

ELEMIOM

העמותה למעורבות במצבי סיכון (ע"ר) youth in distress



YOUTH

In the Shadow of “Swords of Iron”

On October 7th, thousands of teens joined the cycle of risk
We cannot lose them

April 2024 - six months since the outbreak of the war

A status report on at-risk youth



Now I'm a guest

Nadav Alpha, 14, evacuated from Bar'am to Tiberius.

I'm standing on the hotel balcony. Far away from my home, and the war continues. And still the sun shines over the Kinneret, the flag is waving, and the land is beautiful. I feel pride.

From Rabbi Shai Piron, Chairman

The war continues. The eyes are blurred viewing the photos released to the public. Hearts beat fast and erratically. The anxiety about more than 130 hostages is gut wrenching.

We are a strong nation. We've known hardships and loss, and we've known hope. We are a nation that falls and rises. Our faith in goodness, in our righteous path, does not replace a realistic assessment of the situation, and our commitment to repair it. This requires tenacity, professionalism, perseverance, and a country-wide network. In one word: ELEM.

The events of October 7th and the days that followed have grave implications on teens, especially those who have been evacuated from their homes. ELEM's teams have arrived at many of the evacuation centers. We have seen the deep distress, we witnessed severe risk patterns. We did not stand by. We came to their aid. With a variety of programs, we reached our arms out to the youth, pulling them upward, striving to save them from falling into a dark pit.

We are honored to present you with a report summarizing our activities in the last six months. ELEM, Israel's national Emergency Room for at-risk youth, will not stand by. We will do all it takes to support these teens, help them overcome this awful tragedy. They are the future of our country. The activity report reflects the extent of our cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare and additional governmental ministries, local municipalities, and community leaders.

No one will be left behind.



Photography: Keren Gafni



On October 7th, 2023, Israel experienced the biggest national catastrophe since its establishment. Due to the war, approximately 130,000 people were evacuated from their homes. About 30% of them are teens and young adults.

This report presents the situation of the youth we met with.

"You see me here drunk every night. You wouldn't believe that before the war I was an honors student in mathematics. Since the war, I had a fight with my mom and left the house. I hang out around here at night"
(D, evacuated to Tiberius).

Evacuated Youth - Concerning Trends

South – Despite the ongoing struggles of teens from the south, and the accumulation of multiple risk factors, **we observe that there has been some improvement in their mental state, compared to the first quarter following the outbreak of the war.** The improvement stems from the assistance they have been receiving, the supportive community, and the move to more permanent housing solutions, all positive factors that contributed to their adjustment. However, moving back into their homes or less temporary housing solutions, is still afflicted by many systemic hurdles and partial solutions as the education and welfare systems in the south have yet to be fully restored and there is a shortage of professionals in the education and therapeutic realms.

North – While most Israeli citizens have adjusted to life under war, the residents of northern Israel continue to live under emergency provisions – they are still living in temporary lodgings and hotels, in tight quarters, disconnected from their homes, sometimes in conflict with evacuees from other cities or with the hosting communities. For the past six months, they have been living in a state of anxiety, dreading an escalation in the military situation in their region.

These factors diminish the evacuee's personal resilience, and especially that of the teenagers, who are more vulnerable to such pressures. We observe a trend of growing distress at the social and geographic periphery.

Risk Behaviors

**1 in 4 teenagers suffers from depression and anxiety.
50% suffer prolonged loneliness.**



We predict that without extensive long-term mental-health care for teenagers, their state will deteriorate, which could manifest in severe risk patterns like social isolation and seclusion, insomnia, dysfunction, suicidality, and more.

33% Attrition and slipping to the margins

Overt and covert attrition from educational and social systems.



1 in 3 teenagers is truant from school or social frameworks. We must remember that the youth in question were regularly attending those frameworks, and generally did not have trouble respecting authority and boundaries. This detachment is a clear risk factor that can lead to regression in all aspects of life: academic, social, and emotional, and can lapse to severe risk phenomena.



30% Drugs and alcohol use

Use of alcohol among teens aged 12-15.

Increased substance use among boys compared to girls.

Experimentation with, or amplified consumption of, alcohol and drugs at a young age can lead to physical and emotional dependency and addiction problems among evacuated youth, as well as exacerbate their involvement in incidents of violence, crime, and attrition.



*data is based on the youth ELEM met in the evacuation centers

Teenagers Evacuated from the North

Among the teenagers and youth evacuated from the north, there has been a deterioration in their emotional state and risk behaviors: loitering, substance abuse, participation in unsupervised parties, and more. In the absence of holistic solutions, we predict that the deterioration we see on the ground will only be aggravated.

These statistics are a warning sign of a dangerous social trend in which gaps are widening between two populations that are supposedly suffering from the same challenges. However, one group, the southern, was better organized and supported before the war, and is receiving more solutions from the government and gradually getting better; meanwhile the northern group, which had been facing many peripheral hurdles prior to the war, is not receiving such solutions, and in the absence of clear plans for the future, their distresses and risk behaviors are only deteriorating.



Drugs and alcohol -

Teenagers from the north use it at twice the rate of their southern counterparts.



Participation in unsupervised parties -

22% of evacuated teens from the north, compared to 5% from the south. That is 4 times the rate.

Youth at Extreme Risk

Within the routine of war, ELEM continues to work with its usual target audience - teens and youth who lack familial support, are detached from frameworks, discriminated against and marginalized, who now must handle the present challenges on their own. Our staff and volunteers meet these youth at our drop-in centers and on the street, in 24/7 shelters for youth surviving through prostitution and substance abuse, at programs for teens who were involved in sexual assault - as victims or as victimizers, in the project for young mothers at risk, and more.

Common phenomena in extreme risk population:



Loneliness,
depression
and anxiety
87%



Psychoactive
substance
abuse
70%



Absence
of family
support
64%



Poverty
and
hunger
56%



Violence,
domestic and
otherwise
55%

Marginalized populations are pushed even further to the margins and to the bottom of the priority list, their health and wellbeing must not be neglected.

משרד הרווחה
והביטחון החברתי



These programs operate in cooperation and with joint funding from the Ministry of Welfare

* among 200 teens surveyed

April 2024

ELEM responses in the Swords of Iron war

"Breathing Spaces"

11 towns, **20** spaces, **1,000** teens and young adults at risk.
36 staffers, **60** volunteers.

Six months since the war broke out, ELEM continues to operate its physical and virtual emergency spaces, which have been established to take care of teens and young adults, who have been exposed to direct and indirect trauma and suddenly fell headfirst into the cycle of risk. These youth are still facing an erosion of their personal resilience and family support, that manifests through a worsening of risk behaviors.

The Breathing Spaces are informal mental health spaces to support youth at risk and in trauma who have been evacuated from the Gaza Perimeter and from the North. The program cooperates with and is partially funded by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security.

As part of these activities, ELEM staff and volunteers work to identify, track down and connect with youth through informal dialogue to decrease isolation, provide an initial response to trauma and crisis, and an opportunity to vent, providing privacy from family members and assistance in seeking further treatment.

In-School Breathing Spaces

4 towns new In-School Breathing Spaces (Eshkol region, Ofakim, Netanya, and Tiberius), **5** preexisting In-School Breathing Spaces (Kiryat Shmona, Nof HaGalil, Ashdod, two in Holon)

The goal of In-School Breathing Spaces is to identify and provide informal emotional support to teenagers in the education system who find it increasingly challenging to participate in school activities due to the war, some of whom demonstrate risk behaviors and are in danger of overt or covert attrition.



משרד הרווחה
והביטחון החברתי



These programs operate in cooperation and with joint funding from the Ministry of Welfare

Youth In the Shadow of "Swords of Iron"

ELEM Digital

4,995 youths have received services and support in ELEM's digital platforms since October 7th.

ELEM receives a commendation from the Israeli Marketing Association!

"We are awarding ELEM this commendation for assuming responsibility over a population which was afflicted and does not receive official solutions"

Teenagers see the virtual world as a familiar space in which they know how to operate and is a more stable element in their life. As the war broke out and physical public spaces were closed down, the internet remained available, immediate, and familiar to them; their intuitive response was to turn to it to express their feelings, to search for groups of peers, to find resources for handling their situation, and for connection.

ELEM's digital department offers professional responses in three channels:

1. An apparatus for identifying and offering initial interventions to teen distresses on various online platforms.
2. A "virtual clinic" that allows youth to appeal to mental health professionals.
3. A virtual center offering specialized short-term care programs.



A 47% rise

in appeals for emotional support on our digital platforms, compared to the pre-war period.

2,504 appeals

from teenagers in distress that reached the mental health support that ELEM operates on Whatsapp and on our chat.

A 58% rise

in emotional support giving (interventions initiated by staff).

2,003 identifications and initial interventions

with teens who expressed emotional distress on social media such as TikTok, Instagram, and other websites.

431 appeals

of teens on our Arabic chat services. This compared to 230 before the war.

Viral video content on TikTok, dealing with relevant emotional problems, gained over 2 million views in Hebrew, and over 1 million views in Arabic.



In collaboration with the Children at Risk Foundation, Social Security

April 2024



Youth In the Shadow of “Swords of Iron”

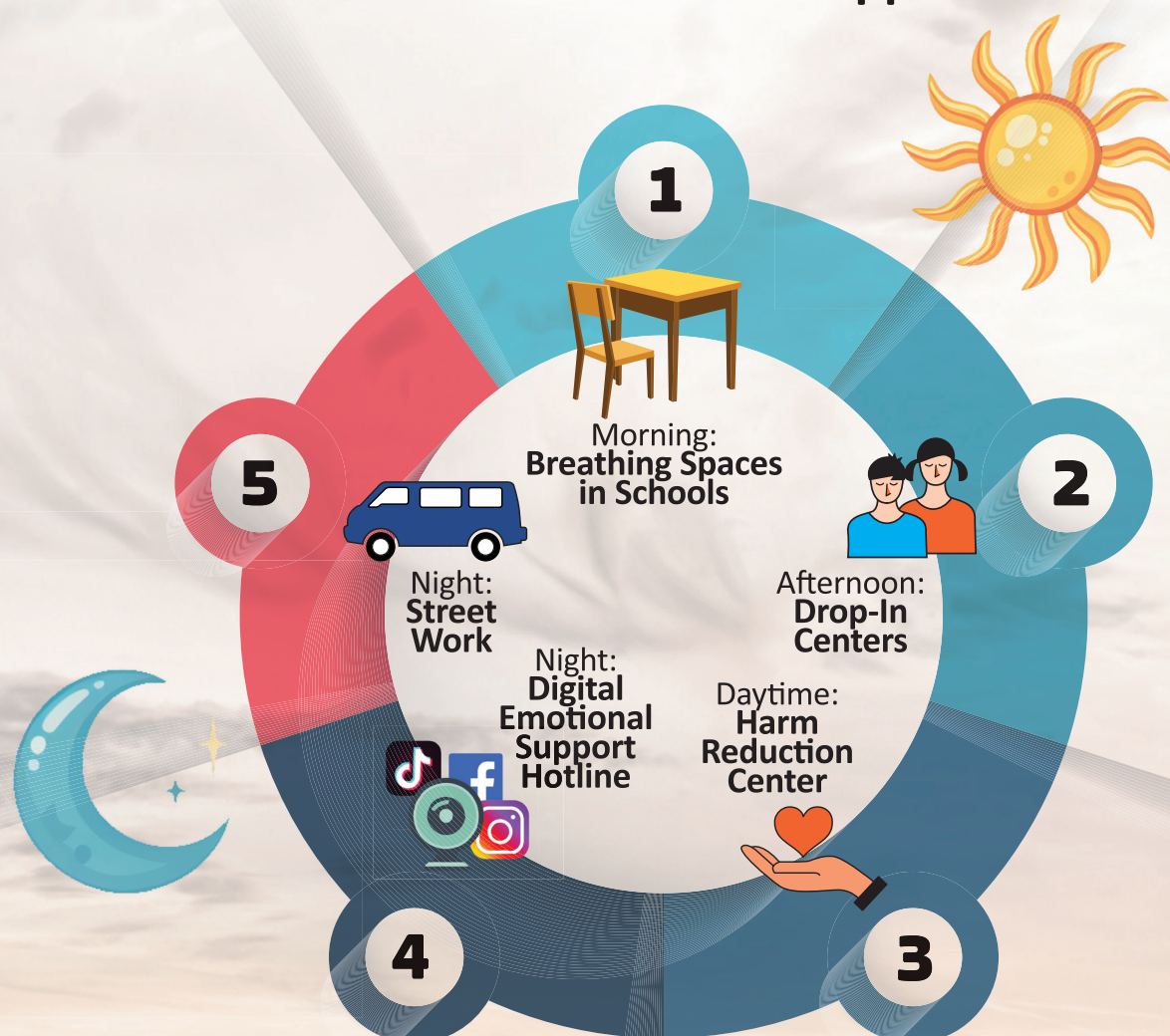
Looking Forward: Developing and Establishing Long-Term Solutions

Our emergency activity in the centers for evacuated teens has proven once again that one of ELEM's greatest advantages is its being a "flexible" and informal organization, and that its main asset in the therapeutic realm is its ability to identify and reach out to teens in need, create eye-level judgment-free relationships, meeting them on their own turf, in informal settings, and thus counseling them, supporting them, and facilitating meaningful change in their lives.

Seeing the complexities of the war situation and its ramifications of youth, we continue to forge channels of cooperation with government ministries, public institutions, businesses, foundations and other third-sector organizations, to advance and develop new responses to current distresses among teenagers.

These days, we are promoting a trauma-oriented holistic model for intervention and care, consisting of a series of responses meant for long-term handling of exposure to trauma and the interruption of life and routine that teenagers have experienced, by creating a safe and stable environment within the local municipality level.

Municipal trauma-oriented comprehensive model for intervention and support:



“from Emergency to Rehabilitation” convention at the President’s House

Professional discourse over the challenges teens face, and the possible responses to address it, were discussed at the “Emergency to Rehabilitation” convention held March 17th, at the President’s house.

The convention was initiated by Mrs. Michal Herzog, the president’s wife, led by ELEM, and attended by teenagers, young adults, and many partners in this struggle.

“The challenges are immense, but we will not be menaced”

Hila Gonen-Barzilai, manager of the Sderot Resilience center.



Youth In the Shadow of “Swords of Iron”

We reached the hotel a bunch of agitated, confused, and sad teens. We didn't know what would happen with us. We felt like a cactus, just don't touch us, we rebuffed anyone who got close. And you did not despair, you slowly made your way to our hearts.

We shared the hardships and the dilemmas with you, and we sometimes made it hard for you, but it's all out of love. Thank you for not giving up on us, we will remember the magical moments in the ELEM tent.

Love,

The teens of Netiv Ha'Asara and Zikim.
The Ye'arim Hotel in Ma'ale Ha'Hamisha



“ I meet her almost every night.
 Her user name is a period. No name, just a period mark.
 She starts talking, or actually, writing.
 That's how it is when you meet teens in the virtual space.
 They come back at night to talk and share.
 Then she asked me “Do you know what it's like, not to have
 a home to go back to?”
 She is only 13 and she survived the hell of that horrific
 Shabbat.
 Like her, thousands of teens lost their home and overnight
 found themselves torn from the reality they used to know.
 Some lost family or friends, some were injured.
 And if all this isn't terrible enough, they have to deal with a
 broken soul, nightmares, fear and severe anxiety.

(A volunteer in ELEM Digital)

We mourn the loss of three of our volunteers, members of the “Good People” project, murdered at the Nova Party: Yonatan Richter Z”L, Sigal Levy Z”L, and Lior Attias Z”L; as well as the loss of Yasmeen Bira Z”L, a volunteer in the “Young Mothers at Risk” project, murdered with her family in Be’eri.



ELEM- Youth in Distress

35 Hayarkon Street, Bnei Brak, 5120423

Tel: 972-3-7686666 | Fax: 972-3-6470319 | Website: www.elem.org.il

משרד הרווחה
 והביטחון החברתי



ELEM works in cooperation with
 The Ministry of Welfare and Social Security