

Originally posted on Maariv Business, Israel, 4.17.2020

“The Coronavirus creates distress among the families and the treating staff. Cancer doesn’t take a break just because of the virus.”

Organizations that usually deal with the toughest of social issues are currently facing the nearly complete halt in donations. We spoke to the leaders of a few of these organizations, and we learned that there isn’t always a way to utilize those who are there to help.

Written by Talia Levin.

The Corona crisis didn’t only severely hit the small and average sized businesses, it also gave what seems like quite the irrecoverable blow to the Israeli NGOs that lean heavily on volunteers, who were sent home, and on donations, that are absent at this time, both from the private sector and the business sector.

The outcome being that many of the at-risk youth, young cancer patients, and families in need, find themselves with nowhere to turn to these days. We spoke to four NGOs leaders who told us about the hardships they’re currently confronting, while needing immediate financial support before it’s too late.

“ELEM is the biggest NGO serving youth, and young men and women at-risk, and the Corona crisis hurt our income greatly,” says Inbal Dor Kerbel, ELEM’s CEO. “The business sector is absorbing losses, the general public received a massive blow, fundraising isn’t relevant considering the public’s current state of mind, and the government and the authorities still don’t have a sorted plan to support the NGOs, and the entire voluntary sector. All the while the sector is required to serve the weakest and most vulnerable demographics.”

According to Dor Kerbel, since the crisis started ELEM registered an immediate loss in its income. Their yearly fundraising campaign, which is one of the major sources of income, was supposed to be launched in two months. The goal: raising 2 Million Shekels (nearly \$560K – ELEM USA). This campaign has been postponed indefinitely, and the remaining sources of income are dwindling.

“At this point, things are vague when it comes to government funding, and since the beginning of this crisis the funding provided by the local municipalities and the government was cut by 40%. ELEM must reach deeper into its pockets and use every last bit of money,” Dor Kerbel explains.

When examining the estimates since the beginning of the crisis, it appears that 2020 will end with a 40% decrease in ELEM’s planned yearly fundraising. As a result, ELEM was forced to put staff on unpaid leave, cut the salary of many others, and cut on hours, in order to lower the expenses.

That said, due to the growing need of the youth, ELEM is still operating most of the programs that are funded by ELEM itself. “Those who are hurt the most by all of this are the youth, and young men and women at-risk who need help, especially when things are escalating and their distress is greater and deeper,” Dor Kerbel summarizes.

What do you see on the field?

The challenges on the field are becoming more extreme. The youth, the young men and women whose situations are hard on the day-to-day, are now more invisible than ever. Their distress is growing and becoming more intense during an emergency, and the need to assist them grows as well. Now, of all times, during this emergency, the state’s ability to help us has been reduced.”

What pending programs were put on hold or stopped altogether?

At the moment, all of our programs operate in a limited capacity, but ELEM is covering the funds that usually come from the state, and that won’t be possible for much longer. Programs that were meant to be launched this year and are currently on hold, are programs to help young at-risk mothers to gain independence, programs to locate youth and young people at-risk in the Arabic community, and implementing more of ELEM’s programs in that community, and more.”

What’s going on with the volunteers at this time?

Our six centers for youth and young people at extreme risk (such as homelessness and prostitution) are open, almost all in full capacity and in accordance with the guidelines set by the Ministry of Health and the authorities. In addition, our scouting and assisting youth and young people on the street continues, with adjustments to the current reality.

We go out on the streets to locate young homeless men and women, who now more than ever have nowhere to go, or a bite to eat, and they prefer the drugs, or the 'client,' whose money is going to help them survive on the streets. Our staff practice maximum precaution, they wear masks and gloves, and they go out, find them, distribute food and basic supplies, give them attention, warmth, and care, so they don't feel alone."

Due to the Corona crisis, you're only getting a portion of the government funding for these programs.

How do you handle that?

Even with only partial funding, ELEM keeps the programs operational because we know that without the services we offer, thousands of youth, young men and women, will find themselves on the streets. In addition, many of the youth ELEM mentors to independent lives were fired during this crisis. Many of them don't have savings, a family to turn to, some don't even have money for food anymore. In order to support them, we maintain our one-on-one meetings with them, and we do so via phone."

[This is an excerpt about ELEM's work from a full article about the NGOs' crisis]