

NA'AMAT USA supports 'nation in trauma'

By Sharon Sutker McGowan

Since the Oct. 7 Hamas terrorist attack and subsequent war, NA'AMAT Israel has responded with courage, resilience and creativity to try to address the complex needs of women, children and families throughout the country. "We are a nation in trauma," NA'AMAT Israel President Hagit Pe'er said. "NA'AMAT has an important role in getting Israel back to life."

NA'AMAT USA is instrumental in supporting those efforts through its Israel Emergency Fund. As of the end of April, NA'AMAT had raised nearly \$450,000. The funds were used to purchase six mobile shelters at \$50,000 each; help distribute care kits to women soldiers; and provide food, clothing and programming for about 20,000 Israelis who have been displaced, among other projects.

The Emergency Fund helped finance mental health support and necessities for about 110 NA'AMAT staff members who stayed at hotels with their children, and others who were evacuated to NA'AMAT's two youth villages. Displaced staff also received 1,000 shekels (about \$265).

While all NA'AMAT's facilities are confronting challenges, they are particularly evident in the 140 daycare centers. As of April, thousands of children had not returned to day care or school. "They are with their parents; they don't have a place to go. We have to solve this problem," said Pe'er.



Chaya Lev taught dance and movement classes to promote healing at NA'AMAT's Meshanot Center for Gender Equality in Jerusalem.

In addition, many daycare workers have not returned since the start of the war, according to Shirli Shavit, director of NA'AMAT International. "Many are still in ongoing trauma. It's very challenging and problematic, but we are doing our best to assist however we can."

NA'AMAT prioritized re-opening daycare centers after the first few weeks of the war to provide stability for children and their parents, many of whom were among

the 360,000 reservists called up when the war began.

Based on their location, the centers reopened gradually, under instructions from Israel's Home Front Command. Among the last to reopen were in Sderot, in mid-March. Of 62 children in Sderot's Tshelchon center, about 85% returned; of 64 children at the Eucalyptus center, about 70% returned. Only half of the 55 children returned to the Shikma center. Other children have been enrolled at all three centers to fill the vacancies.

Sderot, which is only about eight miles from Gaza, was particularly hard hit. Rockets landed at the Women's Empowerment Center, where repairs are estimated to cost 100,000 shekels (about \$26,000), according to Shavit.

Despite the tremendous need, NA'AMAT has received no additional support from the Israeli government for daycare centers or other programs since the war began. Although the government committed to reimburse parents who paid tuition for the time the centers were

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Strengthening bonds across communities

By Selma Roffman

A whirlwind U.S. tour by Hagit Pe'er and Shirli Shavit was a highlight for NA'AMAT this spring.

Pe'er, president of NA'AMAT Israel, and Shavit, director of NA'AMAT International, started their journey in Los Angeles, followed by Cleveland and the Philadelphia/Cherry Hill, New Jersey, region. Throughout their visit, Pe'er and Shavit shared NA'AMAT's numerous ef-

forts to support Israeli women, children and families since the Oct. 7 massacre.

Pe'er and Shavit followed in the footsteps of Israeli leaders who have come to the United States to strengthen bonds between the two countries. In January 1948, shortly before Israel's declaration of independence when war with the Arab states seemed inevitable, Golda Meir, one of the founders of the organization now

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Building stronger connections

By Susan Isaacs, *Publicity & PR VP*

In recent months, NA'AMAT USA has implemented a range of innovative public relations strategies aimed at enhancing connectivity, engagement and outreach.

A notable addition to NA'AMAT's PR arsenal is the creation and deployment of attractive fabric banners, custom designed to harmonize with the organization's updated logo and website aesthetic. These banners serve as powerful visual representations of NA'AMAT's revitalized brand identity, conveying a sense of cohesion and professionalism at various events, conferences and community gatherings.

Another significant enhancement has been the integration of QR codes into NA'AMAT's business cards. Encouraging members to keep a few cards on hand ensures swift access to NA'AMAT's programs, events and membership details, preparing them for any opportunity that may arise.

Additionally, NA'AMAT recently hosted a noteworthy PR event — "NA'AMAT Shabbat," a Zoom gathering, featuring four esteemed rabbis from across the U.S. This event provided a virtual platform for members to convene, absorb inspirational messages from spiritual leaders and collectively light candles symbolizing unity and solidarity.

Furthermore, NA'AMAT's regional offices continue to play a pivotal role in PR initiatives. Sending monthly newsletters and encouraging members to post and repost NA'AMAT information raises awareness about upcoming events and opportunities.

Recognizing the significance of nurturing future leaders, the Western area organized a young women's gathering in February, drawing more than 30 participants to connect, collaborate and advo-

cate for pertinent issues concerning Israel. A follow-up event is slated for the summer.

A press release was distributed to Jewish media outlets, heralding the visit of NA'AMAT Israel President Hagit Pe'er and Shirli Shavit, director of NA'AMAT International. They were scheduled to visit NA'AMAT clubs and chapters in the Western, Midwest and Eastern regions, an exciting and important opportunity for NA'AMAT members.

How you can help

By Randye Sable and Susan Neubauer, *Advocacy Chairs*

Typically, we celebrate a "chag" with joy, and a solemn day with prayer or fasting. Yet since Simchat Torah, Oct. 7, everything has been turned upside down. Instead of rejoicing at the start of the Torah cycle, we witnessed the most horrific attack on Jews since the Holocaust.

This Simchat Torah was marked by mass murder, rape, devastation of families and tightly knit farming communities, hostage taking and soldiers killed or wounded. It will be remembered for the exodus of 200,000 Israelis from their homes and the disruption of normal life as parents were called up for reserve duty. The months after Oct. 7 also will be remembered for the triple-digit uptick in antisemitism in the U.S.

As we grieve lost lives and pray for the return of the hostages, we must never forget the miracle of the modern State of Israel.

Out of a ragtag and ill-equipped air force and an army comprising a large percentage of immigrants and Holocaust survivors, came the will and courage to push back the armies of neighboring Arab countries. This sce-

nario has repeated itself over and over again throughout Israel's 76-year history.

As Jews in the diaspora what can we do in the time of crisis?

- Visit Israel on a mission to Israel from your synagogue, Jewish community or a national Jewish organization such as NA'AMAT USA. Contact Kim Marks at development@naamat.org if you are interesting in joining a NA'AMAT mission to Israel in September 2024.
- Buy Israeli products in stores or online.
- Make repeated donations to organizations such as NA'AMAT that supply programming and support for women, children and families in Israel. You can donate here: www.naamat.org.
- Write your elected officials to support Israel.
- Speak out when local college campuses, government officials, school districts and social media posts defame Israel and the IDF.
- Organize and participate in rallies and programming in your synagogue, local NA'AMAT chapter and community.
- When necessary, refute letters to the editor in local newspapers and call out articles or photos used in local and national media that show an obvious bias against Israel.

A famous Naomi Shemer song, "Al Kol Eleh," reminds us to bless the "bitter and the sweet"—the bee that stings but also brings us honey. On Passover we eat moror (bitter herbs) and sweet charoset. It is no mistake that Israel's Day of Remembrance for all who have been lost in keeping Israel safe immediately precedes a joyous Independence Day celebration. So let us mourn, let us be resolved, but let us also remember that even in these horrible times, there is still much to celebrate.

Message from the President



By Jan Gurvitch

“The times they are a changing” and NA’AMAT continues to evolve in its quest for women’s equality. For almost 100 years, NA’AMAT USA has partnered with our sisters in Israel to build a society where women would play an equal role. In the early days of kibbutz life women were often relegated to what was considered “women’s work,” which might include cooking, laundry and childcare. To challenge that stereotype, NA’AMAT established agricultural schools for young women where they could learn the skills needed for them to work on agrarian kibbutzim. To this day the youth villages of Ayanot and Kanot remain the “jewels in our crown” providing educational opportunities for young adults.

In the 1980s, we introduced young women to fashion design. Lea Gottlieb, the founder of Gottex bathing suits, supported our programs and frequently hired our students as interns. Many of these students later fulfilled their dreams and went on to careers in Israel’s world-recognized

fashion industry. NA’AMAT then challenged women to break the glass ceiling in the academic world by providing scholarships in fields such as science, technology and gender studies. We are proud of the more than 200 women who annually receive scholarships to complete their bachelor’s, master’s and Ph.D. programs. They are the changemakers of our world.

NA’AMAT has now embarked on a new chapter with a leadership course called “Learning and Advancing.” This course is a collaborative effort of the Histadrut (the Federation of Labor in Israel) and the Ono Academic College.

An exceptional group of women are enrolled in the program. They are eager to acquire the tools necessary to excel in senior management roles, lead with confidence and make a positive impact. In the words of NA’AMAT Israel President Hagit Pe’er, “You are the women we’ve been waiting for. I have no doubt that in the near future we will witness your influence at the forefront of the workplace and Israeli society.” Yasher Koach to them and todah rabah to all our supporters for all that you do to help women achieve their dreams.

Strengthening bonds

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known as NA’AMAT, raised \$50 million to equip the Jewish armed forces. Last month, we welcomed today’s leaders on a visit to strengthen bonds, celebrate our enduring partnership and raise funds at this challenging time.

In Los Angeles, Pe’er and Shavit attended Shabbat dinner with the Mitzvah chapter. They later attended a Yom HaShoah program for the Eilat and Mitzvah chapters, where they launched a new fundraising campaign called the “Golda Fund.” Their activities in Los Angeles concluded with a visit to the new NA’AMAT USA office.

In Cleveland, Pe’er and Shavit attended the annual 2024 Golda Meir Award Gala honoring Holocaust survivor Erika Taubner Gold, which was a fundraiser for a safe room at the Weitzman Day Care Center in Holon.

The Rimonim Philly and South Jersey, Cherry Hill NA’AMAT chapters toured the Beth Sholom synagogue, a National Historic Landmark, with Pe’er and Shavit. The community also learned more about



From left: Joanna Mendelson, SVP, Community Engagement for JFed LA and daughter of beloved late member Ivy Liebross and NA’AMAT supporter Burt Liebross; Hagit Pe’er, NA’AMAT Israel President; Susan Seely, Executive Director of NA’AMAT USA; and Shirli Shavit, Director of NA’AMAT International at our event on May 6 at NA’AMAT USA national headquarters in Los Angeles.

NA’AMAT’s work through a new video. Rhena Kelsen was the chapters’ first Golda Meir honoree for her unwavering support and dedication to NA’AMAT, Israel and the Jewish community.

Pe’er and Shavit’s trip highlighted the solidarity between NA’AMAT Israel and

NA’AMAT USA. It was a resounding way to demonstrate that we are truly stronger together. In that spirit, please join our summer Play It Forward initiative, creating safe havens for children by refurbishing 10 daycare center play-grounds across Israel.

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

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NA'AMAT supports

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closed, not all of the money has been paid out, Shavit said.

Unlike other daycare providers, NA'AMAT chose not to put its employees on unpaid furlough. "We felt responsibility for our workers. We kept paying them," Shavit noted.

In addition to prioritizing day care centers, one of NA'AMAT's first actions after the war began was to increase the capacity of the helpline for women in crisis run out of the NA'AMAT Family Center (formerly Glickman Center), with support from the NA'AMAT USA Emergency Fund. The anonymous hotline is staffed by professionals and provides a free initial consultation and follow-up consultations on a sliding scale. The stress of the war, combined with displacement and financial challenges, has resulted in an increase in domestic violence in Israel.

Hotline calls in the first seven weeks after Oct. 7 rose 45%, according to Gali Brin, NA'AMAT's director of hotline services. NA'AMAT averages nearly 200 calls per month, about 70% related to physical and other types of abuse.

"Whoever experienced domestic violence before the war is still dealing with this issue, in addition to all the war-related challenges like anxiety," Brin told The Times of Israel.

NA'AMAT leadership

Since the war began, NA'AMAT also:

- Advocated for the return of hostages held by Hamas. NA'AMAT members were invited to leave an empty seat at their Seder to "symbolize our commitment to supporting those in captivity and advocating for their release."
- Recognized women and girls, called "Panthers," who demonstrated extraordinary bravery. On International Women's Day in March NA'AMAT distributed medals to these courageous women, who took part in fighting on the front lines or protecting others.
- Provided educational programming, including workshops throughout the country for women on managing their household budget during the war.
- Offered dance and movement classes to promote healing at NA'AMAT's Me-

shanut Center for Gender Equality in Jerusalem. The classes were taught by dancer Chaya Lev, who made Aliyah from California.

- Knitted hundreds of hats for soldiers, in cooperation with the NA'AMAT Pensioners' Association. David Cohen, a supporter from New York City who has consistently asked how he can meet NA'AMAT Israel's needs, donated two crates of yarn.

NA'AMAT Israel leaders have repeatedly voiced their appreciation for the support they have received from NA'AMAT USA and other sister organizations around the world. "You showed us what is solidarity, what is sisterhood," said Pe'er. "I wish all of us better days."

To donate to the Israel Emergency Fund, go to <https://naamat.org/blog/2023-naamat-israel-fund/> and click "Donate."

Play It Forward

As we approach summer, our communities simmer with tension and uncertainty, underscoring the urgent need for repair and hope. This summer, we urge you to join us in our Play It Forward initiative, providing children across Israel with safe havens by renovating 10 daycare center playgrounds. With your help, we aim to raise \$250,000, bringing joy to children facing insecurity. This endeavor fosters hope and resilience, demonstrating solidarity in adversity. Consider Sarah, a single mother in Ashkelon, and her son, David, who rely on the daycare center as a lifeline. Your vital donation will transform their playground into a vibrant space. It offers hope and stability to families like Sarah's. Join us in building a brighter future for Israeli children. Please see the enclosed flier and donate generously today.