

Marc 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**Subject: Resilience Programs for kids and youth during “routine war time” resilience and recreation**

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for your support, love and prayers for the people of Ashkelon.

The residents of the city of Ashkelon, woke up in horror, on the Saturday of October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, along with the whole country to a brutal and murderous attack by the Hamas. On this murderous occasion the city lost 27 of its town citizens with 1 citizen still among the hostages of its 170,000 residents. On that terrible Saturday morning, the Ashkelon Municipality immediately gathered its Directors to switch from routine to emergency mode and to respond to all the needs of all the residents that arise.

Roughly 40% of the residents of Ashkelon live in low income areas, **most live without safe rooms**, at the time due to ongoing mass attacks targeted at civilians, more than a quarter of all the rockets fired to Israel were at Ashkelon and the region, with many direct hits that harmed buildings, private houses and infrastructures. This led to power outages and a lack of clean water supply. Many citizens were forced to move into public communal shelters that are located in the neighborhood underground. In order to facilitate and assist the residents, the city provided a few thousand of mattresses, renovated and restored shelters, installed A.C units, distributed games and toys, and daily hot meals. Furthermore, the city purchased immediately a few hundred back up generators, emergency lights and provide hundreds of gallons of daily water to public shelters, private houses and buildings. During the first two weeks of war Ashkelon became a ghost town with closed supermarkets and suppliers not willing to distribute in the city so the city management took a stand and started to take care of the citizens with hot food and all needs and delivered it to all households that asked. In parallel to food and all the essential products the city management provided activities in the public shelters including shows, after school classes, resilience kits which includes coloring books, craft materials, box games, markers, crayons and anti-anxiety products such as soap bubbles and relaxing dolls (balloon filled with flour) etc. All enabled by the generosity of donors from around the world.

In early January 2024, Ashkelon was cleared to open of the educational system, after 3 months with no school structure for our children. However, the formal educational structure is focused on closing the academic annual gap. Therefore, we have created a program focused on **strengthening emotional and mental resilience**, as well as, respite activities that will help the children process what they experienced and reduce gaps created by the reality that the children were isolated in their homes without friends for so long.

**The Pre-K and Kindgartens and 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders** will receive experimental meetings to strengthen resilience, enrichment classes, plays and shows to promote morale and professional workshops to strengthen interpersonal skills and create social resilience. Between the workshops there will be simulation games that will allow the children to talk about their emotional state. To provide them with tools to deal with emergency situations, anxiety and stress, allow them to process and share their feelings in order to reduce anxiety situations and ongoing risks. A recent survey in early Jan 2024, by the Ministry of Health, showed that Ashkelon children in first grade, are the most obese in the country, which is currently being defined due to the ongoing negative impacts of war, enhancing the goal to reduce “anxiety eating disorders”.

**In Ashkelon there are 304 kindergartens (~9,200 children). Whereas, 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grades there are 328 classes (~9,840 children). Total number of children around ~19,040 children.**

**Breakdown:** the cost of this program for the next **12 months is \$500K** (~\$41.5K monthly, and \$715 annually per class) Each session costs around \$50 per gathering.

- Each child will participate in 20 sessions, each session is 1 hour, the activities will take place in the classrooms as part of the educational framework. The sessions are drama, music, crafts, animal therapy, and other forms of therapeutic tools. A professional organization will perform a semi and annual evaluation report of impact.
- Currently, we have funding and have begun the program in 40 of the classrooms, and have raised \$30K.

**Activities venue:** In order to facilitate grades 4-11, for cultural gatherings that relieve stress and tension, the municipality has currently rented a protected and sheltered cinema complex in the local mall for the year of 2024.

**For the 4th to the 9th graders** who had a sporadic return to school, due to the lack of sufficient shelters in the schools, initially used our solutions once a week to hold social and cultural meetings in our protected space. In this age group, many are suffering from vast loneliness, we have placed an emphasis on social activities and on strengthening the self, tools for teamwork and experiential simulations, and the students will be able to create connections and friendships with their friends.

**In Ashkelon there are 13,200 children in 4th-9th grade, roughly 440 classrooms.**

**Breakdown:** the cost of this program for the next **12 months is \$725K** (~\$60K monthly, and \$1,650 annually per class) Each session costs around \$82 per gathering.

- Each class will participate in 20 sessions, each session is 90 minutes, the activities will take place in the in the cinema protected facility as part of the school framework. The sessions are psychodrama, music, camera simulations, and other forms of therapeutic tools. A professional organization will perform a semi and annual evaluation report of impact.
- Currently, we have funding and have begun the program for the month of December and January 2024 for all students, and have raised \$230K local municipal funding

After the end of the war, we are interested in renting the complex at "hotzot" mall, with four halls, for three years, purchasing the necessary equipment and continuing to operate it as an activity center where acting and theater classes will be held, where psychodrama sessions will be introduced into the sessions through which we will be able to help the children of the city in an experiential way to release emotions, anxieties and distressed feelings. In addition, there will be theater sessions in the schools with a professional team that will deal with dilemmas, social situations, and emotional situations.

The cost of the complex program for 2 additional years is \$250K

**For the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders** Among the students of grades 10 through 12, we will hold simulation workshops in all classes (234 classes) that will help hold a discussion and touch on emotional and social issues, as well as engage in emotional and mental preparation before being drafted into the IDF. The meetings will be held consistently every week throughout the school year. As we learned during the Covid-19 lockdown period, high school students suffer mainly from distance and social crises and there is an important and urgent need to hold workshops to strengthen the self, providing tools for teamwork and social skills through ODT workshops, meetings and empowerment workshops throughout the year including the establishment of dedicated leadership groups in the schools. Along with strengthening personal and social resilience, there is a need for experiential learning, especially in the scientific subjects, to enable students to secure their future.

**In Ashkelon there are 6,900 students in 10th -12th grade, roughly 234 classrooms.**

**Breakdown:** the cost of this program for the next **12 months is \$515K** (~\$43K monthly, and \$2,200 annually per class) Each session costs around \$110 per gathering.


- Each class will participate in 20 sessions, each session is 90 minutes, the activities will take place at the school and some outdoor locations. The sessions are ODT team building, leadership groups. A professional organization will perform a semi and annual evaluation report of impact.
- Currently, we have funding and have begun the program for in January 2024 for the 12<sup>th</sup> graders at this stage, and have raised \$75K Ministry of Education.

The city will match budget components to philanthropic funds.

Sincerely,  
Dafna Amira Biton  
Director of the Youth Culture and Sports Department

  
SIGNATURE

Accepted and Agreed:

 ELI DAYAN, ASHKELON FOUNDATION

PRINT NAME, TITLE

DATE