



REHABILITATION PROCESS IN ISRAEL

BROTHERS' KEEPER CAMPAIGN



**KEREN קרן
HAYESOD היסוד**
For the People of Israel

HEARTBEATS EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION IN SDEROT: A COMMUNITY UNDER FIRE



Project Proposal

Presented to Keren Hayesod European Communities

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SUPPORTING THE PROJECT

The high number of children at-risk is one of Israel's most pressing social challenges. Keren Hayesod-UIA is committed to supporting Israel's children at-risk and their families through the Heartbeats intervention programme for children ages 0-3, a partnership with the Government of Israel and local authorities.

Your generous donation of \$66,000 is requested to fund the Heartbeats Program in Sderot, where it will reach out to 30 young families. Together, we can support parents of young children in their initial stages of parenting, encourage healthy parent-child relationships, and promote early childhood development.



According to an OECD report, Israel has one of the highest poverty rates among member states, with one in three children living in poverty. Poverty is linked to emotional distress, poor health, risky behavior, underachievement, and lack of social mobility in children. Parenting under poverty adversely affects children's healthy development, especially in infancy and early childhood. However, many parents, especially first-time parents in Israel's periphery, lack access to resources and support for positive parenting. Furthermore, no centralized government body is responsible for children under six, despite research showing the critical importance of the first three years. To address this, the Heartbeats Program was launched in 2016 to provide guidance and intervention to at-risk new parents in Israel's peripheries. Through parenting Mentors, Heartbeats strengthens parental identity, promotes healthy parent-child relationships, and educates parents on accessing early childhood services.

WHERE

Over the past year and a half, Heartbeats has grown from six to fifteen communities nationwide. Together with your support, we can expand the program to include the southern city of Sderot.



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300

The number of children and families participating in Heartbeats.

14

The number of communities where Heartbeats takes place nationwide.

1,300

the total number of people who benefit from Heartbeats activities (children and their families) nationwide

20

The number of Heartbeats Mentors in 2023.

55%

of Heartbeats families receive welfare services.

38%

of Heartbeats parents suffer a history of trauma.

33%

of Heartbeats families have three or more children.

36%

of Heartbeats families are single-parent households.

7%

of fathers and **52%** of mothers in the Heartbeats program are unemployed.

THE NEED FOR HEARTBEATS IN SDEROT

Located just seven kilometers from Gaza, the city of Sderot was founded in 1951 as a development town. Today, Sderot is one of the southern region's largest cities and has a population of 34,000 residents. Due to its proximity to Gaza, Sderot is also the most targeted city in Israel by rockets from Gaza. In the last 20 years, about 10,000 rockets and mortars have hit the city, killing several people and injuring hundreds, causing millions of dollars in damage and profoundly disrupting daily life. **The terror attack on Israel's southern region that took place on October 7th claimed the lives of 50 people, including civilians, soldiers and security forces. Sderot continues to be a target of missile attacks in the Swords of Iron War.**



25%

of the population are new immigrants.



30%

of Sderot's population are children and youth under the age of 18



5 out of 10

city rank on the socioeconomic well-being

As a result of Sderot's proximity to the Gaza Strip and the ongoing threats of rockets, children suffer from ongoing emotional and physical trauma, leaving them especially vulnerable. The city also has lower rates of high school matriculation and army service compared to the national average.

After the terror attacks on October 7th, 90% of Sderot's residents were evacuated to hotels in Eilat and the Dead Sea. In March 2024, schools reopened and many residents began to return to the city after the Israeli government announced that its funding for evacuees would cease in July 2024. Despite the fact that Sderot is being repopulated, the need for support is stronger than ever because many of Israel's resources and attention are being devoted to other areas and populations due to war. Furthermore, the situation among



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the city's at-risk populations has worsened, as many more families are being defined as "at-risk," especially with young children. These include families with children who were born during the war and families in which at least one parent was drafted into reserve duty. **The Sderot Municipality has identified young families as a target population in urgent need of guidance and support, and by investing in early childhood programming in Sderot, we can help make resources and services more accessible and assist these families in overcoming the impact of the war.**

The unique Heartbeats intervention model gives young children a stable framework where they can thrive while providing parents with the tools and knowledge to be better parents. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the children in the program will require less or no intervention as they continue to develop. Thus, by identifying and addressing challenges that parents and children face either before they are born or at a very young age, the chances of developing issues later in life are dramatically reduced.

THE PROGRAM

The Heartbeats Program is based on the role of two Mentors per community, each of whom works with 15 families for a period of 18 months, reaching a total of 30 families. The mentors are supervised by a national coordinator and coordinate their efforts with early childhood professionals in the community, providing guidance, support and intervention to an additional 100 families per year.

The intervention provided by Heartbeats focuses on two core Areas:

- **Personal-Home Intervention:** Mentors visit families, providing personalized assistance in the comfort of their own homes. The intervention consists of close parental guidance and support that advance the family through the process of parenting, following the family's unique needs. The Mentor ensures the healthy development of the infant, strengthens the parent-child connection and parental capabilities, and facilitates the utilization of available services.
- **Group-Communal Intervention:** In this area, the Heartbeats Mentor provides parents from the wider community who require less intensive support with a communal space for young parenting. This space serves to create a direct meeting between parents in the community, together with different professionals in the field of infancy. This space advances two important aims: the creation of a supportive group among equals, and a safe and pleasant meeting space that offers professional knowledge and familiarity with the available resources in the community.

Throughout the year, mentors facilitate workshops for parents on early childhood-related topics as well as mothers' circles and a community Play Centre. There are one-time activities that are open to the wider community in order to expose as many families as possible to the early childhood services available in the community and encourage parents to take part in Heartbeats. These community-wide partnerships include the local Early Childhood Centre, Community Centre, Health Clinics and other organizations.





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IMPACT

Heartbeats guided by a professional committee comprised of governmental representatives, experts in the field of infants and toddlers, and representatives in the field of research and development. An external evaluation was recently completed by the Digma Institute for Applied Evaluation, and Dr. Iris Lavi of the University of Haifa's School of Social Work and England's University of Bath's Department of Forensic Psychology, with the aim of assessing the impact on its beneficiaries. The most recent nationwide report indicated that Heartbeats continued to play a positive role in the following areas:

Healthy Physical, Cognitive, and Emotional Childhood Development

- **86%** of mothers demonstrated improvement in maternal functioning and strengthening of mother-child bonds
- **79%** of fathers demonstrated improvement in paternal functioning and strengthening of father-child bonds.
- **67%** of parents demonstrated an improvement in the degree of parental attention and treatment for their children's developmental delays.
- **81%** of the parents testified to acquiring knowledge and tools in the areas of early childhood development.

Stable, Healthy Families

- **80%** of the families improved their functioning in terms of family climate and environment, in which children are raised.
- **88%** of parents testified to acquiring the knowledge and tools necessary for dealing with the home environment vis-à-vis early childhood.

Strong, Supportive Communities

- **70%** of the children were integrated into preschools adapted to their ages, enabling integration into their community.

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THE IDAN FAMILY'S STORY

Lena and Eden are an example of parents who are navigating the complexities of parenthood with the assistance of the Heartbeats Programme in the southern town Yerucham. They are parents to two young children, two-year-old Ilai and two-month-old Meshi. Since their involvement in Heartbeats, the parents developed a strong bond with their dedicated mentor who offers targeted guidance and support when needed.

Lena's childhood was marked by her immigration to Israel from Russia when she was just five years old. Her parents divorced when she was eight-years-old. Eden faced violence during his childhood, which significantly influenced his understanding of how to raise children and be the kind of father he aspires to be. Both Lena and Eden did not have stable and nurturing parenting experiences in their own homes, which prompted them to seek help and support from Heartbeats.

Lena and Eden actively participate in community activities, like "Mommy & Daddy's Kindergarten," a community-based framework to support families with toddlers who lack access to suitable childcare for children aged 0-3, operated by Heartbeats twice a week. When the war broke out, Eden was called into reserve duty, leaving Lena at home with their two children and limited support. The Heartbeats mentor reached out to Lena to check up on her and realized that she was struggling. The two reached out to Lena's sister, who lives nearby, to help with daily tasks, caring for a two-month-old baby and a toddler. Lena also expressed concerns about exposing children to distressing news content during red alert sirens and heightened security. Lena's mentor directed her to the local authorities who are assisting and guiding her about the potential harm of keeping the TV on all day with constant news updates.

Heartbeats also organized a virtual activity for Lena and her children, who were delighted to reconnect with their mentor and engage in familiar songs and stories from the "Mommy & Daddy's Kindergarten." This activity offered a welcome break for Lena as well. Despite the challenges, Lena continues to bring her children to the "Mommy & Daddy's Kindergarten" which provides a much-needed respite for both Lena and her children, allowing them to enjoy quality moments together, especially while her husband Eden is in reserve duty.

There are many other families like the Idan Family in Sderot who can benefit from the Heartbeats program.

