JDC-Israel’s Operations in the Time of Corona

Background & Update

1. Continuing current programs (wherever possible)

The clients we serve are the most vulnerable citizens in Israel – older adults (particularly those who are homebound), children and youth at risk (and their families), people with disabilities, and those who are unemployed (hundreds of thousands more now than there were before the crisis) or who are low-income workers.

We are continuing to provide much-needed services virtually wherever we can, and the majority of our programs will continue to operate through phones, Zoom meetings, online seminars and webinars, and other technologies. Some of our programs will close temporarily, but we are working to keep this at a minimum.

2. Adapting programs to meet ever-emerging crisis-related needs

Since we already work with the country’s most at-risk populations, we are leveraging well-established programmatic infrastructure to respond to new needs arising from the crisis.

Examples include:

- **Muwared**: We designed this program to help poor Arab municipalities access and effectively utilize government funds. The program trains high caliber individuals to hold a new professional municipal role that we developed, called “Integrators for Economic Development”. To date, this role has been filled in over 30 of Israel’s neediest Arab municipalities. Since the Corona outbreak, these new municipal professionals have become a crucial link in coordinating the efforts of the Government of Israel (GOI) with Arab municipalities. They voice the concerns and needs of these communities. The GOI has defined them as “essential” workers during this crisis.

- **Independent Living for People with Disabilities**: Over 500 people with disabilities meet regularly with more than 60 caseworkers and mentors as part of our programs
supporting independent living. These caseworkers are now being trained to identify and address new needs emerging from the crisis - and to do so virtually.

- **Families First:** This GOI led program helps 3,000 “multi-problem” families break out of poverty. The Corona crisis has thrown these families back into crisis, as people are losing their jobs and the frameworks for children on which the families rely have closed. We are already seeing a number of these families beginning to slide back into poverty. In response, together with our partners – the Ministry of Welfare and the Rashi Foundation – we are adjusting Families First so that program funds can be used to buy the food and other necessities that will help these families weather this storm.

### 3. Developing new responses to meet crisis-related emerging needs

We are in daily discussions with our GOI partners and other partners as to what JDC can do to help the country in its efforts to respond. Below are key areas to which JDC can bring added value and for which we are currently looking into developing responses, as well as examples of interventions that we have recently launched in these areas.

**Older Adults**

This is the population at greatest risk in Israel. Cut off from their families, friends, and caregivers due to quarantines and travel restrictions, and confined to their homes, they need immediate and ongoing help to weather this storm. The situation has created a massive surge of new needs, new risks, and new sorrows. These elderly individuals need urgent help with getting food, medicines, and basic home care, as well as the emotional care and social support that is crucial - especially in a crisis when fear and isolation coexist. The biggest concern right now is the 3500,000 elderly reliant on nursing care and/or income support (including Holocaust survivors).

**Already Launched:**

1) A comprehensive, cross-sector effort to meet the basic needs of 100,000 of Israel’s most at-risk homebound older adults was launched on March 22. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services is providing funding for food and food delivery to local municipalities. The National Council for Volunteering in Israel (a JDC-developed, accelerated, and handed-over program) is coordinating some 100,000 volunteers to
deliver these meals to vulnerable elderly confined to their homes. These volunteers are also conducting intake calls to assess what other urgent, basic needs these individuals have as a result of the crisis. JDC is training these volunteers on how to work with vulnerable elderly. Also, with the support of the Schusterman Foundation and others Israel, JDC is offering 27 additional basic-needs services that are not currently funded by the government to 140 of Israel’s poorest municipalities. These services include the delivery of medicines and hygiene products, transport to a hospital/HMO clinic, protective gear for caretakers, telephone counselling, exercise kits and activity kits (knitting, embroidery, painting), and more. We are hoping to raise additional funds in order to expand this effort.

2) Disseminating knowledge on caring for the elderly in times of stress – for professional caregivers, for family caregivers, and for the older adults themselves. This includes infographics and short videos in Hebrew, Russian, Amharic, Arabic, and English. JDC’s division for aging is working with the Home Front Command, TV, radio stations, and social media to broadcast to the public.

Additional Directions:

- Participating in a national emergency operation to reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19 for residents and staff at 300 geriatric facilities across the country, and to maintain the residents’ wellbeing during this crisis. The operation is a collaboration between the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and aims to fill dangerous gaps in safety and care measures, knowledge and training amongst personnel, and provision of psychological support to lonely, frightened elderly residents. JDC will be providing training and guidance to professionals and caregivers working in these facilities. The operation is a collaboration between Sheatufim, Zionism 2000, and the National Initiatives Fund, and social entrepreneur and businessman Ronny Douek has donated four million shekels towards a target of 12 million. Solutions developed in this operation may be expanded to the broader older adult population.

- Scaling up the use of an app currently being piloted – Invisi.Care – that transforms existing non-medical data into an effective clinical prevention tool. Together with the Ministry of Social Services and Social Affairs, JDC is planning to offer the app to 2,500 older adults. Their cell phone data will be monitored in order to identify
worrying signs of illness, depression, falls, and other physical and mental health crises.

- Developing long distance rehabilitation programs so that older adults in need of physical and occupational therapy can continue treatment even when quarantined.

**People with Disabilities**

As with older adults, we're seeing many cases of care workers who are quarantined or who are deserting their posts. Loneliness and isolation are major concerns at this time, as are issues of assistance and practical care for people with disabilities. In addition, the GOI has closed all special education frameworks. This will have far-reaching consequences for families of children with special needs.

**Already Launched:**

1) Guidelines on providing support for people with disabilities virtually have been prepared and distributed to professionals across the country, and a series of webinars training professionals launched.

2) A virtual Center for Independent Living has been launched – currently on Facebook: www.facebook.com/Cil.org.il The site provides information to people with disabilities, material that has been specially designed for different types of disabilities, podcasts, online support groups, a fitness course every morning and a cultural/leisure course with a discussion every afternoon, training sessions on providing remote service for people who work with people with disabilities, and more.

**Additional Directions:**

- As with the elderly, we are looking into developing long-distance physiotherapy and other paramedical services to people with disabilities.

- The GOI has approached JDC to help with the looming shortage of community care workers. We are exploring different avenues of assistance.

**Children, Youth and Families at Risk**

With the closing of most educational facilities, many families at risk who were reliant on existing frameworks are experiencing great difficulties. We expect the needs to be
greatest in the Arab and Bedouin sectors, where a lack of digital infrastructure and a general distrust of the system present major challenges. As with other populations, we anticipate the greatest problem here to be a shortage of professionals to meet existing and growing needs.

Already Launched:

1) We are training local activists who work with JDC’s Better Together program in 10 disadvantaged neighborhoods to work as emergency volunteer squads. These squads are providing virtual training, mapping current needs, and working to increase volunteer responses to those needs.

2) We are helping the GOI’s Psychological Services take their work online, so that they can continue providing services during the quarantine.

Additional Directions:

- An effort to distribute 4,000 hygiene kits with culturally adapted explanatory materials about how to use them and how to practice social distancing, to Arab and Bedouin families in the North and South. Volunteers will be handing these out and early childhood professionals, therapists, and social workers will be conducting follow-up calls to support use.

- We are in discussions with the GOI of how JDC can help youth and young adults-at-risk that are particularly vulnerable in this period.

Workers at Risk

Israel’s unemployment rate is skyrocketing, with (to date) over 657,000 new unemployment benefits applicants - a terrifying contrast to February, in which the number of people receiving unemployment benefits was some 80,000, of which approximately 25,000 were new applicants.

About 90% of people applying for unemployment since the crisis began are those who have been placed on unpaid leave. The unemployment service expects 10-20% of those registered to lose their jobs following the crisis. Indeed, social security experts estimate that up to 1.2 million people will be unemployed by the end of the crisis. That would be 32% of Israel’s workforce.

Many of the newly unemployed are middle- and lower-earning workers, and many of
the latter were already living near the poverty line. JDC is exploring how it can help these people during this period, as well as prepare them for the "day after".

**Already Launched:**

For many living in Israel's social and geographical periphery, technological colleges (that provide professional training for engineering and technical certificates) and vocational training programs offer a critical path to social mobility. In order to preserve and enhance these channels during the crisis, JDC together with the GOI is working to take tech training online. In the past week, 220 lecturers received training on teaching online. Throughout next week, JDC will run webinars to the staff of more than 30 technical colleges and tens of vocational training programs.

**Additional Directions:**

- Helping people who have already or will soon either lose their jobs or go on unpaid leave. The GOI has asked JDC for help developing platforms and creating content for reskilling and replacement opportunities.

**System Challenges**

Ensuring that different government ministries coordinate and work together, and that the government aligns forces with civil society, is critical during this crisis. JDC’s division for addressing system challenges is utilizing its unique convening abilities in a number of ways.

**Already Launched:**

1) Facilitating a cross-ministry, cross-sector team to help manage the crisis in the Bedouin sector. This population is viewed by many as a ticking time bomb due to lack of infrastructures as well as deep-seated mistrust of the government. Over 40 representatives from government and civil society participated in the first meeting of the task force earlier this week.
2) Facilitating a cross-GOI taskforce to develop a digitized model for municipalities so that they can better provide services online (in partnership with Deloitte, which is providing its resources pro-bono).
Additional Directions:

- Convening a similar cross-ministry, cross-sector team for the Arab and Haredi sectors.
- Convene a cross-ministry team to plan responses for the Day After.

Helping Civil Society Organizations

The NGO sector has been particularly hard hit during the crisis. Many NGO’s are already experiencing major budget cuts and the situation is only expected to get worse in coming weeks. JDC is looking into different ways to help Israel’s nonprofits weather the storm.

Already Launched:

1) To match corporations willing to help NGO’s with existing needs, JDC together with 12 other organizations working to help the nonprofit sector (such as Civic Leadership, Matan, Sheatufim, and more), collected needs from about 100 nonprofits across the country. These needs were presented to a virtual “table” of over 40 of Israel’s leading corporations (including Microsoft, Unilever, Intel, Teva and more) who expressed interest in providing assistance. Almost all of them have already pledged volunteers, and many of them have agreed to provide in-kind assistance (from computers to medicine and hygiene products). In addition, they all asked to continue looking together at emerging needs and committed to bringing additional corporations on board.

2) JDC has set up an online peer learning forum for Israeli lay leaders on how to lead their organization during the crisis. Two sessions have already been held on the governance and fiduciary responsibilities relevant to the crisis, with over 70 participants (Chairs, board members, and professionals).

While we are very proud of these efforts, they are just a drop in the bucket of the overall needs of Israeli nonprofits that are currently facing major crisis. That is why our staff is also working very hard behind the scenes with the GOI and other partners to build a significant special assistance package for the NGO sector.