

# Summer Newsletter 2020



*Off the Streets and On to Life*

## From our President

2020 has been an extraordinary year for everyone around the world. Usually, a crisis is isolated to a specific region or country. We see it on the news and think about how difficult it is for the people involved. This pandemic is different. Simultaneously, we are all experiencing its effects worldwide, and with TV and social media, we are all feeling it together.

All of us have had to change our lives and the way we go about our day. Jewish tradition teaches that the most we can do at these times is use them as opportunities to reflect, introspect and improve as human beings. Many people have had terrible struggles during this time. Others have looked inside and used this time to improve themselves and better who they are in the world.

ELEM has had extraordinary challenges since the corona virus hit and we too have had to overcome and improve. Not only was there lack of government funding in Israel for the nonprofit sector, but the need for our services has increased. ELEM has always been there for at-risk youth for 38 years, and we were not about to let them down now.

ELEM was designated an essential organization, which meant we could go out on the streets to search for youth in abandoned buildings and bring them to safe places and provide food and essential needs. We chat online with youth and provide them with counseling through the Y-ELEM website, Zoom and Whatsapp. Many youth were in unsafe environments, but had to stay home because of the pandemic. ELEM met with them on street corners or abandoned lots to provide counseling and support.

We are all so proud to be part of ELEM and see the extraordinary work they do in Israel every day. Please join us at our virtual gala on October 22nd and help these vulnerable youth in Israel.

We are all in this together and I believe we will all make it through this time together.

Stay safe,

Lenore Ruben  
President



## Update from ELEM Israel: More Than 200 Youth Attempted Suicide in April and May

Springtime was a particularly difficult time for troubled youth in Israel. In addition to the 200 suicide attempts during this period, over 600 distressed youth needed assistance from ELEM due to violence at home. At partial, but not complete fault, is the Covid-19 pandemic. Sadly, many of the youth we help come from tragic family situations.

In most cases, the only network of support these youth have is from ELEM. "Thanks" to the corona crisis their situations have severely worsened. Far too many have been forced to isolate themselves with violent family members. Violence in the home can be physical, sexual and verbal in nature. Other youth had to isolate themselves while homeless, and many turned to prostitution to get money.

Making matters worse, youth currently on the streets are unable to receive their stimulus grant from the Israeli government. We're doing whatever we can to be there for them and support them. While the challenges with homeless youth were always steep, recent times have created an even bigger mountain to climb.

We're right in the thick of the corona crisis and thousands of at-risk youth and young men and women in Israel go even more unnoticed by the public than before. Here's a snapshot of our work during the pandemic.

- **520** young men and women are currently receiving emergency humanitarian support, including emergency sleeping arrangements and food packages
- **2,535** at-risk youth took part in support meetings
- **3,280** personal one-on-one conversations were held
- **8,000** troubled youth reached out to us online, a 40% increase
- **143** had confrontations with the police
- **251** youth found themselves without a home
- **159** developed eating disorders
- **232** tried to harm themselves
- ELEM's outreach vans are still operating, but the physical meetings on the streets have moved to the virtual space via Zoom, Whatsapp and Instagram.
- ELEM is making a huge effort to help support single mothers and young people who have been left with nothing by distributing donations of food packages, diapers and other baby-related items. This was made possible by requesting donations from the community, family and friends through social media. It was touching to see ELEM's managers in the field and our volunteers drive around the country to distribute the donations, while following the restrictions made by the Ministry of Health.

Normally, ELEM staff accompany young at-risk men and women as they move from incarceration or group homes and prepare for an independent life in the community. Many of these young people lost their jobs due to the corona restrictions (many worked in restaurants or clothing store chains). Some youth don't qualify for unemployment benefits because they haven't completed six months of continuous employment, or because they're younger than 18. They have no savings, no family to turn to, and many found themselves unable to pay for food.

To support them, ELEM still held personal meetings with them, but the meetings were held on Zoom, Whatsapp or phone calls. Group meetings also helped these young people survive the severe fallout of the crisis. (sentence deleted) Many of them live alone, suffer from loneliness, and are helpless in dealing with dire financial situations and the uncertainty of what the next day may bring. The group meetings give them a feeling of togetherness and hope. There are general groups, and meetings for specific groups, such as a group for young Arab women.

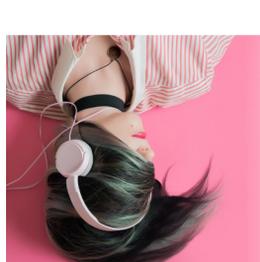
One young person participating in our [outreach van program](#) told us, *Everyone is suddenly gone. I have no one to talk to. I can feel myself getting depressed. It's a good thing that you guys are here.*



## ELEM USA's "Heroes on the Front Line" Call

Sunday, May 31, ELEM USA held a live "Heroes on the Frontline" Zoom call featuring Nava Barak, President, Lenore Ruben, President ELEM USA and Renana Danon, Manager of ELEM's Jerusalem homeless shelter for young women.

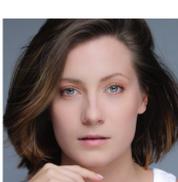
During the call Danon stated they have 16 beds and every day and an overflow of people end up sleeping on the floor. Since the beginning of the pandemic they've seen a rise in the number of homeless youth and couldn't house everyone in the shelter due to social distancing and lack of space. In order not to turn anyone away, ELEM rented hotel rooms and helped feed the young ladies in need. They witnessed a sharp rise in depression, loneliness, sickness and suicide attempts. She stressed that although they've seen many challenges, nothing will stop them from helping the youth that need us.



## Special Performance Celebrating the Work of ELEM/Youth in Distress in Israel

Sunday, June 28, ELEM and BMAD held a live benefit show, hosted by Lenore Ruben. Yaron Hanuana, an ELEM youth, shared his story. He spoke about committing acts of violence in school and his community and growing up with a dad who abuses drugs. He described how working with ELEM helped his behavior, grades and personality improve. Performances featured Yosef David, musician, Orit Hirsch, tap dancer, ELEM alumni and winner of Israeli Idol, Diana Golbi, Oren Korenbaum, tap dancer Avi Lesser, musician and Camille Theobald, comedian.

[Watch it.](#)



## Join "Friends of ELEM"

We know you love seeing our great work helping Israel's distressed youth. We would be honored if you become a "Friend of ELEM," by becoming a yearly donor of \$1,000 or more. Friends receive the "in the know" information, exclusive direct information from Israel, participation in quarterly Zoom calls with Israel and more.

## Save the Date

On November 18, 2020, we are holding our "Ray of Hope Gala" virtually this year. The venue is new but the cause, commitment and fun remain the same. Details are coming soon!

## Get Involved

Consider making a donation. No amount is too small. Our children greatly appreciate anything you can give. If you want to volunteer in the USA or if you're visiting Israel and want to see us in action, contact us at [info@elem.org](mailto:info@elem.org). Get your child involved in a mitzvah project or create a fund to honor someone special.

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