

# Iron Swords War

SNAPSHOT

November 16,  
2023\*

## “Thinking Education”

Philanthropic Interest Group, Meeting #2

Youth in The Evacuation Centers

\* The brief offers a current overview<sup>1</sup> based on the information accessible to us at this time.

### Background

The ‘Thinking Education’ interest group is part of a broader initiative to establish interest groups for learning and joint philanthropic activities with focused objectives. This meeting shines a spotlight on issues related to youth in the evacuation centers, emphasizing the tension between long-term goals and the urgent need for on-the-ground solutions. To join, you can contact Lisa Levy, the group’s leader, at [lisa@jfunders.org](mailto:lisa@jfunders.org).

This meeting also pays tribute to Yossi Hershkovitch, may he rest in peace, who fell in battle in Gaza. He led the Ort Pelech Boys’ School, serving as a role model and inspiration for high quality education.

### The Challenge:

- ▶ Evacuated and displaced adolescents are **facing significant upheaval**: they are experiencing a loss of trust as well as suffering trauma, anxiety, and depression. The following effects are observed in youth: “self-punishment” for being survivors as opposed to their peers who were killed or abducted; withdrawing and refusing to leave their rooms (in hotels) which further intensifies loneliness and depression; being “glued to screens”; sleeping during the day and being active at night; exhibiting dangerous behaviors (alcohol, drugs, violence) and, in general, being very confused and “not knowing what they want.”
- ▶ There is evident erosion in parental authority, and the shared living arrangements of all family members in one hotel room over time have exacerbated the crisis.
- ▶ There is an acute need to provide educational solutions, especially for high school students approaching matriculation exams.
- ▶ Diverse and tailored learning solutions need to be developed for various groups of adolescents, using creative methods that engage them and provide them agency, and a sense of meaning and belonging, not necessarily within a regular classroom setting.
- ▶ In times of crises disadvantaged populations are even more disadvantaged. Thus, in some cases the situation constitutes a double challenge, additional to the existing difficulty.



1. This status report is based on information presented at a meeting held by JFN Network on November 16, 2023. The speakers in the meeting included:

- **Lisa Levi**, Leader of the Philanthropic Interest Group on Education at JFN Israel.
- **Yigal Dadya**, Education Department Manager for the Sha’ar Hanegev Regional Council.
- **Dr. Ariel Levi**, CEO of Joint Ashalim.
- **Inbal Ron**, CEO of “Dror” Educational Institutions.
- **Anat Dennis**, Head of the Philanthropy Desk at Citizen Assistance Center.

## Mapping and Information regarding the Evacuees, with an emphasis on youth – Missing Data

There is a fundamental issue with data collection, as it is highly dynamic and fluid. For example, the Home Front Command only considers those in hotels (excluding vacation rentals), and generally, those relocating from place to place do not update any official authorities.

- ▶ **According to the Ministry of Education:** There are 57 local authorities absorbing evacuees, 393 educational centers nationwide, and 19,000 students aged 6-18 (the Ministry of Education clarifies that the actual numbers are much higher, estimating around 31,000 displaced children, half of whom are adolescents).
- ▶ **According to Home Front Command data:** There are about 100,000 displaced individuals (in hotels), with adolescents constituting about 11%, approximately 12,000 youth aged 12-18 (the estimate is that the actual numbers are higher).
- ▶ **Data from the Sha’ar Hanegev Regional Council (as an example):** Residents of the council are dispersed across 23 absorption centers nationwide, from Tiberias to Eilat. There is a total of 3,761 students, alongside about 200 students from the absorption center hosting Ethiopian immigrants.

The challenge in maintaining a consistent and comprehensive picture generates uncertainty, making it difficult to provide systematic responses in every aspect.

## Responses

### ▶ Local Authorities

Local authorities are responsible for formal and informal education, with the support of the absorbing local authorities.

**In the short term,** there are various channels for action: designated facilities (in hotels) or integrating students into institutions in the absorbing authority; maintaining education in the evacuated community for those who have not relocated or for those who have returned (according to the data, the number of evacuees is decreasing, and the number of returnees is increasing, due to both fatigue and an increase in the sense of security); creating unique responses for independent evacuees in small groups (20-50 families) and for independent evacuees (individuals or families).

**In the mid-term:** responses are required for communities that will not return to their homes soon (estimated two years ahead), such as Kfar Gaza and Nahal Oz. For other kibbutzim, a renewed construction of study spaces is required while keeping them away from the border.

**In the long term:** implementing the vision of growth, in memory and inspired by the late Ophir Lieberman, the head of the council at Sha’ar HaNegev who was killed on October 7<sup>th</sup>, according to the following emphases: the education system will serve as an attractive pull for both returning and new residents; an education system that feeds and is fed by the vision of settlement and pioneering, agriculture, and entrepreneurship; an education system that places children at the center, provides them with tools to spread their wings, empowers their strengths, and leads them to success.

### ▶ Additional Responses – “Dror” Educational Institutions

In the early days following the outbreak of the war, a need arose to provide parents who were in shock and pain with time and space to breathe, alongside the necessity for a framework that would accommodate their children. Against this backdrop, the network established nurseries, kindergartens, and schools in various facilities (beginning with the Dead Sea). Additionally, the network also operates to assist active schools in partially evacuated communities and accepts students into its own network schools.

All of this is done with a central focus on ensuring stable and consistent staff that allows the building of trust and security among children and youth. There is a constant understanding regarding the need for adaptation to the emerging needs of the communities. Against this backdrop, efforts have been invested, for example, to restore childcare groups in accordance with the situation and the conduct that prevailed before the outbreak of the war. This component assists, among other things, in the integration of individual evacuees into the community’s embrace.

## Emphases and Guiding Principles for Creating Educational Responses

- ▶ **Creative Solutions** – Encouraging less time in private spaces to work on fostering social encounters. Adolescents are neither ready nor able to return to traditional classroom learning; models such as summer camps, trips, retreats, workshops in nature, and university lab sessions should be considered – seeking to function via a dedicated accompanying team, as well as collaborating with the Ministry of Education whenever possible.
- ▶ **Contextual Anchored Solutions** – The vast differences between communities (organized rural communities versus urban communities), various geographical locations, diverse learning solutions, the strength of the experience from which the population comes, and more, necessitate the construction of tailored solutions for each situation.
- ▶ **Stable and Consistent Educational Team** – A guiding principle. Relying on changing volunteers over time is not feasible; a professional, skilled, and dedicated team is required to provide relevant responses, preferably involving the evacuee community itself.
- ▶ **Key Objectives** – Building agency (initiative, belonging, and meaning), reducing risk behaviors, and fostering trust.
- ▶ **Developing academic skills** – Given constraints and individual cases, the goal is to ensure meaningful and appropriate educational responses – among other reasons to ensure “fruit harvesting” and continuity of many years of investment by students, as well as considering the gaps caused due to the the Covid pandemic. Emphasizing the educational aspect now is crucial in dealing with future risk behaviors and enhances the youths’ long-term resilience (e.g., the connection between emotional and cognitive wellbeing).

## Key needs

- ▶ **Integration** – The need for a liaison among the displaced and absorbing communities and local authorities, the Ministry of Education, and social organizations is still evident.
- ▶ **Data Infrastructure** – There is a need for infrastructure to enable real-time data tracking alongside reporting back to professional entities, including monitoring actual participation (who attends activities and who doesn’t).
- ▶ **Programs to Handle Risk Behaviors** – Existing programs in welfare and education ministries can be supplemented with new programs. This is an acute topic that requires immediate treatment, and for more isolated populations, this holds more significance. Generally, in emergency situations, the vulnerable become more vulnerable.
- ▶ **Education for Children with Special Needs** – A population suffering significantly during this time with insufficient responses or solutions.
- ▶ **Physical Spaces and Equipment** – There has been improvement in recent weeks, but absorption spaces are still lacking; often, they don’t adequately meet the needs of adolescents. Learning aids, distributed by the Ministry of Education, are insufficient and not centralized.
- ▶ **Team Expansion** – Recruiting retired teachers and education students.
- ▶ **Youth Activation** – Including youth in volunteer activities, as a tool for creating agency, and collaborating with youth movements. This requires funding to sustain coordinators (lodging, food). Additionally, training is needed for skill development in both formal and informal education teams.
- ▶ **Help the Helpers** – A crucial and relevant need concerning all operating teams, be it formal education, informal education, municipal authorities, and more.