

MEIR PANIM

Lifting hearts and minds

September 2021 | Rosh Hashanah 5782



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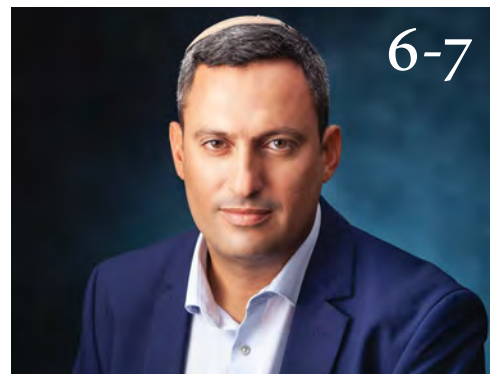
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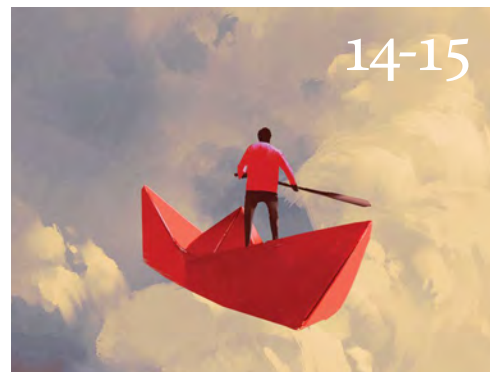
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Welcome to Meir Panim

Feeding the Hungry with Dignity

By Steve Linde

Did you know that one in five Israelis – including almost one million children – live below the poverty line? Meir Panim feeds hungry Israelis, helps break the cycle of poverty, and does it with dignity.

Meir Panim operates throughout Israel, distributing and delivering 1,000,000 meals each year to those in need from its five Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchens, located in Tzfat, Tiberias, Or Akiva, Dimona, and Jerusalem. The Jerusalem location, near the Central Bus Station, is just a short walk from the Jerusalem Post offices at the city's entrance, and we have seen firsthand how Meir Panim helps the city's residents.

Among other services, it hands out some 5,000 prepaid grocery shopping cards to the poor, and almost 35,000 meals a year to at-risk children from disadvantaged families at its various Neighborhood Youth Centers in high-poverty communities. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, its work has

become even more vital and needed.

Binyomin Ibenboim, CEO of Meir Panim Israel, has expanded Meir Panim to a staff of 25 employees and 8,000 volunteers. Its annual budget in 2020 was approximately NIS 14 million.

A nonprofit organization that raises funds around the globe, Meir Panim today is Israel's largest network for assisting the needy, and has fund-raising offices worldwide. Each year, Meir Panim's annual campaign before the High Holy Days urges Jews and friends of Israel around the world to begin the Jewish New Year by donating meals to the hungry.

Many thousands of disadvantaged men, women, and children, including Holocaust survivors, have turned to Meir Panim for help. Its unwavering commitment to the people of Israel has helped bring relief to the poor, encouragement for the less fortunate, new opportunities for struggling families, and hope for children at risk.



Photo: Courtesy

We trust that you will enjoy reading about the activities of Meir Panim in these pages, and that you will be inspired to visit one of the branches on your next visit to Israel, and join the Meir Panim family of volunteers and supporters.



Photo: Ingimage

The significance of food security

An interview with Professor Aron Troen

By Alan Rosenbaum

In Israel, the word 'security' is used frequently in daily conversation. National security, the security of Israel's citizens, and the need for secure borders are constantly mentioned. Yet the word 'security' has another usage which is no less important, but which is discussed far less often – food security. What is food security, and why is it so significant for Israel in 2021?

"Food security," says Professor Aron Troen, Director of the Nutrition and Brain Health Laboratory at the Hebrew University's Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food, and Environment, "exists when all people at all times have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." The absence of these conditions – when people do not have access to sufficient quantities of safe and nutritious food, is known as food insecurity.

Meir Panim, which supplies food packages to

the needy, offers free dining at its six locations in Israel, and delivers nutritious meals to students from disadvantaged families, has long been combating the difficulties caused by food insecurity in Israel. In 2020 alone, the organization served more than one million hot meals at its Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchens, more than 34,000 meals for children, and distributed almost 6,500 food baskets.

Before the corona pandemic, it was estimated that close to 20% of the Israeli population suffered from food insecurity. According to statistics from LATET, an organization which combats poverty and food insecurity in Israel, the number increased to 22.6% of the population in 2020. The unemployment and financial crisis unleashed by the pandemic, says Professor Troen, has created conditions of food insecurity for people who had never before experienced these circumstances. "They don't know how to work the system and the resources that are available," he says. "They are ashamed to ask for help and are stuck." He

explains that people who are in situations of food insecurity purchase greater quantities of cheaper foods that are of lesser nutritional quality and buy fewer fruits and vegetables, dairy products, and smaller amounts of meat. "If you look at the income that's required to purchase a healthy food basket, based on the Ministry of Health recommendations," says Professor Troen, "the cost of a healthy food basket for a family in the lowest twenty percent of income would cost 65% of their income, meaning that two-thirds of their income would be spent on food, which doesn't leave a whole lot left over."

Professor Troen says that food insecurity can be harmful to overall health. "There is ample evidence that a healthful diet is preventive against Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Studies show better cognitive outcomes with a more rigorous diet. One could infer that there is an inequity that places people who can't afford food at greater risk for health, for dementia, certainly, and for depression,

partly as a matter of their inability to provide adequate and healthy food. If you look at the food insecure population, they have two to three times the rate of chronic nutrition-related preventable disease." In addition, he points out that the isolation caused by the pandemic has led to increases in depression, anxiety disorders, and eating disorders. Meir Panim's restaurants encourage diners to socialize with one another, thus enabling greater interaction with others.

Providing healthy food to those in need not only provides immediate assistance and improves nutrition but, according to a recent study, actually encourages recipients to purchase more nutritious food on their own. "We did a study with Leket Israel, the National Food Bank," explains Professor Troen. "We looked at the quality of food baskets, and we correlated with the self-reported dietary habits of recipients. We see that when you provide a healthier basket, even though you are not able to provide sufficiently for the

“ The pandemic has created conditions of food insecurity for people who had never before experienced these circumstances. ”

nutritional needs of that family, the family reports better diets – which means that they are purchasing more fruits and vegetables with the resources that they have saved." In other words, when organizations such as Meir Panim donate healthy food to the needy, the recipients are motivated to purchase more nutritious items from their own food budgets as well.

Meir Panim does its utmost to serve its guests healthy, nutritious meals and provide basic food staples in its food baskets. Meals include a fresh salad, fresh fruit, a meat protein, a vegetable, and a carbohydrate. Pantry food baskets contain basic ingredients such as bread, oil, flour, jams, canned goods and tuna, pastas/rice/couscous, and shelf-stable items that can be prepared in a myriad of ways. When the pandemic broke out, Meir Panim stopped receiving leftovers from hotels and events, and volunteers began preparing meals from scratch. The organization invited a group of students studying nutrition to make

recommendations to help prepare healthy foods. Meir Panim has utilized their guidance at all branches where food is cooked on-site.

The challenges of food security have beset a significant percentage of Israel's population. Solving this problem – especially as the world emerges from the pandemic – is one of Israel's major challenges. Meir Panim is up to the task. ■



Photo: Louis Weyl

Politicians speak out about Meir Panim

Wall-to-wall support for helping those in need

By Alan Rosenbaum

Israeli politicians are a vocal, often vituperative bunch that frequently disagree with each other. Yet, when it comes to Meir Panim, they are uniformly effusive in their praise and are grateful for the assistance that the organization provides.

Alon Davidi, Mayor of Sderot

Alon Davidi, mayor of Sderot, was born in Beersheva and moved to Sderot 25 years ago. He was elected to the Sderot city council in 2008 and has served as mayor since 2013. Meir Panim's Neighborhood Youth Centers in Sderot provide guidance and shelter to children who have grown up under rocket fire under difficult conditions.

How has Meir Panim helped the youth in Sderot?

"Meir Panim has accompanied us and helped the city of Sderot for many years. It's not one-time help. Rather, it is a multi-year partnership that is appropriate for our master plan for Sderot in the area of. Since I was elected mayor, we have set a goal that our youth should be leading and active –not only receiving from others but also giving back to others. We believe that the youth

from Sderot can lead in our city, and I am very happy that the Meir Panim organization has partnered with us in this vision and is part of the ongoing activities of the youth centers in the city."

How do the people of Sderot feel about receiving help from Meir Panim?

"More teens have joined the neighborhood youth centers in Sderot due to the assistance and partnership provided by Meir Panim. Sderot is a city that is like a garden of Eden most of the time, and it is a charming place. In difficult times, though, there can be rockets, and we know that we are not alone, because of the help that we receive from Meir Panim, because of the help that we receive from Meir Panim. Ultimately, we are on the front of the war against terror that is directed against citizens. The fact that Meir Panim marshals



Photo: Reuven Kapuchinsky

support for Sderot both from Israel and the Diaspora encourages and strengthens the city's residents. The residents understand that just as people assist them, they too can, and will, help others.

“ We are privileged that Meir Panim is helping to distribute food in Yerucham ”

“ More teens have joined the neighborhood youth centers in Sderot due to the assistance and partnership provided by Meir Panim. ”

Tal Ohana, Mayor of Yeruham

Tal Ohana was born and raised in Yeruham and is the fourth generation of immigrants from Morocco. She was elected mayor of Yeruham in 2018 and has worked for the city's economic and social development, enlisting partners from Israel and around the world, making a significant impact on the community, employment, education, welfare, and health. Yeruham is in the Negev, just a short fifteen-minute drive from Dimona, where Meir Panim maintains an active branch. Meir Panim provides food to clients in Yerucham and delivers food daily to a center that employs people with special needs.

How has Meir Panim helped the people of Yeruham?

"We have had a partnership with Meir Panim

for many years. We are privileged that they are helping to distribute food in Yeruham. Teens from Yerucham have taken part in the "Young Chef Training Program" in Dimona, which helps train teens in the culinary arts. The head of Meir Panim's Dimona branch lives in Yeruham, knows the families in the city, and takes responsibility for them.

How do the people of Yeruham feel about Meir Panim?

"Residents of Yerucham are grateful for the assistance from Meir Panim. They understand that someone is there to help them and has come to their home to help. That is the beauty of the organization – they fulfill their mission without headlines."

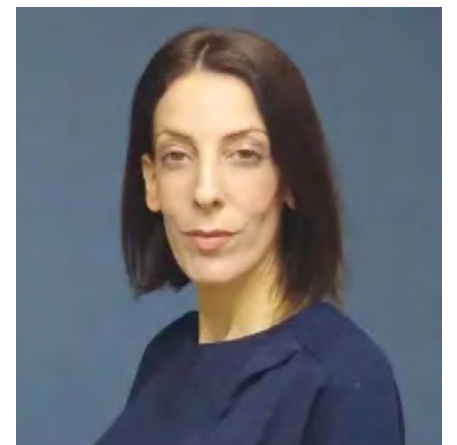


Photo: Anav Silverman Peretz



Photo: Getty Images



The Philosophy of Philanthropy

An interview with Mimi Rozmaryn,
Director of Global Development

Photo: Marc Israel Sellem

By Alan Rosenbaum

Meir Panim has a unique philosophy, says Mimi Rozmaryn, Director of Global Development, which extends both to its clients and benefactors. “Meir Panim was founded to create a positive experience for its recipients, to give with dignity and respect so that there is an elimination of the stigma of being on the receiving end. That is a principle that guides everything we do.” The organization’s supporters, she explains, help Meir Panim accomplish this mission of giving in a respectful way that helps people feel whole again, not only because the organization provides them with food

to eat, but because Meir Panim is attentive to their social and emotional needs as well.

Rozmaryn says that the worldwide effects of the pandemic led to a greater understanding of those in need. “During Corona, people started understanding and feeling more sympathetic to charities that provide basic needs. The images that people saw from around the world resonated.” Additionally, she suggests, within families, people are discussing the need to help others. As a result, she adds, “I’ve seen a lot more conversations and a lot more kids coming to volunteer with families in our locations – something that we didn’t

see as much before.”

Mimi notes that volunteering for Meir Panim at their centers throughout Israel is a valuable form of philanthropy. “Anyone at any level of ability and financial means can come in and make a difference and take part in giving back to the community.” She notes that people of all walks of life have come into Meir Panim’s centers and offered their time, talents, and abilities in preparing foods, serving and delivering meals, and maintaining locations. “So many people are giving in any way they can – and it’s amazing,” she says. One restaurant owner whose business was

closed during Corona, Mimi relates, came to one of the Meir Panim centers and taught personnel how to turn a food warming center into a cooking center, which was essential at a time when Meir Panim could not rely on leftovers from hotels and events.

Though the immediate effects of the pandemic have lessened somewhat since last year, Meir Panim is still experiencing increased numbers of people who are turning to it for assistance. “We are still supporting many families in the hospitality and tourism industry that need help,” she says.

As a result of the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, many of those who had volunteered for Meir Panim in the past needed to turn to Meir Panim for help when hard times hit. A project funded by the Miami Jewish Federation enabled people to receive a box of ingredients that left their dignity

intact. “We prepared a pantry bag of shelf-stable ingredients for preparing food,” explains Mimi. “In this way, they felt a little more normal, as opposed to if they were getting tins of pre-cooked food.” The goal of Meir Panim, explains Mimi, “is to break the cycle of poverty – not only to help them meet their basic needs, but to heal, feel dignified, and feel a part of a community – to lift them up in their moment of crisis.”

Meir Panim accomplishes this goal, says Rozmaryn, by always welcoming clients with a warm smile. “We don’t ask any questions. We don’t look at what people are wearing and make assumptions about them. Our whole ethos is an extension of that. Even if someone is wearing nice clothes, we don’t make assumptions about their needs. Everyone who comes in is welcome.”

Meir Panim does more than provide a smile

and a warm meal. Meir Panim’s Neighborhood Youth Centers in Sderot offers a haven for teens at risk, where young people can learn to lead healthy and productive lives as caring individuals and community members. In the past year, Meir Panim opened a Chef Training Workshop in Dimona to help provide career options for at-risk youth, and it will soon be initiating a work training program for women who are currently working as housekeepers to help them retrain and launch new careers. “We are creating initiatives helping to retrain both the current generation of workers as well as the next generation,” says Rozmaryn.

“This year, we have been able to do so much more,” says Mimi.” She is grateful to the numerous volunteers who have contributed in so many ways to help Meir Panim help those in need. “We want to give as much as we can.” ■

“ The goal of Meir Panim is to break the cycle of poverty, and lift people in their moment of crisis. ”



Photo: Marc Israel Sellem



With love, Meir Adoni

Holiday wishes from Meir Adoni, World-renowned Chef Meir Adoni, one of Israel's best-known chefs, combines the cuisine of his Moroccan heritage with modern innovation and exploration.

May this coming year be one of creation, appreciation, and thanks. May it be a year in which we can adapt to change, take new directions, and be grateful for the blessings that we have received. May the Meir Panim organization, its clients, and supporters enjoy a healthy, happy, and meaningful New Year.

Photo: Courtesy Of Meir Adoni

CHICKEN BREAST WITH SOY, HONEY, AND GARLIC, SWEET POTATO BAKED IN WHITE MISO, CHUTNEY, QUINCE, ZUCCHINI AND MINI-BROCCOLI

Ingredients:

4 pcs chicken breast	¼ cup olive oil	¼ cup pomegranate syrup
½ cup soy sauce	Salt and pepper to taste	3 cardamom berries
¼ cup honey	4 pcs medium sweet potatoes washed but unpeeled	1 star anise
4 cloves chopped garlic	500 grams coarse salt	1 cinnamon stick
1 teaspoon sesame oil	50 grams dark miso paste	1 teaspoon chili flakes
2 limes for juice and grating	70 grams powdered sugar	2 tablespoons honey
2 lemongrass stalks finely chopped	3 grams of the five spices	¼ cup cognac
A handful of basil leaves	4 granny smith apples peeled and cut into sixths	Sea salt
1 tablespoon fresh, finely chopped fresh ginger		Ground black pepper

Preparation:

Chicken preparation: Mix all ingredients for the marinade, and marinate the chicken breast for two hours (refrigerated). Preheat oven to 200 C°/400 F°. At the same time, heat a heavy pan with a bit of olive oil and sear the breast until golden on both sides. Transfer to a roasting pan and place in the oven for another 3 minutes. Remove and let the chicken breast rest for about 5 minutes. Cut in half lengthwise and arrange on a serving plate.

Sweet potatoes: Preheat oven to 220 C°/425 F°. Sprinkle the coarse salt on a baking sheet, place the sweet potatoes on the salt, and roast for about 45 minutes or until ready (do not soften too much). Cool slightly, peel, and cut the edges. Cut each sweet potato into 2-3 rolls and place them on a baking sheet.

Mix the miso with the powdered sugar and the five spices and spread a generous layer on the part of the sweet potato facing up. Transfer to a preheated oven at 220 C°/425 F° on grill mode for a few minutes to caramelize the glaze of the miso, and place directly on the serving plate.

Apple: Heat a heavy skillet with a bit of olive oil and the dry spices and add the apples, cut into eighths, and brown for about a minute. Add the cognac to the pan and heat the alcohol until the heat subsides. Add honey, salt, and pepper and transfer to a serving plate.

Serving Instructions: Sprinkle with the broccoli florets, drizzle with a bit of olive oil and serve.



Photo: Meshek Artzi and Havat Habokrim



Sweet Wishes for the New Year!

The best way to learn is by doing, and Shirel, 15, Ami, 12, and Emil Emilov, 11, together with Ilanit Hafuta, Or Akiva branch manager learned to bake Rosh Hashanah honey cakes under the expert guidance of pastry chef Oren Celnick. The youngsters enjoyed mixing, pouring, baking...and tasting! Best wishes for a sweet, honey-filled New Year from Meir Panim!





Photo: Getty Images

Naomi Ragen is a renowned American-born novelist, playwright and journalist who has lived in Jerusalem since 1971. She has published eleven internationally best-selling novels, and is the author of a hit play, “Women’s Minyan”, that has been performed more than 500 times in Israel’s National Theatre as well as in the United States and Argentina. Ms. Ragen interviewed a Dimona resident who is a long-time participant in Meir Panim’s Dimona activities.

A Survivor’s Tale

By Naomi Ragen

He is a kindly octogenarian, with large brown eyes and a ready smile. We meet in the way most meetings take place these days, in the cyberspace of Zoom. I have been asked to interview him as part of a holiday article describing the work of the charitable organization Meir Panim, which runs Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchens catering to Israel’s indigent; meals on wheels; youth programs and the unique center in Dimona caring for Holocaust Survivors. Karol Graif is a grateful, longtime member of this center.

We begin with the basics. He was born on January 15, 1940 in Chernivsti, Ukraine, was drafted into the Russian army as a young man, and by the age of 32 applied for an exit visa to Israel. Divorced, the father of four and grandfather of three, the Meir Panim center provides him with what he makes clear is a vital component to his well-being: abundant nourishment, both physical and emotional.

“Three years ago I retired. I feel the center is a second home. They help me with everything. I’m a little ashamed to admit it, but I need to be with other people so much. I’d be so bored, so alone otherwise.”

Much of Karol Graif’s early history are things he doesn’t remember, and which the rest of us should never forget. In the year of his birth, his home town was occupied by the Soviets, who proceeded to torture the Jewish community with Communist directives and Stalinist terror. Close to 3,000 Jews were deported to Siberia for the crime of being “bourgeoise.”

On July 5, 1941, the city was overrun by Nazis and their Romanian allies. Under orders from the Antonescu government, troops were ordered to “punish” the Jews for—ironically—their support of the Communists! What followed was assassinations, culminating in the murder of the chief rabbi, Abraham Mark, and the torching of the synagogue. Yellow stars soon followed and Nazi repression which deprived Jews of civil and economic

rights. A year later, in 1942, he and all fifteen members of his immediate family including his mother, stepfather, brother, aunt, and grandmother, and thousands of other Jews from the surrounding area, were forcibly evacuated to Krasne. The overflowing ghetto led to the establishment of a nearby slave labor camp. The labor was backbreaking, he recalls his mother telling him, and starvation always a threat, as they foraged secretly for potatoes, herbs, berries and anything else that was edible. His mother did all this with a baby to care for.

Despite her best efforts, one day, they came for Karol. It was 1943 and Karol was three years old when they took him from his mother and stood him in a row by an open pit along with the other intended victims of the day’s killing. With powers that seem hard to understand, Karol’s mother found him just in the nick of time, and was able to steal him away back to their hut. In the confusion and overcrowding, no one came to look for him. Soon after, the Jews of the Krasne Ghetto were rounded up and placed in stables which were set on fire, burning them alive. People in the labor camp faced death by shooting. Miraculously, Karol and his family survived, perhaps by returning to Cernivsti where Mayor Traian Popovici had managed to obtain approval for 17,000 Jews to remain to perform compulsory slave labor. By the time the town was reoccupied by the Soviet army in 1944, approximately 30 percent of the Jewish population had survived.

Speaking of his childhood, Karol suddenly loses his easy smile. Quite aside from the horrors of Nazi atrocities, his personal situation as a stepchild being brought up by the biological father of his half-brother was

difficult. His own father had been drafted into the Russian army and simply disappeared. “It is very painful for me to talk about,” he says almost in tears. His own three and a half years as a draftee in the Russian army were also a time of suffering. “It was terrible,” he recalls, shaking his head. “Fifty degrees below zero temperatures.”

When Aliyah from the USSR became possible in the 1970’s, he immediately applied for an exit visa. ‘Four times I applied and four

“ *Meir Panim takes care of me. I have a place set for me.* ”

times I was turned down.” But on the fifth try, his dream finally came true. He and his family, including his mother, arrived in Israel in 1972.

When you ask Karol about his memories of the war, he talks about Israel’s wars. He was here for all of them, starting with the Yom Kippur War, and served himself in the IDF in the army in Lebanon. “I was there for 26 days,” he remembers. “I have been in Israel for fifty years. I love this country.”

When he tries to express his gratitude for the work of Meir Panim which runs the center for Holocaust survivors in Dimona, he is at a loss for words. “There are 35 of us here,” he tells me. “They take care of me. I have a place set for me. I have friends to talk to. They arrange programs, tours around the country. Kol Hakavod to the staff here! My thanks and gratitude to Meir Panim and the staff. What can I tell you? I hope it continues. Thank you, thank you, thank you to all the people making this possible.” ■

Painting a positive picture in Sderot

How a graffiti workshop influences hearts and minds

By Alan Rosenbaum

‘Graffiti,’ according to the venerable Merriam-Webster dictionary, is defined as “usually unauthorized writing or drawing on a public surface.” Yet, in recent years, street art and graffiti, when authorized and permitted by local authorities, has become quite respectable and is considered a legitimate art form. In certain circumstances, graffiti is even used as an effective form of art therapy.

The western Negev town of Sderot (population 27,000), is less than a mile from Gaza, and has been the focus of numerous rocket attacks for many years, which has been a major source of trauma, especially among its youth. Sderot is a low-income community, and teens who come from socio-economically disadvantaged homes are considered high-risk. Meir Panim’s Neighborhood Youth Center in Sderot offers teens a place to socialize with friends while engaging in meaningful activities designed to help ease their trauma and give them tools for success.



Photo: Ingimage

It was in this spirit that teens from Meir Panim’s Neighborhood Youth Center in Sderot recently participated in two art workshops that taught teens how to use spray paint as tools in creating art. As Mimi Rozmaryn, Director of Global Development at Meir Panim, explains, the art workshops perform a dual function. “Everything we do in Sderot has two purposes. Teens can have fun and

come to workshops that serve as a form of ‘stealth therapy.’ This workshop has roots in art therapy, and teens create and express themselves through artistic forms. Being creative and sitting together gives them a foundation of comfort with teens and staff so when times are hard, they can share and build that connection.” The instructors that Meir Panim appoints, she adds, are selected for their ability to give the teens skills, confidence and set a foundation for relationship building.

Aviel Ziv, 25, from Sderot, and Nofar Mallka, 27, from Netivot, led the two art workshops for the Sderot youth. Aviel and Nofar paint professionally and lead workshops in painting and graffiti. In the first workshop, the pair taught the students to use spray paint to

“Art seminars are an excellent opportunity for Sderot teens to get together in a fun and positive social activity.”



Photo: Courtesy Of Meir Panim

create an artistic background of outer space with the moon in the foreground. After the students had become comfortable using spray paint, Aviel and Nofar set aside an area 50 feet across and 8 feet high on the wall of the Youth Center for the students to paint.

The teens chose to create a scene from ‘The Black Panther,’ the popular Marvel Studios film about T’Challa, the superhero from the land of Wakanda. Nofar explains that she and Aviel had initially suggested their own theme for the wall painting, so the fact that the teens themselves chose an alternative subject provided them with a sense of independence and freedom. All the teens who participated wrote their names next to the large picture they had painted. Aviel and Nofar say that the entire experience was “very liberating,

freeing, and fun” for the dozen fifteen and sixteen-year-olds who participated.

Nofar says that drawing and graffiti-type artwork can lessen stress. “When I draw, I disconnect from everything that is going on around me.” The wall of the Center, which was previously empty and boring, is now bursting with color and showcases their work. “The makeover of the wall turned out great,” she adds. Aviel, who grew up in Sderot, part of the ‘Gaza Envelope,’ which is within range of shells and rockets fired from the Gaza Strip, noted, “As someone who has been living in the Gaza Envelope for a long time, I can say that the last thing you think about when you are painting is the security situation.”

Aviel says that the art seminars are an

excellent opportunity for Sderot teens to get together in a fun and positive social activity. Nofar points out that the sessions took place after the students’ regular school hours had ended when they were bored and were in search of a fulfilling activity. “The next time the teens see spray paint,” says Nofar, “they will remember the enjoyable activity that they did together, and ultimately, they may want to experiment with it further, which is what is great about the entire thing.”

The Sderot teens’ reimagining of the Youth Center’s exterior and creation of a beautiful work of art through the graffiti workshops befits the special place that the Center holds for the youth of Sderot. ■



A Food Bank Tale

How a visit to a Meir Panim food bank inspired one volunteer to write a children's book about her experience

By Alan Rosenbaum

It all began on a summer morning in July 2020, when Madelaine Black visited the Meir Panim branch in the coastal town of Or Akiva to volunteer at the food bank. Black was so moved by the interactions between the staff of the center and the volunteers who were sorting vegetables for distribution to people in need, that she decided to write a children's book about her experiences. The book, entitled 'Meir Carrot & the Happy Shopper: A Food Bank Tale', was released this summer and is available on Amazon and at the author's website, meircarrot.com.

"I had never written a children's book before," says Black, who moved to Israel from London some fourteen years ago. "What touched me was seeing several volunteers sorting vegetables and getting their children to go into the empty crates to see if anything was left to take for themselves. Several women who also needed to be on the receiving end of the food charity had volunteered with their kids. Out of pride, they were coming to volunteer and hoping they might be offered some for themselves or take themselves. I saw how Ilanit, the Meir Panim branch manager, was interacting with people because she really knows everyone in the town and knows everyone's needs. That's where I got the idea for the book."

The book, colorfully illustrated by veteran children's book illustrator Shirley Waisman, tells the story of a boy named Danny, a magical carrot called Meir, and the adventures that ensue when Danny and his mother volunteer

at the local food bank. Black says that there is a great deal of discussion in the charity world about givers and receivers. What struck her about her experiences at Or Akiva, she says, was how everyone was working together. "There was a need to brand this process so that you are not a giver or receiver."

Madelaine says that the book is ideal for families snuggling together and creating interaction between generations. "I call it a family book more than a children's book," she says. Black adds that there are very few children's books about soup kitchens, and the story communicates their importance and the need to reduce the stigma of people in need. Madelaine says that her goal is to 'rebrand' the terms of recipient and client to that of 'shoppers.' "Whether one is a giver or taker, we are all in it together," she says.

Proceeds from sales of the book are directed to Meir Panim branches in Israel. ■



Photos: Courtesy

29.3% of families live in poverty, compared with 20.1% in the previous year.

86% of the elderly who receive assistance have experienced loneliness during the crisis

422,000 additional households experienced economic hardship due to the corona crisis.



80% of working families living in poverty have been negatively affected at work because of the Corona crisis

22.6% of families live with food insecurity

80.9% of those who receive assistance said that the food they purchased was not sufficient and they did not have enough money to buy additional amounts

73.9% of those who receive assistance do not have computers for long-distance learning

Photo: Getty Images