

Originally posted on YNET, Israel, 3.17.2020

“I realized I’ll be able to rehabilitate my life here”

N. ran away from her mother’s house, lived on the streets for long periods of time while also being addicted to drugs and experiencing violence. ELEM’s staff and volunteers took her off the street and out of a vicious cycle of exploitation, and helped her start a journey of hope and a steady life.

Written by Yarden Shaked.

“Any young women or men who experience some sort of distress, who need a place to sleep, feel save, a shoulder to lean on, any sort of support - we’re here for all of them.” That, in a nutshell, is the goal of ELEM, which has been helping thousands of at-risk youth, young women, and men, since 1983.

N. is one of the young women who’ve been assisted by ELEM. She grew up in a normal family, regular household, warm family, but when she was five her parents split. Her mother got into a new relationship, and N. didn’t get along, to say the least, with her mother’s new boyfriend who was violent towards N. This is when things started to go downhill. “I started with Alcohol. I got used to the flavor and at some point I felt like I need something stronger, which is where the drugs came in,” she tells us. She ran away from home and lived on the street for a long time. After a very rough period on the street, N. managed to rent an apartment in Eilat, but shortly after she found herself on the street again, with the drugs and the violence that entailed.

[Watch a video featuring N. and ELEM’s CEO Inbal Doe Kerbel here.](#)

She searched for a place where she could sleep, and after a while she arrived at ELEM’s Shelter for Homeless Young Women (formerly known as “Galgal” – ELEM,) a center that is a collaboration between ELEM, the Ministry of Welfare, Jerusalem’s municipality and the Friendship Fund. The shelter operates 24/7 and will let any woman in, no matter her situation, no preconditions and no questions asked. At first it was just a place for N. to stay at, “but after awhile it started to feel like home. Somewhere where I can take a break from all the mess, and start figuring out my life,” N. says.

“One day I was approached by a woman who started talking to me,” N. tells us. “It was one of the supervisors at the Shelter, who offered to help me. It was weird. I was always used to others deciding for me, rather than asking me what I wanted, but she left the choice in my hands. Suddenly, I realized this was a place where I can sort out my life.” N. started working, stopped taking drugs, rented an apartment, got her GED, took the Pyschometry (The Israei equivalent of the SATs – ELEM), and today she’s dreaming about becoming a lawyer.

ELEM employs 300 professionals, who are supported by 2000 volunteers. They go out to the field and meet the youth on the streets, at public parks and gardens, at social gatherings, at school, on-line. Anywhere they can be found, really. The organization works all across Israel, in 42 towns and cities, and provides services to address different types of hardships. Be it personal crises, a chance of dropping out of school, social distress, violence at home, drug and alcohol abuse, street roaming, sexual violence and homelessness.

Among all these who suffer, ELEM helps hundreds of homeless young men and women who are being commercially sexually abused. Without ELEM’s help, most of them would’ve become victims of violence and addiction, and some may have even died. They’re not at fault for the situations they’re in. Often times these phenomenons are a result of sexual abuse, dysfunctional family unit, violence at home, and more.

To donate to ELEM, visit <https://elem.org/donate/>