women and brings society one step closer to gender equality.”

In June 2023, the Supreme Court ordered the IDF to explain why female soldiers were not admitted to all elite units. Though there had been pilot pro-

grams for tank units, search and rescue units and combat engineering units, women typically were not drafted into these specialized groups.

On Oct. 7, women serving in all-female tank crews played a critical role when Hamas began a terrorist attack, killing about 1,200 people including more than 800 civilians and taking 251 hostages. For the first time, female soldiers fought in an armored battle, shooting down numerous terrorists and shooting down others.

When the fence of Kibbutz Holit was penetrated by a Gazan bulldozer, a female tank crew moved in to guard the area as numerous terrorists ran towards the kibbutz. Ultimately an Israeli tank plowed through the main gate and established contact with soldiers already defending the kibbutz. The fatalities could have been greater except for the skill and bravery of this tank crew.

Despite this, the IDF recently said that there are no longer enough tanks for women to serve in tank combat forces. Gali Etzion, NA'AMAT’s director of legislative

affairs, describes this as “one step forward, two steps back.”

NA'AMAT will continue to fight for equality in Israeli society, whether in the military, the workplace, the schools or other Israeli institutions.

## Play it Forward

By **Susan Miller**, *Fundraising VP*

Our summer campaign to raise \$250,000 to rehab 10 daycare center playgrounds has been very successful. The “Play It Forward” campaign has funded seven playgrounds: in Beersheva (one, funded by the Greater Los Angeles Region); Or Akiba (three); and Ofakim (three). Many studies affirm the value of play in fostering resilience and alleviating the effects of trauma, anxiety and stress in children.

Our efforts will continue through October; if you haven’t donated, please consider doing so. Thank you to the donors listed below (as of Aug. 14, 2024).

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## Message from the President



By Jan Gurvitch

October is National Domestic Violence Month in the U.S. During this month, the NA'AMAT community plans to show our support for those who have experienced domestic violence or abuse. On Purple Thursday, taking place this year on Thursday, Oct. 17, please stand up and be counted by wearing and encouraging others to wear purple — which is also the color of NA'AMAT's logo.

In Israel, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is Nov. 25. After NA'AMAT's decades-long effort to enhance protection for women and families at risk, a new law to prevent domestic violence recently went into effect. For the first time, judges can mandate electronic monitoring of domestic abusers. Currently, electronic surveillance is limited to 100 cases. NA'AMAT and other women's organizations have appealed to the Ministry of National Security to increase the quota to at least 200 cases.

NA'AMAT Israel conducts a public awareness campaign throughout the month of November. This work is supported by donations made by members like you and legacy en-

dowments. The campaigns emphasize that domestic abuse is not only physical, but psychological, and that victims are not only women. Children also may experience physical violence or suffer from the trauma of observing their mother being abused.

This year, NA'AMAT is publicizing the "My Sister's Keeper" program, which trains people who answer the phones at their company to recognize signs of domestic violence. Please see the article on page 1 to learn more about this program.

NA'AMAT Israel continues to operate an emergency helpline that women can call when they are in danger. The helpline is essential as Israelis live under constant pressure since the terrorist attack on Oct. 7 and its aftermath.

The NA'AMAT Family Center also offers the "Abba" program, aimed at fathers who want to improve their parenting skills, need grief counseling or want to stop the cycle of violence in their own families.

Please give with your heart today, or on Giving Tuesday, Dec. 3, when all funds raised will be designated to support victims of domestic abuse.

Wishing you Shanah Tovah.

## Kim Marks named NA'AMAT USA executive director

Kim Marks, previously NA'AMAT USA's development associate, was named national executive director in June.

In her prior role, Marks worked to increase donor engagement, expand awareness of NA'AMAT USA and coordinate with NA'AMAT's Israel team to help donors and members learn more about the impact of their giving. As executive director, she will continue to oversee all these activities.

"It is both an honor and a privilege to lead our incredible team as we embark on the next chapter of our journey together, particularly in NA'AMAT USA's 100th year," said Marks. "I am dedicated to expanding our impact for the women, children and families in Israel. With your continued support, we will help even more people thrive through projects such as our Play It Forward campaign to rebuild playgrounds at our daycare centers."

Marks splits her time between the



Kim Marks

U.S. and Israel, allowing her to provide real-time updates "from the ground." Before joining NA'AMAT USA, she worked at the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Mercer in Princeton, New Jersey. As a volunteer, she co-chaired Jewish American Heritage Month in Mercer County and served

on the Jewish Community Relations Council. She received her BA from Northwestern University, and a master's degree in social sciences from the University of Chicago. She and her husband have three sons.

Marks said that her early life was shaped by a leadership program that promoted her mother into a role previously closed to women. "I know firsthand how impactful our programs and services can be for women and their families," she said, "and I am eager to bring my talents and skills to this new role."

### Did you know?

Israeli athletes won seven medals at the Paris Summer Olympics. Tom Reuveny won a gold medal in the men's windsurfing event. Other medals were for women's windsurfing, women's and men's judo (three), men's artistic gymnastics and women's rhythmic gymnastics.



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NA'AMAT NOW is written and produced by Complete Communications Inc., Skokie IL

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## Creative approach

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Vitenberg raised 25,000 shekels (about \$6,800) from a personal contact to start the program after Zvia Neben-zal, the shelter's director, emphasized the importance of obtaining a job to prevent women from returning to their abusers. A study conducted by an Israeli nonprof-it organization reportedly found that a woman who is not financially independent has a 66% chance of returning to a violent relationship, compared to a 0.01% chance for a financially independent woman.

Vitenberg said that the counselors help the women find high salary jobs at good companies so they can support themselves.

"When a woman comes to the shelter we're already thinking about the day after. She has to use the time that she's here to think about what she will do," said Vitenberg. Women stay in the shelter about a year and typically, when they leave, they move to a different city and NA'AMAT is not allowed to follow up with them. "The government wants us to do something very specific for a period of time and then let go," Vitenberg said. Presumably the women would have access to support in their new community, but Vitenberg says that the system does not work well. The Day After program fills the gap.

Another creative solution is a new ini-

tiative to train operators and others to recognize when a caller or a colleague may be a victim of domestic violence. "My Sister's Keeper" was launched after an incident in which a woman called the electric company "to order a pizza." The call-taker immediately understood that this was a call for help. The electric company contacted NA'AMAT, which created a 90-minute workshop for companies that provide customer service across Israel.

"We are not trying to make the call center people therapists," Vitenberg explained. "We want them to be sensitive to the signs and to follow the protocol set up by their company to address the situation." NA'AMAT is working with companies to help them create a protocol.

Vitenberg noted that trainees will also

be able to recognize signs of domestic abuse in their colleagues. "It's working," she said. "In the training, one participant said, 'I was in an abusive relationship for two years and no one saw; no one asked.'"

NA'AMAT also is training volunteers to identify women who may be in an abusive relationship from their online posts. Volunteers point her to NA'AMAT's crisis hotline for help.

Vitenberg said that since Oct. 7, "the stories are much worse. Women are at very high risk. We are living in a pressure pot."

*Your donation can help prevent domestic violence in Israel. Use the enclosed envelope or click on [naamat.org/waystogive/donate-now](https://naamat.org/waystogive/donate-now). To learn about legacy giving, visit [naamat.org/waystogive/planned-giving/](https://naamat.org/waystogive/planned-giving/).*

## Centennial

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up to support the pioneers in Eretz Yisrael and today we continue their mission.

If you want to learn more about women's past contributions and help create NA'AMAT's future, join us in Toronto. Do you enjoy schmoozing with NA'AMAT friends, while seeing the sights of a colorful, multicultural city? If so, add this trip to your calendar!

At our centennial celebration, we will honor U.S. and Canadian national presidents, past and present, and hear speakers discuss how NA'AMAT has been in the forefront of assisting children and their families during unique and challenging times. There will be opportunities to converse and network in and outside the conference. All of this will ensure that you will be enriched and have a wonderful time! For more information, email [engage@naamat.org](mailto:engage@naamat.org) or call 818-431-2200.