



LOOK THEM IN THE EYES

ISRAELI YOUTH IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

A REPORT ON THE NEW AT-RISK GENERATION IN ISRAEL

PUBLISHED IN ISRAEL DECEMBER 2024 | PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES JANUARY 2025

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The English version of the ELEM Annual Report was prepared in collaboration with the American Friends of ELEM.



STRENGTHENING ISRAELI YOUTH



FROM RABBI SHAI PIRON, CHAIR



I opened the last report with the words “The war continues. The eyes are blurred viewing the photos released to the public.” Six months have passed, and this report can be opened with the same painful words.

A war on several fronts takes a high toll, but there are other battlefields raging alongside it: evacuated families, the families of soldiers and reservists, and no less significant is the war over the souls of our teens. The war is battering their resilience and leading to risk behaviors in unprecedented magnitude. At this hour, we must redefine terms, like “at-risk youth.” If before the war, we were focused on marginalized youth, we are now dealing with risk symptoms that are spreading at the heart of our society, looming over Israeli youth of all stripes. Unfortunately, I do not believe we can really assess the extent of the damages, as the war is still going, but when the battles die down, and when hundreds of thousands will return to their homes, we will discover the heavy load that teens are carrying in their hearts.

ELEM is thankful for the industrious work of different government agencies, especially the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Education, but I believe that we must recognize the extent of the devastation, that we must prepare a national emergency plan to address this in the upcoming years. We cannot stop at first aid; we must prepare for a few years in which we need to rehabilitate the mental health of our youth. I am full of appreciation for the teams out in the field, working tirelessly with a true devotion. But these times demand new solutions: widespread, professional, holistic, and long-term.

The ELEM report reflects the current state of teens, and is not meant to criticize the work of educators, social workers, or the professionals at the government ministries. It aims to be a call to action, to unite us in caring for our youth, and thus – to strengthen Israel’s national security and resilience.

The report in front of you presents ELEM’s work, and our work with the government and local authorities. ELEM – Israel’s national ER for youth in distress – will continue to do everything it can to reach out a helping hand and listen in to check the heartbeat of Israel’s youth.

No one is going to be left behind.

Photography: Keren Gafni



“We often hear the phrase “youth are the future.” This is especially true for a small nation like Israel, surrounded by real risks and a challenging path ahead. With enlistees joining the military at 18, the well-being of today’s youth directly impacts Israel’s future. We must ask ourselves: What happens if we fail to invest in and care for Israel’s youth now?”

Lenore Ruben,
President,
American Friends of ELEM

Liora Attias-Hadar,
Chief Executive Officer,
American Friends of ELEM

THE 2024 ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT PRESENTS THE CURRENT STATUS OF YOUTH IN ISRAEL AND ELEM'S IMPACT ON THE YOUTH POPULATION.

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

The impact on youth has been immense, including:



Direct Trauma



Indirect Trauma



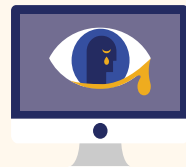
Displacement and Lack of Appropriate Housing



Destabilized Family Units



Lack of Structure



Increased Exposure to Harmful and Trauma-inducing content



Lives, Interrupted



Clash of Identities and Cultures



Ongoing Uncertainty

ELEM BY THE NUMBERS

13,393

teens and young adults who received assistance from ELEM

1,000

evacuated teens regularly attending Breathing Spaces

78,878

78,878 miles covered by ELEM Outreach Vans

10,000

hours donated by volunteers

1,500

youth assisted by Anashim Tovim (The Good People) project at festivals and raves

2,973

nights of informal therapeutic care in ELEM's outreach initiatives

9

research and policy papers published by ELEM staff

21,645,955

views on ELEM Digital social media videos

10,247

therapy hours for survivors of sexual abuse

6,137

appeals to the ELEM Digital chat hotline

194

stories in the media about ELEM's work

144

professional training sessions led by ELEM

31

Knesset hearings in which ELEM participated

ALARMING TRENDS

A TRAUMATIZED GENERATION

Since October 7th, ELEM has been measuring increases in key risk factors, like irregular school attendance, substance abuse, emotional distress, and violence. In surveys involving 3,000 teenage participants, ELEM has noted the following:



IRREGULAR ATTENDANCE:

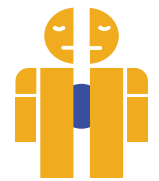


1 IN 3

teenagers report sporadic school attendance.

IRREGULAR ATTENDANCE: This year, teens themselves report irregular attendance in school and other educational institutions, with a number dropping out entirely. School attendance and regular participation in educational programs is crucial during formative adolescent years, as it offers opportunities to build meaningful relationships with positive adult figures, develop critical social skills with peers, and provides teens with access to the formal learning process and all its benefits.

Sporadic attendance is often a gateway to further risk behaviors, such as loitering and delinquency, which increases the likelihood of exposure to many types of abuse. ELEM has made it a priority to reintegrate at-risk teens into educational and social systems, to ensure they regain a stable and supportive educational environment.



EMOTIONAL DISTRESS:



1 IN 3

teenagers report loneliness, depression, and anxiety. Among youth at extreme risk, the rate rises to 60%.

EMOTIONAL DISTRESS: The most frequently reported areas of concern for teens are anxiety, loneliness, and depression, which are natural mental health consequences of a year marked by crisis. If neglected, these symptoms can become aggravated and develop into mental health disorders that require complex treatment. ELEM provides immediate therapeutic interventions, offering formal and informal professional care to alleviate anxiety, loneliness, and depression.



ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE:



1 IN 2

teenagers report drinking alcohol.



1 IN 4

teenagers reported using drugs.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE: The last year has seen a significant increase in drug use and alcohol consumption among teens. Upticks in substance abuse are often seen in times of prolonged periods of stress, with similar trends during the COVID pandemic. The current surge in the aftermath of October 7th and the ongoing Swords of Iron war, with its far-ranging impact on adolescents, stems from the need youth feel to relieve extreme stress. Continued consumption of drugs and alcohol can lead to dependence on psychoactive substances, and ultimately, to addiction.

ELEM's deep understanding of the factors driving teens to substance use enables its staff and volunteers to provide effective alternatives for managing stress and combating loneliness. When necessary, ELEM also refers youth to professional services that treat addiction and dependence on psychoactive substances.



VIOLENCE OUTSIDE THE HOME:



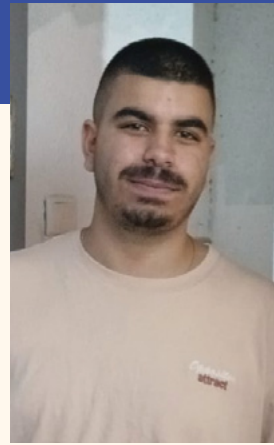
1 IN 5

teenagers were subjected to violence outside their homes: on the street, in schools, or in public places.

VIOLENCE OUTSIDE THE HOME: The war has undermined the sense of security typically felt in public spaces. As a result, many teens feel compelled to arm themselves on the streets, and commonly carry knives or other available weapons for self-defense.

This phenomenon poses serious emotional and physical risks—not only to teens who may become victims of violent attacks, but also to those who find themselves increasingly involved in committing violent acts. ELEM's Outreach Van night patrols provide emergency interventions and detect at-risk youth in rough areas of a city, and serve to increase the feeling of safety on tough streets at night. The presence of trusted adults and a familiar organization like ELEM helps reduce nighttime violence and vandalism.

BEYOND THE HEADLINES: INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH



NACHMAN, TZFAT

“Going out is like Russian roulette. Will there be a missile? There usually is. This is how I’ve been living for the past year.”

At age 17, Nachman recognizes the sound of drones from afar, his explanation for regularly skipping school sounds almost reasonable, and he doesn’t understand where the support is for the North that’s been promised. And it’s already been a year.

In a parallel universe, Nachman’s life would have been completely different. At 17, he should be spending his days playing video games, strumming his guitar, hanging out with friends, and hiking Israel’s gorgeous trails. But Nachman lives in Tzfat, and nothing is as it should be. Instead of playing guitar, he listens for the sounds of missiles. Unlike the teens supported by ELEM’s Breathing Spaces, Nachman’s family hasn’t been evacuated. He lives amidst constant missile alerts, limited access to bomb shelters, and a deep sense of systemic neglect.

“We feel exposed all the time,” Nachman says. “Everyone knows there are missiles up North, but all anyone says is, ‘Oh well, it will pass.’ They’re trying to normalize it, but this is the reality my family and friends are living.”

We’re sitting in Tel Aviv, interviewing Nachman over Zoom, and we’re interrupted by a few missiles that send the residents of central Israel into bomb shelters for about ten minutes.

“So you have a few alarms in the center now,” he says when we return. “Maybe you’ll finally understand the reality of the North for the past year!”

ELEM: You’re right, Nachman. There’s a big lack of understanding here in central Israel about your experiences. We want to hear more about it. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Nachman: I’m Nachman, I’m almost 17 years old. I live in Tzfat with my mother, brother, and little sister, and my dad lives in the center. I study, or maybe I should say should be studying, in a Yeshiva here in Tzfat.

ELEM: What is Tzfat like right now?

Nachman: When people ask me what Tzfat is like, I usually say “Sababa,” it’s fine, but I do that because I don’t want them to worry. But the truth is it’s not fine. We are in a war zone here, with airplanes, explosions, missiles, and rockets. People get injured. Sometimes people die.

ELEM: And how are you holding up?

Nachman: I try to keep cool. I go on as usual. You have to understand that this doesn’t mean it’s not scary, it’s just that sadly I’m already used to it, used to the

noise, the alarms, the plane engines, and the explosions.

ELEM: How do you live like this for over a year?

Nachman: This was a really challenging year. The fact that we are not being evacuated – it’s really bad. You know what? I feel abandoned.

ELEM: Can you tell me what you mean when you say abandoned?

Nachman: Abandoned for me means that the government is not helping us. And I’m talking about all the different aspects. We were not evacuated, so we don’t get any financial support. But in our area there’s nothing left, because everyone’s scared. Businesses are closed, people here get up and leave. This isn’t the North I know. I come home Thursday before the weekend, I see people running away, loading up the car and leaving. Does this make sense to you?

ELEM: Honestly, it doesn’t. How are things security-wise? How protected or exposed are you there?

Nachman: Tzfat is a dense city, so it’s a clear target for Hezbollah. The bomb shelters are pretty scarce and that is significant. It’s a feeling of being exposed all the time. There’s no sense of security. It feels like Russian roulette. Will there be a missile? Won’t there be one? I’m in a constant state of tension because there’s hardly any time to run if there is an alarm. We have less than thirty seconds.

Missiles have fallen here. I’m not even talking about the Biriya forest. One fell right near my house. The whole forest is burnt, and everything smells like smoke. We were standing in ELEM’s Hafuch Center and you saw the air filled with ash. The entire forest looks like the remains of a bonfire.

IT’S NO COINCIDENCE THAT NACHMAN MENTIONS THE BIRIYA FOREST, ONE OF ISRAEL’S LARGEST FORESTS, WHICH BORDERS THE CITY OF TZFAT. NACHMAN LOVES NATURE, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE NATIONAL PARKS AND NATURE OF ISRAEL’S NORTHERN REGION AFFECTS HIM ON A PERSONAL LEVEL.

In the beginning of the war, people were talking about southern towns in the Gaza Perimeter, and it’s truly painful, but we are in pain too. We are pained about what’s left of the North, we have such gorgeous landscapes here, rivers and camping sites, and it’s all been abandoned. In one day it all goes up in smoke. Literally, this is happening every day.

ELEM: Let’s talk about school.

Nachman: There’s not much to talk about. This was a really challenging year. My homeroom teacher was barely around during my 11th grade. He was doing reserve duty for most of the year. You gotta understand, this teacher was the reason most of us were coming. Since 9th grade, I’ve had a hard time attending school regularly as I should. It’s hard for me, and my homeroom teacher was the one who empowered me to come. If he called me in the morning and I wasn’t up, he would come to my house to wake me up and bring me to school. Now he’s off in reserves, so I didn’t come in for a few months – there isn’t someone to motivate me. In the whole school, he’s the only one who can teach me. He’s honestly a really good man and if I can equate it to the religious world – he’s my rabbi.

ELEM: And does this affect your social life?

Nachman: This year is really tough for me, socially also. I felt that there’s a wall put up, saying “Stop! You’re not going out, you are

staying home.” I hate the feeling that I’m limited. That’s why I disappeared for three months in the beginning of the war: I didn’t come into the Hafuch or the Volume (a music center in the city) for three or four months. There’s no social life. People may forget, but we are the generation that went through COVID and had everything on Zoom. Just when that ended, the war started, and we’re asked to go on Zoom again. So that was sort of working for about a week and a half – but then you’re home again, alone again, and it’s not working. It collapses. We had our friend group and we’d meet on a daily basis at first, but since there’s no school, these connections wither away.

ELEM: And how has the war affected your everyday life?

Nachman: Everyday life? There’s no “everyday” here for a year. You really want to know? I don’t sleep at night, I don’t come to school like I should, I don’t see friends, I don’t come to the Hafuch center. If I’m driving and there’s a truck on the road, I get scared. I worry that if a rocket lands here, there will be nowhere for me to run. That’s my train of thought when I drive. One year has affected this 17-year-old quite enough, don’t you think?

ELEM: The situation you’re describing sounds really difficult, and yet you manage. What do you want Israeli decision-makers to hear from you?

Nachman: It’s important to me that I tell them to take care of this area more. Especially when it comes to coverage in the media, I really feel abandoned. They make a big deal about any missile to the center, or to Netanya. But I’ve been living like this for a year! I’m not saying this to criticize the government, maybe I am, but to me the deal is the media. I don’t understand why what’s happening here is not covered. The news does not treat us like they treat the center. They say “Oh, there are missiles up North. Oh well, it’ll pass.” They’re trying to normalize it, but this is my routine, this is the life my family and friends are living. The routine of the North is that it’s been left to fend for itself. ■

**“ONE YEAR HAS AFFECTED THIS
17-YEAR-OLD QUITE ENOUGH,
DON’T YOU THINK?”**





LAVIE, SAFSUFA

“Every explosion is another wound to my soul!”

Lavie, a smart, self-aware teen who expresses himself with surprising maturity, is unable to understand why he feels so abandoned by the country he loves. Lavie and his family live in the northern village of Safsufa, near Meron, which, despite regular rocket attacks, was not evacuated.

Lavie’s life used to revolve around a diverse array of social, athletic, and volunteering activities, but he now finds himself constantly worried about the physical and mental well-being of his family and neighbors, his family’s financial struggles, and feeling betrayed by the institutions he once looked to for support.

ELEM: Hi Lavie, can you introduce yourself?

Lavie: My name is Lavie. I am 17 years old, and I have a twin brother and an older brother. We live with our parents in the village Safsufa, not far from the border with Lebanon. I volunteer in the fire department, play rugby at “Lions of the Galilee,” and this last year, during the war, my twin brother and I volunteered within the village’s emergency team, helping the community’s protection squad.

THIS WAR DISRUPTED EVERYTHING: SCHOOL, FRIENDS, ACTIVITIES, SOCIAL ACTIVITIES. IF A YEAR AGO, YOU’D HAVE DESCRIBED MY CURRENT LIFE TO ME, I WOULDN’T HAVE BELIEVED YOU.



ELEM: What is your life like now?

Lavie: Very hard. It’s not a life. It’s definitely not the life I want for myself or my family. This war disrupted everything: school, friends, activities, social activities. If a year ago, you’d have described my current life to me, I wouldn’t have believed you. I couldn’t imagine such a bizarre reality. The war caused my family’s restaurant to close down. My family has been operating this restaurant in Tzfat for 30 years. It survived the Second Lebanon War. But now it’s closed because the city is empty, and those who stayed are not going out. And because our village is not officially evacuated, the state is not paying us compensation or anything. So my parents are left with no job, no livelihood. Sometimes, I miss getting up in the morning, going to school, and passing by the restaurant just to say hi. I don’t have that anymore.

ELEM: That sounds rough. If you had to put all your feelings into one word, what would it be?

Lavie: Abandonment. I don’t even need to think to answer this. I feel that I, my family, my home, the North – we’ve been abandoned. There’s a big difference between those who were evacuated and those who weren’t. I live under constant fear of the Hezbollah attacks from Lebanon. I’m in danger every

moment of the day; other than the missiles from Lebanon, there’s an artillery battery here. Every launch from it sets my entire house shaking. And I still don’t understand why we weren’t evacuated. Why isn’t the government taking care of us? Are we worth less than Bar’am or Sasa*? Tziv’on is one kilometer from me and they were evacuated, so why are we still in the battle zone? Because of a few meters? It’s crazy that I’ve been living in this horror for a year.

ELEM: So how do you manage?

Lavie: Now I’m working, so I can help my family. I found a job at a fashion store in Rosh Pina. I get there by public transport and hitchhiking, but it’s pretty hard to get there with all the alarms, explosions and interceptions. Sometimes you’re somewhere on the road, and you suddenly hear a bunch of booms over your head. Or airplanes whirring.

ELEM: How do you live with this fear?

Lavie: A while ago we decided to go to Tel Aviv to chill for a little bit. We made it to the gas station in Jish, about five minutes from here, and a rocket hit like five hundred meters from us. We turned right back home. I feel that people here are dead on the inside. Every explosion feels like another wound to my soul.

ELEM: What do you do to mitigate the impacts of this reality?

Lavie: It is a struggle that you only understand when you live here. If you don’t live here, you really don’t understand what it means when your house is shaking after an Iron Dome interception, and then a minute later, it’s shaking again from the artillery here. Sometimes I can’t breathe when there’s this boom. I wonder if a home bomb shelter

* Nearby Kibbutz in the North, which was evacuated

unit is even able to withstand something like that. But I’ve learned to mitigate this by breathing, and that really helps me. I breathe in really deeply after each explosion that rattles me. I’ve learned not to repress it. Sometimes it helps to go out and play rugby, even though they keep changing our field because of the situation.

ELEM: Lavie, this is a difficult and unfair reality that you’re living because of the war. I hope people will read this and understand how hard life is here in the North. Do you have a parting message?

Lavie: Yes, I want to tell you that we can’t live like this. I’m tired of it. We don’t want to stay here because this isn’t what we grew up on, what we dreamt of. There’s no scenario I could’ve imagined where the country that I admired and cherished would betray me like this.

Bring us back our North. Bring us back our homes. And bring the hostages home! ■



MUHAMMAD, JADEIDI-MAKR



“Being a young Arab citizen in Israel is very complicated. The war has made it more difficult.”

When Muhammed speaks, there’s a sparkle in his eye. He tells us of his love for life, and how he misses the days before the war, when he used to meet his friends to sing and have fun. Back then, there was no fear. He speaks with us about his wish for an end to the war, and for Israel’s leadership to work with the Arab

communities to tackle its increasing rates of violence. He wants to see more investment in Israel’s Arab youth, who have a lot of potential—who are eager to fit into society, to succeed in the job market, to contribute to the country—but lack resources and options. As an optimistic and life-loving person, he believes wholeheartedly in a future where all this is possible.

ELEM: Hi, Muhammad. Can you introduce yourself?

Muhammad: My name is Muhammad. I’m 17 and a half, and I live in Jadeidi-Makr. I’m a 12th-grade student in trade school, in the car mechanics track. I like hanging out, listening to music, and singing. A friend and I have a YouTube channel, where we post our songs. My dream is to be a famous singer with music that people love.

ELEM: How has this last year been for you?

Muhammad: The last year has been the hardest in my life, because I’m a boy who likes to live. I like to go out, sing, and hang out with my friends. This situation and the war have limited me. I’ve been closed up in the house, and it’s prevented me from having fun with my friends. It made me really angry at the situation and at everyone. I really miss my regular life, before the war. Now I’m home a lot, just moving between the house and my job at a hardware store. Life became boring: there’s no hanging out, there’s nothing. And even when I go to work, I’m always afraid of rockets and missiles, so I come back home as fast as I can, so I don’t get caught outside when it happens. There are alarms here

three or four times a day. We are always living in fear, and even if I want to go out, I think twice. Usually I’ll decide not to go, because it’s best to stay home, safe. I have to calculate everything.

ELEM: Where were you on the 7th of October?

Muhammad: I was home, watching TV. At first I didn’t believe the news. I thought it was a bad dream. When I realized that this was really happening, I was afraid. I started thinking, what if the terrorists get here and enter the houses like they did in the South? What would they do to us? Kill us? Kidnap us? I had a lot of anxieties and thoughts that kept me from sleeping, mostly in the first few months.

ELEM: And how did this affect your life, your school, your social connections?

Muhammad: What happened this past year really hit me hard and made school difficult. It was very hard to learn on Zoom, because I didn’t even understand how to log in. I had no privacy or quiet place at home to focus on studying, so I didn’t always log in to class. Because of the situation, I’d often stay up very late, until early morning, and I couldn’t get up

for classes. Socially, like I said, I couldn’t go out with my friends.

ELEM: Was there something that helped you through these difficult times?

Muhammad: The only place that made me feel better, and where I could hang out with my friends, was the ELEM Migdalor center in Akko. As soon as the team reopened the center, even though it was limited to small groups because of the IDF security restriction, I was very glad to go back there, and to see my friends who I love and missed. The amazing team there also helped us get out of the complications of the time we’re living through, with one-on-one talks and fun workshops. It all really helped me let go of the anger I was holding, and I started feeling a little better. I’m a guy who likes to express his feelings! I like talking, whether I’m mad or happy. The ELEM staff here has really been listening to me like they were family, giving me advice and just being there for me. I want to say how much I love you, Leila, Majdi, and Ala’ah! But Migdalor is hosted at a public shelter, and it was subject to a few incidents of vandalism, until it got totally ruined. We had to stop activity there. We were moved to a temporary location, and once it’s ready, we’ll go back to meeting there. In the meantime I really miss them all. We try to stay in touch through Google Meet, phone, video calls, but it’s not the same. The center is really a second home for me and suddenly it’s out of order. I miss the Migdalor staff.

THE ONLY PLACE THAT MADE ME FEEL BETTER, AND WHERE I COULD HANG OUT WITH MY FRIENDS, WAS THE ELEM MIGDALOR CENTER IN AKKO.

ELEM: What do you think the future will be like?

Muhammad: I want to be optimistic. I don’t want to be negative. My dad said that the

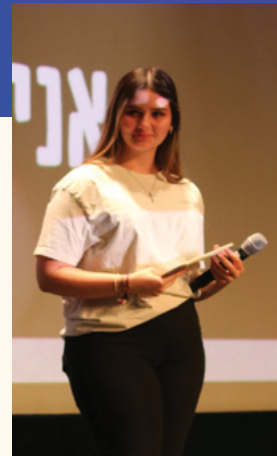
second Lebanon war ended with a deal. So I’m waiting for that deal, because I believe that evil has to be gone and the war has to end, so we can all go back to living a normal life and feel safe. I believe it and wish for it with all my heart.

ELEM: Muhammed, could you please tell us a bit about what it’s like to be an Arab teen in Israel, especially this past year?

Muhammad: Being a young Arab citizen in Israel is very complicated, and the war made it more difficult. There’s no safety. I’ve always felt fear because some people in the Jewish community think we are all terrorists, and want to kill us because of that. We avoid expressing our opinions and feelings for real. For example, we don’t put anything on social media, even if it’s just to say that we don’t want war. We’re afraid the police will arrest and interrogate us, because every word we say could be interpreted as radical. But as an Arab teen, I really just want to live peacefully, get equal opportunities, and feel safe.

ELEM: Do you have a message for the decision-makers and leaders?

Muhammad: I want to tell the adults and the decision makers in this country to make an effort and stop the wars, because me and other youth love life. We just want to live and be happy. And I ask that you see us, that you invest in us—the Arab youth—who don’t have many opportunities to get ahead in the job market or in good careers. Because there are no job opportunities and the economic situation is so bad, many teens my age end up in gangs. Give us opportunities, and support us so we can advance and succeed. We are part of the next generation of Israel. We want to have respectable jobs, and we want to reduce the violence in our communities. We don’t want to be afraid of internal violence, on top of the war. I want the decision makers in Israel to see the potential in teens like me, to help us find jobs, to help us live well. Because really, I love life. ■



GOMEH, KFAR AZA

“You have to be aware of how much this year has affected us. Stop talking about the youth – talk with the youth”

Gomeh Hamias was evacuated from her home in Kfar Aza and ended up in Shfa'yim, a kibbutz on the coast just north of Tel Aviv. In conversation with Yoav Roth, the manager of ELEM's Shfa'yim Breathing Space, she recounts what she went through in the past year and she asks us not to look away.

Yoav Roth, ELEM: Hi Gomeh, could you tell me a little about yourself?

Gomeh: My name is Gomeh Hamias. I'm 18 years old from Kfar Aza. I currently have my own room in the hotel in Kibbutz Shfa'yim, with the rest of my kibbutz community. In a month, we're supposed to move into a new temporary residence in Kibbutz Ruhama, in the south. Right now there's nothing there yet, so we are waiting for things to look a little more normal, so we can move there.

ELEM: Once it's possible, will your family return to Kfar Aza? Do you talk about it?

Gomeh: Yes, it's a conversation that keeps changing. There are days when we want to go back, but there are days when we're not sure. We talk about the security breaches in our area, or there are new revelations about scandalous security errors that apparently happened on the 7th, and we just can't be sure that they won't happen again. These things make us rethink returning at all. On top of this, in order to come back, we need the war to end, and we need the kibbutz to be rebuilt. Right now, none of that is happening. So when we see that all these things are at a standstill, it shakes our conviction that we'll return. All in all, I certainly want to go back to the kibbutz. If this happens with my family or it's me alone – we will find out.

HAMAS BASICALLY TURNED MY HOUSE INTO A LOCAL COMMAND CENTER, USING THE ROOF, WHILE MY FAMILY WAS LOCKED IN THE SHELTER.

ELEM: How has this year been for you?

Gomeh: There are things that are hard to convey with words. On the morning of the 7th, I was in Kibbutz Or HaNer*, with a delegation of teens from Germany who got there a couple of days before. We woke up to the sirens and ran to the shelter, while news about the invading terrorists started flowing in. We were really worried about our family and friends, and also we were trying to calm the German teens. At 5 PM, we were evacuated to Kibbutz Dorot**, and the whole time, I was on WhatsApp with my mother and brother who were hiding in the shelter at home in Kfar Aza. They were updating me about what's going on there. Hamas basically turned my house into a local command center, using the roof, while my family was locked in the shelter.

*A close by Kibbutz in the Gaza Perimeter that was not infiltrated.

**A nearby Kibbutz further from the border with Gaza

My dad, who lives abroad, was visiting for the holidays and heard there were terrorists in the Kibbutz, so he came to help. In the battles, he was severely injured. He was hit by bullets and an RPG rocket. At 10 PM they called me to let me know he was wounded, just as we were getting on a bus to Mitzpe Ramon, to get away from the fighting zone. It was so surreal to be far from my family and friends in those days, especially since two days later I heard that a good friend of mine from the kibbutz, a girl my age, was murdered. But then later we found out she wasn't murdered, she was kidnapped. Thankfully she was returned in the hostage deal, but in those moments when I got the message, I fell apart. I realized that I had to get to Shfa'yim, where everyone was evacuated to, to be with my community.

ELEM: What was it like in Shfa'yim, at first?

Gomeh: At first, it was a big mess. Our community underwent a massacre. A lot of people wanted to come and help with equipment, clothes, toys, and all sorts of activities and therapeutic services. But then most of them left. The fact that the ELEM's Breathing Space stayed with us the entire year was very meaningful to us. At first, when we were rushing between funerals and memorials, the Breathing Space gave us a reason to leave the room, to sit and share the unbelievable stories and the horrifying experiences with the staff and with each other. And we could cry and laugh and get their help with anything we needed. They also got us instant noodles, tea, cookies and even home-cooked food, at a time when we were only eating hotel food.

ELEM: What does Kibbutz Kfar Aza look like today?

Gomeh: There are places that look exactly as they were left after October 7th, like the "Young Generation" neighborhood that was attacked really viciously. And there are places that are already being kind of rebuilt, and places where if you walk around, other

than how empty of life they are, it seems as if nothing had happened.

ELEM: This transfer to Kibbutz Ruhama, how are you feeling about it happening now?

Gomeh: I feel like it's just in time. I just finished 12th grade, I finished my year of school and work, and I'm supposed to enlist into the army's observation troops in January. It means I'll live in Ruhama for a short time, so I'll be able to organize and design the house a little bit, and then I'll join the army. I'm also really comforted by the fact that my dad was recently signed out of the hospital after a long treatment process, and he is really doing better and better.

ELEM: How are you feeling about enlistment? Are you considering the criticism of the army's disregard of the warnings from the observation troops, and the accusations that they were abandoned?

Gomeh: The truth is I've wanted to be in the observation troops since I was a little girl. During the holidays, we used to make food packages for them. When I realized I can't be assigned to a combat role, I found out that I can be in the observation troops, and I can even protect my home on the Gaza border. What happened on the 7th only strengthened my desire to do this. I feel that it's important that someone from Kfar Aza come back to the South and take a role in the observation troops.

ELEM: Can you tell us a little about the Kfar Aza community and what happened to it in the past year?

Gomeh: We are a very diverse and very tight-knit community. We have members of all ages and origins, secular and religious. Of course, like any place, there are some conflicts, but nothing serious. All in all, we are a very strong community. I think the young generation of the kibbutz is very strong, and will keep the torch lit. This last

year has been very hard on us. We've had to live in really tight, enclosed quarters. We are suddenly like the kibbutz of old times, when everyone had the same things and everyone knows everything about everyone, because we don't have privacy, really. There are no private spots, no places to chill, the neighbor's door is right across from your room and everything is exposed.

On the other hand, we've also seen how strong our kibbutz is, and we've done really incredible things: we initiated the Youth March for the Hostages, we got significant media involvement, we hosted the Alternative Memorial Ceremony, we helped spearhead a rehabilitation fund and therapeutic efforts to restore the community. These powers are coming to the surface; I don't know if I should say "thanks to", but following the events of October 7th.

ELEM: Do you see differences in the way teens and adults have been affected by this year?

Gomeh: I think that for adults, the struggle is much harder right now. A lot of the adults in the kibbutz are the children of the founders of the Kibbutz. Seeing the Kibbutz like this, the destruction and the struggles of the community, is really hard on them. You might also say that we youngsters developed a resilience to this since kindergarten, because we grew up in this reality and they didn't, so they don't have the tools we developed at a young age. It makes it much harder for them.

ELEM: How has this year affected you? Socially, emotionally, in terms of school?

Gomeh: Socially it was very hard. Most of my friend group are from the Sha'ar HaNegev High School, and they weren't evacuated to Shfa'yim with us. I keep in touch with them, but it's not the same, because they're far away. I didn't really find my place with the teens here in Shfa'yim, but that's fine. Soon we'll go back south and I'll be close to my friends again.

School itself was actually more positive for me. We lost about four months of learning, and then we were put in a school that was not suitable, but once we banded together and fought for ourselves, we were transferred to the Hof HaSharon High School. They allotted a group of teachers specifically to us, and that really helped me. I don't think I would have been able to achieve as much as I did this year if not for these teachers that were really available for us, and the one teacher who focused on me and helped me personally. But there are others from my group, that all these changes just ruined the school year for them.

Emotionally, it's really unpleasant that there's no privacy and everyone knows what you are doing all the time. Like if I come back from somewhere and I have a shopping bag, everyone will come see what I bought. If I dress up nicely, everyone will ask what's the occasion. My boyfriend and I broke up and got back together, so when he came to visit everyone was all over me saying "Oh, you are back together." I don't like that.

ELEM: What about mentally? Difficulties, fears, sleeping troubles, stuff like that?

Gomeh: There are fears, but they're different from what we used to have. We had the regular fears of every family in the Gaza Perimeter: what if a terrorist comes while you're sleeping? Now it's different. There's a fear that everything is returning to the way it was, that people expect us to go back to the south, and we'll be treated as if nothing happened.

ELEM: What do you think we need to pay attention to when talking to teens? Is there a message you want to state?

Gomeh: I think we need to be aware of how this year affected the teens. There really is a negative change. When you put a thirteen-year-old in a hotel room alone, with no supervision, it's not good. My mom, for example, insisted that I be in the

room across from hers, but I know that not everyone did this, but it's very important, because kids need adult supervision.

The second thing I think is important is that anyone who went through the 7th of October gets some type of therapy, but this isn't happening right now. Most teens my age are being treated, but a lot of younger teens and kids are not. They think that therapy will make them feel that they are supposed to be miserable. But it's important to explain that they aren't weak, they just went through a traumatic experience. Parents need to understand that what their kid went through is not normal, even if the kid acts normal and everything seems fine. It's important that teachers in the education system be aware of it, because there are many behavioral changes in survivors. We are talking about teens that went through a very difficult experience, and they are in an unknown environment.

A lot of parents are not in a position where they can supervise and support their kids, because they themselves are in a bad place, emotionally, or they're part of families that fell apart. It's important that teachers fill in that gap. We must listen to the youth. Teens don't like it when you treat them like victims. You need to address them in a way that emphasizes how strong they are. It's true that something bad happened, but we are strong and we'll get through it. Don't talk about the teens – talk to the teens.

I hope that peace and quiet will be restored, that all the evacuees will return home, and most of all, that our hostages come back. In Kfar Aza we are still waiting for five more kidnapped community members: Emily Damari, Gali and Ziv Berman, Keith Segal, and Doron Steinbrecher. We miss them and pray for their swift return home. ■



Kfar Aza

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<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>
via Wikimedia Commons

The most important thing is providing a space for youth to talk to someone and process the trauma. The teens think that their pain is unheard. They need validation, a safe space to talk about how much they miss their friends, how lonely they feel, how they have lost their community, how frustrated they are with school. The Breathing Space invites them to bring their full selves.

MICHAL ELICHAJ
DIRECTOR OF TIBERIAS BREATHING SPACES



AT WAR: ELEM'S SPECIALIZED SUPPORT FOR ADOLESCENTS

Since the outbreak of the “Swords of Iron” war in October 2023, ELEM stepped up in unprecedented ways to assist thousands of affected youth. From bolstering dozens of existing programs for youth who were already at-risk prior to the war, to quickly developing tailored mental health interventions to support newly at-risk youth, ELEM was one of the first organizations to adapt to wartime.

Within 48 hours of the October 7th attacks, ELEM was on the ground meeting hundreds—and then thousands—of additional teens. With the partnership and funding from the Ministry of Welfare, ELEM established a network of immediate emergency services, which are still in high demand fourteen months later. These programs support teens and youth dealing with myriad forms of trauma and distress, including: loss of family and friends, disrupted routines, disconnection from home, loss of community support, diminished resilience and family systems, and loss of trust and hope for the future. These phenomena often aggravate risk factors for youth.

ELEM continues to provide formal and informal interventions to youth at-risk due to war, along with those navigating pre-existing challenges, such as homelessness, domestic abuse, marginalization, disconnection from social or family frameworks, and sexual abuse. Staff and volunteers meet with these teens and youth at a variety of locations: at our drop-in centers and on the streets, at our 24/7 centers for youth impacted by sexual exploitation or involved in sex work, at the shelter for homeless youth, in programs for young survivors of sexual abuse, at the Young Mothers project, and at the centers and therapy groups for victims and perpetrators of sexual violence.

Many of the youth supported by ELEM's centers and therapy modalities tailored to war trauma were not previously at-risk youth, but were thrust into ELEM orbit due to direct and indirect exposure to trauma in the days and months since October 7th.



“I choose what to talk about and when. It helps me remember that I am more than just an ‘evacuee’. I still exist.”

OREN, 15
DISPLACED TEEN IN THE ELEM BREATHING SPACE

ELEM HAS DEVELOPED SPECIALIZED MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH DURING THE SWORDS OF IRON WAR:

BREATHING SPACES

 **60 EMPLOYEES**
50 VOLUNTEERS



17 CENTERS IN 11 TOWNS

Tveria · Zichron Ya'akov · Nah'sholim · The Yardenit · Herzeliya · Shfa'yim · Netanya · Tel Aviv · Jerusalem · Ma'ale HaHamisha · Eilat

More than 30% of Israel's 130,000 internally displaced people are youth. Current statistics suggest that approximately 9,000 of them are high school age. ELEM has assisted 1,000 of these youth in 2024 through the Breathing Spaces program.

Although there are more formal therapeutic options for youth evacuated from the Gaza perimeter and Israel's north, many youth are reluctant to be labeled as someone who needs "treatment," and rarely seek it out.

ELEM staff and volunteers work to identify, track down, and connect with youth through informal dialogue in order to decrease loneliness, provide an opportunity to vent, offer assistance in seeking further treatment, and provide an initial response to trauma and crisis.

ELEM's Breathing Spaces offer warm, relaxed spaces for informal, immediate, on-the-ground support for teens. They look like friendly pop-up spaces in lobbies and courtyards of hotels where displaced families are being hosted. Furnished with bean bag chairs and rugs, and offering musical instruments and snacks, Breathing Spaces are welcoming spaces for youth, free from the oppressive smallness of shared hotel rooms and offering a private space to express their feelings.

At first, many youth don't want to talk about their personal situation and prefer to play board games, have snacks and talk about themselves outside of the context of war. However, over time, these teens open up, and ELEM begins to guide them on the long path towards healing. The effectiveness of Breathing Spaces relies on ELEM's informal approach and voluntary format with youth. This allows for openness, honesty, mitigation of feelings of shame, and meaningful interventions at which youth feel safe, seen, and supported.



Breathing Spaces operate in cooperation with the ministry of Welfare.

BREATHING SPACES IN SCHOOLS

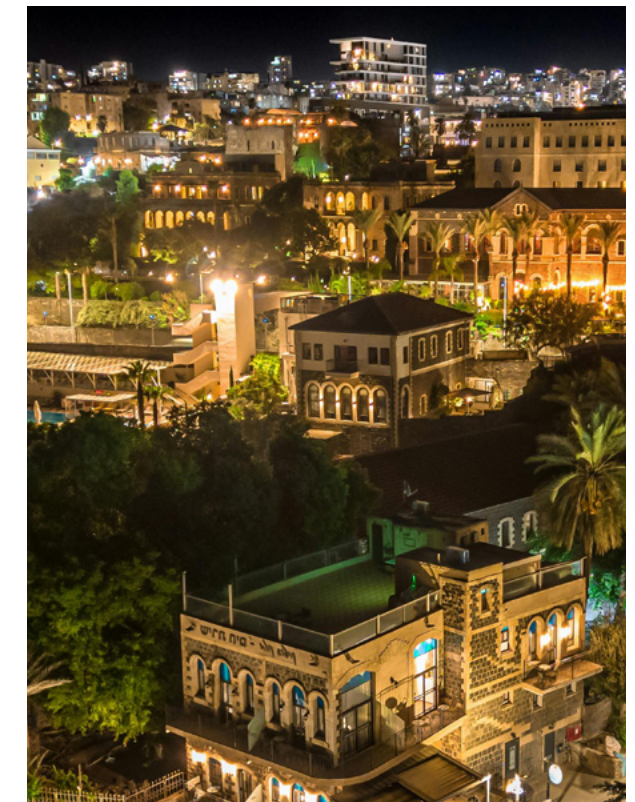


Tveria · Dead Sea · Ofakim · Acre · Kiryat Mal'achi · Netanya

As displaced families find long-term living situations, ELEM has shifted Breathing Spaces from evacuation centers to schools. Building on Breathing Spaces and ELEM's existing successful school 'Shluk' model, ELEM is launching a drop-in center that focuses on the needs of evacuees in a newly established school for evacuees in the North, and in re-opened schools in the South. The staff at these informal spaces in schools identifies, guides, and refers teens to relevant services in the community.

These support services target teens who are attending school, but as part of the repercussions of the war, they struggle to function as normal, and are at risk of dropping out of the educational framework. Many are beginning to display significant risk symptoms and behaviors, and are at risk of truancy. These in-school centers provide guidance and social-emotional support.

In-school Breathing Spaces are operating in cooperation with the National Insurance Institute.



Tveria (Tiberias)

Alexander Bobrov, Pexel
<https://www.pexels.com/@alexander-bobrov-390088/>

ELEM DIGITAL

The October 7th attack in Israel and the ongoing war has significantly increased the number of youth exposed to violent content online, as well as the number of youth experiencing symptoms of trauma or crisis. Many of these youth cannot or will not seek help in person. In response, ELEM Digital staff were trained in new modes of trauma-informed care, and the hours of the chat and outreach platforms were extended. ELEM is supporting a wide range of youth online, including those with culturally specific needs.

For example, Arab youth in Israel face intensified issues pertaining to belonging and identity since October 7th. ELEM's support in Arabic has quadrupled since October 7th, with 844 chat conversations initiated by youth, as compared to a pre-war average of 230 chats, and with 919 initial interventions.

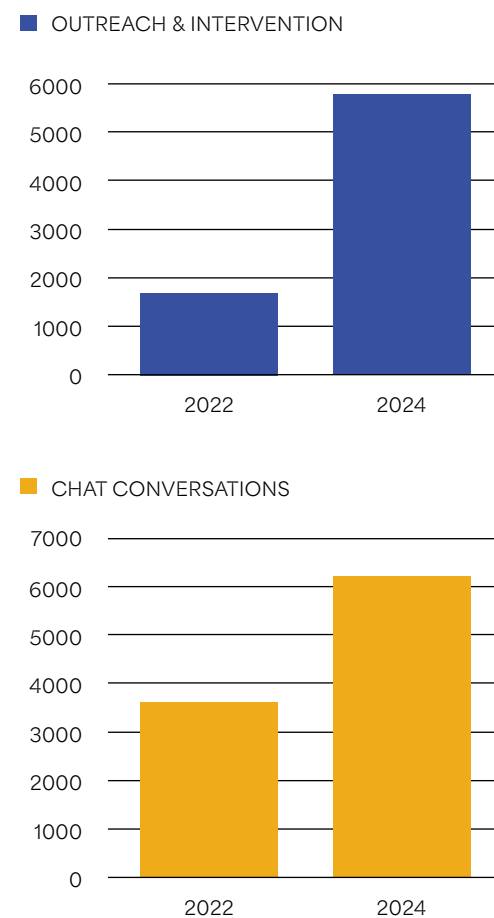
A significant number of youth reaching out on our chat platforms are currently deployed IDF soldiers who are struggling with unique forms of trauma. For many, ELEM's nightly chat is the only safe space to talk about their experiences and their fears.

Many youth report feeling that their own problems—ranging from loneliness in school to anxiety about a sibling or parent on the front lines, to experiences of domestic violence—are small in comparison to the wider national trauma. ELEM's online platform is an easy way for many of these youth to begin a conversation, despite their trepidation, and begin finding support for the very real challenges they face:

87% of displaced youth report loneliness, depression, and anxiety

40% of Israeli youth have been exposed to harmful content online since Oct. 7

Since October 7, 2023, average nightly conversations reported by staff has roughly tripled.



ELEM increased the number of outreach and intervention chats by three-fold since 2022 (Fig.1), and the number of incoming chats doubled since 2022 (Fig. 2).

Between Oct. 7, 2023 and Oct. 7, 2024, ELEM initiated 5,001 chat interventions in Hebrew, and 919 in Arabic; and fielded 6,137 incoming chats in Hebrew, and nearly 1,000 in Arabic; for a total of 10,000 conversations with youth in this time of uncertainty and fear.

Learn more about ELEM Digital on Page 32.

ELEM Digital operates in cooperation with the National Insurance Institute.

YUVALIM: THE SURVIVORS PROJECT

Estimates suggest that only 2,500 of the 3,700 Nova Festival survivors are receiving care. The estimated number for survivors of the kibbutz attacks is much higher. In response to this alarming data – and the understanding of how critical mental health support is for all of these youth– the Israeli government has requested that ELEM design a plan to create new, broader reaching, therapeutic options, and connect these resources to the survivors in need. Leveraging ELEM's deep familiarity with Israel's festival, rave, and party subculture and decades of mutual trust with rave attendees, ELEM's Anashim Tovim (Good People) project staff will lead this critical effort. Tragically, three members of Anashim Tovim were killed on the job at the Nova Festival on October 7th. Despite this devastating loss, within seven months, the remaining team members returned to a profoundly altered scene to provide greatly needed support. This staff is uniquely positioned to identify survivors in need, build trust through ELEM's trauma-informed, collaborative approach, and guide each individual through their entire healing journey.



The Yuvalim Project launched in cooperation with the National Insurance Institute and the Yated initiative for at-risk youth operated by the Joint and the Ministry of Welfare.



SUPPORTING DRUZE COMMUNITIES

Majdal Shams · Mas'adé · Buq'ata · Ein Qunya

After the rocket attack that hit a soccer field in the Druze town of Majdal Shams killing 12 teens and injuring dozens, the community has demonstrated a marked resilience and strength. In a close-knit, family-oriented community, the impact of the tragedy was felt by all. To help teens minimize trauma, regain their footing and return to their routines, ELEM offered its help and expertise. A team of Arabic-speaking ELEM staff began operating in Majdal Shams three nights a week, while simultaneously training local professionals in how to support youth on the streets, including scouting and identifying youth demonstrating risk symptoms, reaching out to teens in distress, and working with teens in informal settings. Addressing trauma promptly after a crisis is crucial in minimizing its long-term impact. By helping teens process their experience and guiding them back to normalcy, ELEM helps communities like Majdal Shams support the well-being of its youth and strengthen the next generation.

ELEM's programs in Druze communities operate in cooperation with local municipalities and the Ministry of Welfare.



HIGHLIGHTS AND UPDATES

In Israel, ELEM divides its work into three sectors: Community, Extreme Risk, and Digital. With significant internal cross-collaboration and close partnerships with the government, local municipalities, partner organizations and other youth workers, these divisions help streamline ELEM's diverse offerings.

COMMUNITY



Director: Natty Carel



Youth Served Annually: 4,000

ELEM's Community field identifies, contacts, and guides teens and youth across the risk spectrum, using an informal, therapeutic-educational model based on holistic and accessible interventions. Programs in the community field rely on regular face-to-face interaction with youth, and offer consistent presence in the different areas of teens' lives in order to create opportunities for reintegration into communities and long-term, lasting change.

Thousands of new teens and youth entered the cycle of risk this year, due to direct and indirect exposure to trauma, internal displacement, interrupted routines, increasing societal ruptures, and more. With increased reports of mental health struggles in teens navigating these challenges, the community field broadened its network of services to support the widest range of youth. ELEM's community programs help facilitate a return to stability through the creation and support of safe environments in a holistic municipal system.

ELEM operates the following community services in 28 local municipalities:

8 SCHOOL CENTERS

In-school Breathing Spaces and school Shluk centers are informal drop-in spaces operating in high schools to identify, assist, and refer teens at risk to relevant services in their community. Read more about these spaces on [Page 25](#).

ELEM's in-school centers operate in cooperation with the National Insurance Institute.

13 DROP-IN CENTERS

Afternoon guidance centers serve as safe spaces for teenagers, with the aim of helping them cope with struggles, facilitate optimal acclimation into the community, and prevent risk behaviors. Centers include Hafuch (general drop-in centers), Migdalor (culturally specific Hafuch centers), and Nur (after school program for Arab teen girls and young women).

Hafuch, Migdalor, and Nur operate in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Education.

21 OUTREACH VANS

Specially equipped vans staffed by ELEM professionals and volunteers provide immediate responses to at-risk youth on the streets through the Outreach Van program. Outreach Van teams support loitering youth, assist in emergency and crisis situations, form long-term connections based on trust, and counsel and refer teens to support services in the community.

The Outreach Van program operates in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare.

4 CITIES WITH HOLISTIC MODELS

ELEM's holistic model features the entire spectrum of ELEM's community services working in tandem with other local partners in one municipality. ELEM operates drop-in centers in schools, afternoon guidance centers, and Outreach Vans at night. The holistic model is currently operating in Ashdod, Beit Shemesh, Holon, and Ofakim.



EXTREME RISK



Director: Maya Fish Baron



Youth Served Annually: 1,200

The Extreme Risk field develops and operates programs for youth and teens who are at Extreme Risk. They face marginalization and traumatic challenges, including exclusion from familial, economic, or social support systems, traumatic life events, violence, sexual abuse, incest, sexual exploitation or trafficking, sex work, homelessness, substance abuse and addiction.

5 HALEV (THE HEART) 24/7 SHELTERS:

Haifa, Tel-Aviv, Petach Tikva, Dimona and Eilat.

HaLev shelters support youth and teens involved in sexual exploitation or sex work by providing holistic services such as sleeping accommodations, emergency care, harm reduction for substance abuse, stable relationships with adults and mentors, guidance in claiming and accessing legal rights, and support for the transition to independent living.

HaLev operates in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare.

GALGAL SHELTER:

A center for homeless young women in Jerusalem. Galgal provides holistic services, including sleeping accommodations, emergency care, harm reduction, forming trust bonds with the staff, help in accessing entitlements, and guidance to independent living.

Galgal operates in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare.

YOUNG MOTHERS AT RISK:

A project to promote, assist, and guide young mothers in risk situations through individual and group counseling in their community. The project aims to reduce and prevent marginalization, discrimination, poverty, and neglect, and to promote social acclimation, independence, and the building of an optimal living environment for the young women and their children.

BAYIT AMITI (A REAL HOME):

Bayit Amiti supports young women and girls who have survived sexual abuse in their childhood. It offers personal guidance, female empowerment, assistance with access to legal rights, and referrals to services in the community.

Bayit Amiti operates in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare.

ORSHINA:

A therapeutic center for boys ages 13 through 18 who experienced sexual abuse, offering personal and group therapy, a social space, guidance for parents, and assistance in accessing entitlements. The team also outreaches to identify other teen boys that may benefit from the program through the Orshina in the City program.

Orshina operates in cooperation with the National Insurance Institute.



A volunteer with an ELEM outreach initiative listens intently to a teen on the street at night.

CENTER FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

ELEM operates three of these centers which support youth and teens who were victims or perpetrators of sexual abuse, generally within a family system. The center provides support and therapy for the entire family. Centers are located in Tel Aviv (serving Yaffo and Bat Yam), Afula and the Valleys Region, and Bnei Brak.

This Center for Sexual Violence operates in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare.

28 JUVENILE PAROLE THERAPY GROUPS

ELEM operates 28 of these therapy groups for minors who were arrested or charged with sexual abuse, and were referred to group therapy at ELEM. The program operates in cooperation with the Juvenile Parole Service and the Ministry of Welfare.

These groups operate in cooperation with the Juvenile Parole Service and the Ministry of Welfare.

ELEM DIGITAL



Director: Yael Warshawsky

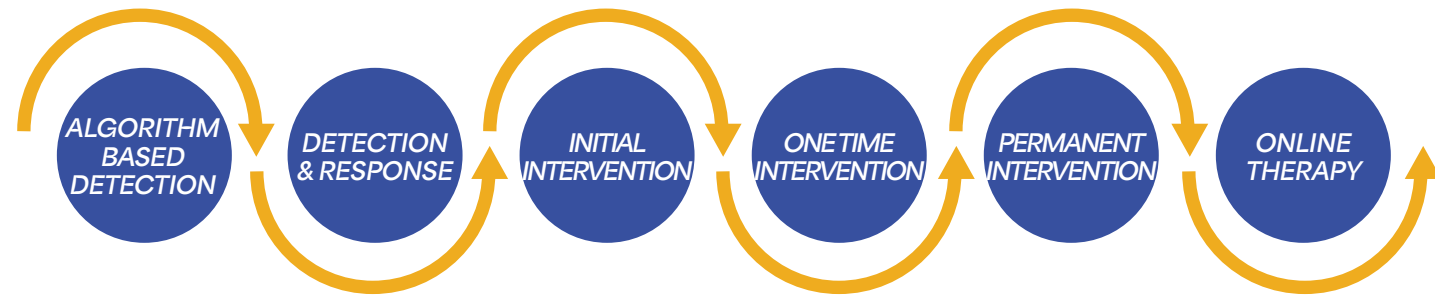


Youth Served Annually: 10,791 teens

ELEM's one-of-a-kind Digital Field is a global leader in virtual therapeutic interventions, providing online outreach, nightly chat support, and a virtual clinic for formal therapy. ELEM Digital is designed to identify hardships that characterize the reality of the lives of teenagers and young adults in the virtual space, and provide therapeutic responses.

These online interventions, offered by professionals and highly trained volunteers, rely on innovative methods of action on a variety of digital platforms for detection, referral, and short and medium term treatment of risk situations online.

In 2024, there were 5,512 initial appeals from youth in the chat, and 5,279 youth in crisis were identified by ELEM staff online.



1 DETECTION & INTERVENTION

Using a unique algorithm and trained specialists, ELEM initiates contact with youth demonstrating risk online, including self-harm, potential for sexual exploitation, and experiences of abuse.

2 CHAT CLINIC

ELEM offers chat and group services in both Hebrew and Arabic on all major platforms, including WhatsApp and Discord, with the option of anonymity.

3 DIGITAL THERAPY CENTER

Youth from the chat or outreach platforms are offered six free virtual therapy sessions centered around trauma-informed care, and referred to additional services when necessary.

ELEM Digital operates in cooperation with the National Insurance Institute.

ELEM Digital is present in all virtual spaces frequented by Israeli teens, across many different platforms catering to different youth demographics, media use, and activity. The team creates videos, posts, and other materials that invite teens to follow, identify with, and contact the teams.

Total Video Views

of ELEM produced content across all platforms, including TikTok and Instagram.



844 chat conversations

844 chat conversations initiated by youth, as compared to a pre-war average of 230 chats, and 919 initial interventions.

Please can someone help me? My dad just beat up my mom and I can't live in my house any more I'm sick and tired of it I really wanna die I don't even know how you could help me but I just know I need help so for the slight chance that someone here can help me, I'm sending this message.

I spent many nights of my childhood on your anonymous chat. Thank you for continuing to help kids who don't know to ask for help.

When I sit and drown in my depression and my problems and don't talk to anyone, not leaving the house and not doing anything but sit in my room and cry all day and try to figure out what I've done wrong in this life to deserve all this pain and suffering, and I just keep mentally collapsing and can't handle it anymore, drowning in overthinking. And I probably won't get out of this depression and I'll keep collapsing.

In times of crisis, the digital space becomes an anchor of stability for [teens] and offers ways to deal with stress and anxiety, and receive assistance and support in an anonymous and safe way. Understanding the crucial role these spaces play in their lives, especially in times of crisis, will allow us to leverage them in order to provide significant support. Our presence in the digital space is important to help teenagers feel that there are those who see them.

MIA MAGNAT
ELEM Director of DIGITAL SPACES

"THE 'FOR YOU' PAGE: TEENS ONLINE DURING THE SWORDS OF IRON WAR"
OCTOBER 2024, ELEM CONFERENCE

ELEM AS A LEADING RESOURCE

As Israel's leading nonprofit working with at-risk youth for over four decades, ELEM is the industry expert. Each year, ELEM hosts a conference that brings together hundreds of professionals and organizations from fields such as therapy, education, social welfare, law enforcement and academia, alongside members of the general public. The conference serves as a platform for dialogue and an in-depth exploration of the current challenges facing at-risk youth. The annual conference aims to provide new tools to support youth, host an exchange of knowledge across relevant disciplines, and to advocate for improvement in Israeli policies regarding youth.

In 2024, the conference was dedicated to Israel's teens impacted by the war, with panels featuring ELEM experts, representatives from partner organizations, and youth themselves. Sessions and published papers included:

- # POV: The Teen Experience on TikTok
- Who You Callin' Evacuee?—Identity Crisis Among Evacuated Youth
- Support Across Borders: Virtual Spaces as Tools in Aiding Teens Through War
- Teenagers in Arab Society in Israel: Between Distress, Dreams, and the Future
- The Power of Community in Building Resilience and Managing Crisis
- "I Still Exist"—Principles for Effective Intervention with Adolescents in Post-October 7th Israel
- The Courage of One: the Testimony of Dalet and the Unique Challenges of Male Survivors of Sexual Assault Since October 7th

This second conference in the aftermath of October 7th deepened the understanding of new needs and services for youth, and affirmed ELEM's role as a leading resource for effective, research-based solutions for at-risk youth in Israel and beyond.

In addition to the annual conference, ELEM staff conducted 127 lectures and training sessions for 32 institutions and organizations in Israel. ELEM's forward-thinking approaches, including new digital strategies, resilience-building, and culturally tailored interventions—are leading the nation in real, tangible solutions for Israel's most vulnerable youth.

ELEM professionals have made strides in advocacy, policy change, and spearheading research on at-risk youth:

31 Knesset hearing with ELEM experts • 144 Professional trainings taught by ELEM staff

194 Hebrew news items by ELEM professionals • 400+ Attendees at ELEM's Annual Youth Mental Health Conference

ELEM VOLUNTEERS



Director: Leah Prizant Adler

Volunteers are at the heart of ELEM's professional work. All ELEM services are built on the firmly held belief that volunteers are the creative, constructive, driving force of every program. Volunteers offer another point of access for at-risk youth, and play a key role in amplifying ELEM's image as a non-judgmental, welcoming place for teens and young adults.

ELEM relies on over a thousand volunteers, who play a significant role in all of ELEM's projects,

from working directly with at-risk teens in every one of our programs to supporting organizational operations. The dedicated volunteer department oversees volunteer recruitment and provides extensive professional training and guidance for every individual. Most volunteers with ELEM programs attend weekly training sessions over a period of several years, and become integral parts of the ELEM team. ELEM's many departments hold additional professional training classes, along with appreciation events throughout the year to appreciate and strengthen the commitment of these many volunteers.

ADVOCACY WORK: ELEM AT THE KNESSET

ELEM works tirelessly to affect change at both the societal and policy levels in Israel to better serve the needs of at-risk youth. ELEM helps shape public discourse around challenging topics through active participation in Knesset hearings, and by maintaining close working ties with government ministries, local authorities, public institutions, and organizations in Israel's business and social sectors. Coupled with their work directly with youth, ELEM social workers and other professionals also hold hundreds of training programs every year, publish dozens of articles and research papers, and work closely with corporate partners to facilitate volunteer opportunities.

This year, ELEM staff and youth spoke about critical issues affecting at-risk youth at 31 hearings in the following committees:

- Education, Culture and Athletics Committee
- Special Committee for Youth Issues
- Special Committee for the Rights of the Child
- Special Committee for Combating Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Committee for Promoting Women and Gender Equality
- Welfare and Works Committee.



The position papers presented to the committees by ELEM include:

Truancy Among Evacuated Teens in Temporary Frameworks

Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among Evacuated Teen Survivors of October 7th

Needs and Services for Survivors of the Raves on October 7th

The Government Budget for Combatting Sexual Violence and Violence Against Women

The 2023 Budget and Work Plan of the National Youth Authority

Intersectoral Partnership Towards Navigating and Preventing Domestic Violence





The Challenges of Youth in Sex Work in Light of the Client Criminalization Law





Nitrite Abuse (Poppers) Among Teens and Youth





Israel's Emergency Housing System: General Status and Updates in the Swords of Iron War

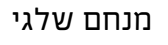




Young Mothers Facing Marginalization and Acute Risk




OUR PARTNERS










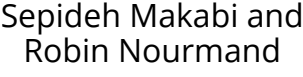
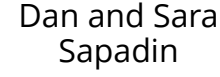












































































IN MEMORY



Yasmin Bira z'l



Yonatan Richter z'l



Sigal Levi z'l



Lior Hadad Atias z'l

We mourn the loss of three of our volunteers, members of Anashim Tovim (Good People) Project, who were murdered at the Nova Festival: Yonatan Richter z'l, Sigal Levi z'l, and Lior Hadad Atias z'l; we also mourn the loss of Yasmin Bira z'l, a volunteer in the Young Mothers program, who was murdered with her family at Kibbutz Be'eri on October 7th, 2023.

They gave of themselves with generosity and love until their last moments.
May their memories be forever a blessing.

