

HELPING A CITY IN NEED

Plagued by economic failure and some of the highest drug abuse, violence and drop out rates in Israel, government programs are not reaching Jaffa's citizens. The Jaffa Institute's after-school support for the neighborhood's children is a shining light in this bleak reality / Jennifer Szapiró

The ancient port of Jaffa, referred to as "Joppa" in the Bible, is Israel's oldest seaport and once served the needs of the inner Judean hill country. Today, it is the city of Jaffa that is needy: in need of competitive elementary education, in need of solutions to offset long-term food and job insecurity, in need of a better future.

The Jaffa Institute was founded in 1982 by Rabbi Dr. David Portowicz and the late Col. Zonik Shaham to fill a distinct educational gap by providing after school tutoring and homework assistance. Twenty-eight years later, the Institute's programming has successfully grown into a coordinated approach to poverty eradication.

After-school programs

At the base of the Jaffa Institute's effort is After School Enrichment Programs (Moadoniot) designed to provide educational support via coordination with local primary teachers, extracurricular activities standard in most districts but absent from Jaffa's curriculum, and drug and violence prevention programs to keep students on track for matriculation.

In response to the Ministry of Absorption's relocation of Ethiopian immigrants to Jaffa, the Institute began to operate an integration-focused Moadonit. Moreover, in order to address the dire need for an after-school program in the Hatikvah Quarter of east Tel Aviv, the Institute is renovating a Jewish Agency-owned building to coordinate therapeutic activities for children with attention deficit and behavioral disorders and their families. All after-school program participants receive a hot meal upon entering their program site - often their only hot meal of the day.

One of the most innovative programs provided by the Jaffa Institute is the Musical Minds program. Through instrumental and voice lessons, the program provides music education to all children, not only those who demonstrate innate abilities, and is proven to advance cognitive development, while helping students succeed in more traditional academic disciplines.

For children whose parents inhibit their growth, the Institute runs a local emergency residential center - The Neve Ofer House



- providing shelter, safety and therapies for abused and neglected children while keeping them in their schools and Jaffa Institute enrichment programming as welfare authorities work out the best long-term solution.

For boys on the brink of dropping out of high school because of poor grades, excessive absences and oppressive home situations, the Bet Shemesh Educational and Residential Center helps each student complete their high school matriculations. The Institute aims to create a similar campus for Israel's at-risk girls, who are among the lowest priority in the rank of governmental funds. Toward this goal, the Beit Ruth Hostel in Rishon LeZion is a small-scale pilot program designed to support the unique educational and therapeutic needs of Israel's at-risk girls.

Passover food packages

After witnessing the desperation of parents of Jaffa Institute children - and how their unemployment affects the progress of its students - the Institute extended its services to

include the Welfare to Wellbeing program, which provides comprehensive workplace training courses for unemployed local women, and the Food Distribution Center, where volunteers pack and deliver hundreds of food parcels monthly.

The upcoming Passover holiday sparks a sharp rise in demand for the Center's food parcels. Thousands of community members, including new-immigrant families from Ethiopia, single-parent households, and hundreds of Holocaust survivors, will receive specially-tailored Passover food packages. To finance this massive undertaking, the Institute is turning to friends and supporters from across the globe, including major donor and long time friend, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, headed by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein. Rabbi Eckstein generously donated \$150,000 toward the Institute's anti-hunger programming, of which \$50,000 is designated for Passover food parcels for Holocaust survivors.

The Institute is also participating in the annual Feinstein Foundation Challenge, which will donate \$1,000,000 to organizations by proportionally matching funds for food donations received from March 1st until April 30th - including Rabbi Eckstein's.

Institute chairman Dr. Portowicz exclaims: "Even though the need has risen by more than 100 percent in the last year, and even though we are desperate for more donations, we don't turn anyone away. We continue to receive requests from the Municipal Welfare Authorities and if there is a need that cannot wait, we meet it, at least temporarily. Each story tears at your heart and it doesn't matter if it is an adult, an elderly person or a child. Many times I find myself shaking my head and asking 'how can it be that the situation is so dire and no one sees the poverty?'" ■



For more information and to support the Jaffa Institute please visit www.jaffainstitute.org, or call +972-3-683-2626. American Friends of the Jaffa Institute, 171-06 76th Ave., Flushing, NY 11366, USA. Tel: 1-866-4711923.