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The program that keeps Lod's youth off the streets is in danger.

City hall hasn't transferred the funds for the program "Street Address" which assists at-risk youth, and as a result it might shut down ▪ ELEM CEO: "bureaucratic apathy."

Written by Noam Dvir

Lod's city hall has decided to drag its feet and the youth are going to pay the price. ELEM operates a program called "Street Address" in Lod and other cities, a program which assists at-risk youth.

The program has been operating in Lod since 2008 and helped thousands of youths throughout the years, by offering support and by referring them to other services in town. Except that now, due to bureaucratic foot-dragging, the program is in danger of shutting down. The budget used to come from the Ministry of Welfare that would transfer 180,000 NIS (approx. \$53,000 – ELEM USA) annually. But ELEM claims that city hall isn't transferring the funds and ELEM has to carry the expenses.

According to ELEM, the contracts with city hall haven't been fully fulfilled. Due to these obstacles, ELEM froze its activity in Lod. What it means is that the Outreach Van's operations will have to cease.

"This program saved me."

Y. (22) is one of the young teens who were assisted by the program and now she's fighting to save it. She tells us: "As a teen I'd walk around the neighborhood with this big group and the police will come to break us up. When I was 15 I met ELEM's volunteers and I started sharing what was weighing on my heart. I managed to graduate high school thanks to them and they're also the ones who encouraged me to join the army."

She later also attended officers' course. "I got the positive feedback from the volunteers, not from my family. They were against it," she says. "As an officer, whenever I was home I went to ELEM to talk about what I was going through because at home and in the army they didn't understand."

Lod's city hall reached out to comment: "In the last two years ELEM was the only provider which is why ELEM was in charge of operations. At the beginning of the year we had to launch a bid once we learned that there were other sources providing this sort of service. Sadly, the bid ended and ELEM never participated in it. City hall has no choice but to stop the communication. We'll be happy to continue operations through ELEM once they win the bid in accordance with the law."

ELEM CEO, Inbal Dor Kerbel rejected the comments: "Due to bureaucratic apathy, Lod's city hall keeps providing irrelevant replies and prevents ELEM from serving the city's youth. The aforementioned bid, which city hall seems to be using to push ELEM from operating in the city, came after ELEM carried the expenses for a year and 8 months even though there was designated budget from the Ministry of Welfare. Every time we asked to meet with city hall we got the cold shoulder."

Ministry of Welfare: "We consider programs for at-risk youth a high priority and we're working with city hall to find a solution. The issue is being closely monitored by the district inspector, in order to assure the funding."