

## GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear friends,

This newsletter comes at a devastating time in Israel, leaving the population shocked and traumatized. The brutal attacks and numerous sirens are terrifying for people at home in their safe rooms and shelters; but for the kids whose homes are also dangerous places, they roam the streets paralyzed with fear. ELEM has Essential Emergency Services status and as such are anywhere these kids are, pointing them in the direction of shelter. ELEM normally works around the clock but since Saturday, ELEM has been packing two days in every 24-hour period. Now more than ever we all need to stand together. Now more than ever ELEM/Youth in Distress in Israel needs your help.

On October 12th, we will be holding our annual Ray of Hope benefit, showcasing 40 years of life-saving work, from our modest beginnings to what is now Israel's leading organization for troubled and at-risk youth.

Back in the mid-90s, ELEM Israel still only employed four staff members. The headquarters was a small room in the Tel Aviv University where the four staffers rotated their seats by the office table.

These days, however, we have a dedicated building in central Israel, we employ hundreds of exceptional professionals on staff, we're special consultants to the United Nations, and share our knowledge both in Israel and abroad. Most importantly, ELEM has become a national organization our founders could be proud of. We've kept their vision alive for four decades and went beyond what they imagined originally when they first congregated in New York City in 1979. To this day, the founders cite ELEM's existence as a miracle and one of their proudest, most significant achievements, in careers full of meaningful milestones.

ELEM has existed for more than half of Israel's life. ELEM is Israel. We see youth of all backgrounds, we push for policy change to improve young people's lives, and we employ people from all parts of Israeli society.

Please join us as we take a trip down memory lane. As always, your support means a lot to us and to the at-risk youth we serve in Israel. Let's band together to ensure a healthy future for Israel's vulnerable youth.

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lenore'.

Lenore Ruben, president.



*ELEM Youth Way Back When*

In the late '70s and early '80s, it was very common for American donors to support causes in Israel that had to do with science, art, universities, museums, and hospitals. There wasn't yet an awareness of the need for humanitarian support in the way there is today. The group that came together and ended up establishing ELEM wanted to help people directly. Moreover, they wanted to help youth, preferably in the periphery of Israel.

ELEM's first decade was challenging because the government back then believed it was only the government's role to care for the youth, not NGOs or volunteers. ELEM had some changing of hearts and minds to do. Eventually, ELEM became a trusted partner with the Youth Protection Authority and a household name in Israel.

The organization's story begins in New York City.

## THE YEARS LEADING TO ELEM'S ESTABLISHMENT:

1979

>> Ann Bialkin met a young juvenile judge from Israel, Saviona Rotlevi, and heard about neglected youth who turn to crime. The seeds that led to ELEM's establishment were planted during a lunch on Madison Avenue. "I remember Ann showing up after playing tennis," Rotlevi said. "She had the rackets with her."

1980

>> Ann, inspired to explore the issues up and close, traveled to Israel with multiple friends, most of whom were social services professionals. They visited youth institutes and learned about the youths' challenges. Ann returned to New York and met with Saviona again, ready to get to work. They decided to bring in Yosefa Steiner, who was in New York on behalf of the Israeli Ministry of Welfare, to get her doctorate in psychology. Between Ann, who was then the Head of the Juvenile Criminality Department at the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCs), Saviona, with her background with criminal youth, and Yosefa's background working with young women in distress, they were ready to go.



Right to Left: Yosefa, Ann, and Saviona. The Founders of ELEM



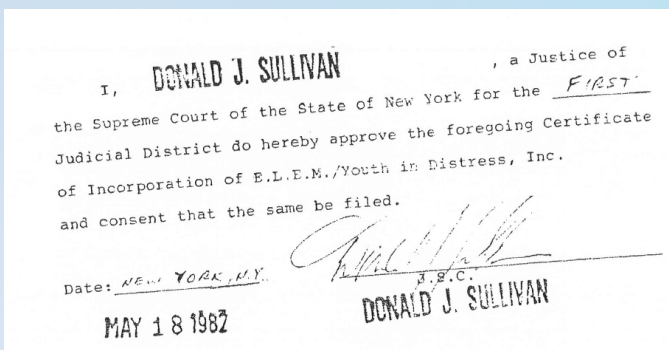
1981

The group that visited Israel wanted to do more for troubled youth than just contribute financially. Since many of them were from the social services field, they wanted to advise, provide ideas, and be a part of developing something completely new. That core group included: Aaron and Nusia Chilewich (Holocaust survivors), Yossi and Atara Ciechanover, Dina Recanati, Nina Weiner, Vera Stern, Dr. Bonnie Jacobson, and others.

1982

ELEM was established in the United States to provide counsel and develop programs for youth, and seeds were planted to establish ELEM in Israel. The first CEO was Hasia Yifat. ELEM is a big part of Israel's history, and so is the Yifat family. Hasia's husband, Yitzchak, is known from the famous photo of the reunification of Jerusalem during the Six-day War.

Frances Katz is a board member to this day, and Bobbie Glass (Z"L) remained a board member until her recent passing.



*ELEM is Officially Born in New York*



*Ann Bialk on the Right Top Row. Fran Katz Next to Her, and Bobbie Glass (Z"L) Fourth From the Right, During a Visit to Israel.*

## AFTER ELEM'S ESTABLISHMENT

1983

ELEM was established in Israel, and soon after, a first day-center opened in Kiryat Gat, one of four centers planned to be built in Israel's periphery. Since the very beginning, ELEM used an individualistic approach: giving every youth what they specifically need. It was crucial to offer multiple alternatives – hostels, group homes, treatment within the community, centers for observation and diagnoses, and later on, outreach through vans and other means. The core idea was to get to know the youth and, based on the assessment, decide which solution fit them best. Our settings were always informal, even in that first center located in Kiryat Gat.

1986

ELEM's first program in Jerusalem opened - a community hostel, marking the beginning of continuous work in the Israeli capital for the next four decades. Jerusalem, a main hub, always brought up unique challenges. Youth visited not only from Jerusalem itself but from the entire country. To this day, we see that many LGBTQ+ kids will escape more conservative environments in favor of a bigger city. So is the case for youth who escape for multiple reasons. In such cities, we'll see more youth in prostitution as well as homeless youth.

1991

1993

ELEM officially launched a field for multiculturalism, focusing on the unique characteristics of all the diverse communities in Israel, such as the Arab community, immigrants from the former USSR, and Ethiopia. The field offered, among other services, professional training to immigrant teenage girls.



*Working with Youth of All Backgrounds is ELEM's Core Value*

ELEM's first drop-in center for homeless and runaway youth opened in Tel Aviv. Its name was *Makom Acher*, or in English, *A Different Kind of Place*.

1995

*Dolphin*, a community hostel for girls at high risk, opened in Ashdod and marked a new era in our work with girls at extreme risk who were often involved in prostitution, severe drug addictions, and homelessness. This was also the first hostel for teenage girls to open in Southern Israel. In the years to come, ELEM will launch an entire field dedicated to teenage girls.

Meanwhile, at Tel Aviv's Central Bus Station, we launched *Another Kind of Coffee* - the first youth counseling center and a new model and concept for what was to become our network of *Coffee & Small Talk* centers.

1996

This was a monumental year during which we established one of our flagship programs - the *Outreach Vans*. We didn't want to wait for the youth to come to us, but instead, we went to them. ELEM was now going out on the streets. We'd park our vans in parks, beaches, and hang-out spots and offer food, warm beverages, a chance to play a game or an instrument and engage in conversation.



*ELEM's Outreach Van in its Early Days*



*From a Single Van in 1996, to a Nationwide Fleet in 21 Cities and Towns Across Israel.*



Working in different communities made the need to deepen multicultural work evident. In 1996, ELEM's work with immigrants expanded. ELEM was the first organization to consider multiculturalism a factor in treating youth. Staff needed a deep understanding of the cultural background of each youth. This became a cornerstone of ELEM's treatment that exists to this day.

That year, we also established the first branch of our "Center for Treatment of Sexual Violence," dealing with both victims and offenders and working for early intervention.



*The Story of ELEM is the Story of Israel. Simcha Githon, the First Head of the Multicultural Field at ELEM, Lighting a Torch During Israel's Independence Day Ceremony in 2022 in Honor of Her Work*

1997

The "Erim Balayla" Program, or *Awake at Night*, was created to decrease commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth. It was approved and budgeted by five committees at the Knesset, allowing ELEM to work with youth in prostitution on a bigger scale. This program would later be known as *The Heart/Halev* and has multiple locations across the country to this day.

1998

Liliyot Restaurant and Social Business opened in Tel Aviv. The restaurant provided vocational training for high-risk youth who were employed there and had a chance to not only learn a profession but also have a steady routine, which gave them stability.



*Omer and Edward Got a Shot in Life Thanks to Liliyot. Edward Cooks to this Day.*

1999

ELEM established a network of counseling and information drop-in centers designed to look like coffee houses. These drop-in centers exist today, offering youth an after-school alternative to roaming the streets.

Between 1999 and 2003, ELEM opened a total of 18 centers. The centers also provide skill development and workshops on topics such as writing, music, photography, and sports.



*A Billboard Advertisement for Coffee & Smalltalk.*



*Early Days at Coffee & Smalltalk*

Beit Dror, a first-of-its-kind home for LGBTQ youth, opened in Tel Aviv a couple of years before the Israel Gay Youth Association was established. ELEM, always the trailblazer, realized that LGBTQ youth were not integrating well into other shelters for homeless youth. We opened the center in collaboration with the Tel Aviv Municipality and the Youth Protection Services. This came about following inquiries and academic research in partnership with Israeli LGBTQ organizations.



*Beit Dror Youth During a Summertime Trip*

2000

*Someone to Run With* was launched in 2000, the first 24/7 shelter at ELEM, serving teenage boys and young men.

That same year, we also launched a yacht program at the Herzliya Marina for naval training of court-adjudicated at-risk youth. This program also included a hostel and served as a new avenue for youth on the fringes of society.

In addition, 90 members of the Knesset signed ELEM's "Fight Against Violence" declaration that year. Among the signatories were the then Minister of Education, Yossi Sarid, former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and former Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Hillary Clinton, former Secretary of State who served as a U.S. senator at the time, also signed the declaration.



*Hillary Clinton with ELEM Youth During Her Visit to Israel*

2002

Since the early days, ELEM aspired to affect policy change in a way that would benefit marginalized young people. In 2002, ELEM won the Speaker of the Knesset Award, showing that the impact of our work did not go unnoticed.

2004

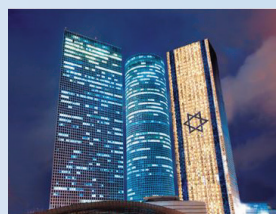
ELEM Launched the Annual Lights of Hope Campaign. Lights on a building were lit once a certain amount was donated. As more funds were raised, more lights were added, and the Israeli flag made of lights was completed. This campaign ran for years, first on the building of the Electrical Company, then on the wall of the Tel Aviv City Hall, and finally, on the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem.



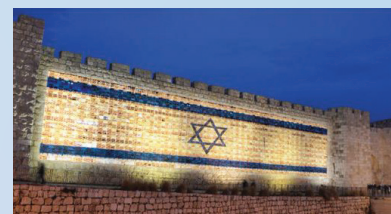
*Israel's Electrical Company,  
2004 - 2005*



*Tel Aviv City Hall  
2006*



*Azrieli Center  
2007 - 2010*



*The walls of the Old City of Jerusalem  
2011*

*The Fully Lit Flags Following Successful Campaigns*



2005

ELEM opened its first *King's Way* center in Be'er Sheva, which was meant to assist graduates of the Youth Probation Services to live independently. ELEM has been assisting young adults following their graduation from our programs, as well as accompanying graduates through army enlistment since the 90s. This, however, was the first time ELEM worked with the Youth Probation Services graduates. This rehabilitative program included personal mentorship, help in acquiring vocational training, creating a sense of self-accomplishment among the young people, and more. During ELEM's tenure, the program was expanded to 10 different cities.

2011

ELEM established The ELEM Race. A 6-mile run to benefit ELEM. The first race was held in Bat Yam, and it became an annual tradition that took place in multiple cities. ELEM youth and supporters alike participated. Sports is something we use in our centers as a way to bond and channel aggression toward something positive, and completing a race always provides a sense of accomplishment.



*Exercise is a Great Way to Heal*

2013

ELEM worked with the Haredi community in different capacities since the 1990s. In 2013, members of the Haredi community took key positions at ELEM, enabling the expansion of our work with the community and a better understanding of its needs. We actively sought to serve in more locations and hire staff from within the community.



*ELEM's Jerusalem Haredi Van Team Shares Input with Haredi and Secular Staff Members*

2014

*The Heart 24/7* opened in Tel Aviv and marked a major expansion of the work with homeless youth and youth in prostitution. This was our first time collaborating with the municipality and government on creating a treatment model.

2015

ELEM has advocated for policy change for the care of troubled youth since its infancy. In 2015, the first Youth in Homelessness sub-committee was launched in the Knesset. ELEM youth participated in the discussions and shared their own stories and life experiences.



*ELEM Youth and Staff Visit the Knesset to Speak in Front of a Committee*

2017

2019

Our first shelter for homeless teenage girls and young women opened in Jerusalem, named *The Friendship House*. No young woman is turned away. In addition to lodging, the women receive legal assistance, aid with medical exams, and information to promote independent living. Many girls who have spent a few months at the shelter become able to rent their own apartment, thanks to the assistance they received. Earlier in 2023, the shelter burned down and has recently reopened in a new location.



*The Re-Launch of The Friendship House in August 2023, Following the Fire*

ELEM received a Special Consultative Status from the Economic Social Council of the United Nations in the field of at-risk youth, farther establishing itself as a world renowned organization.



2020

This year brought Covid into our lives. The first few months were incredibly difficult and stressful. ELEM received special status as an Emergency Services Provider, and while the entire country was on lockdown, including youth centers and schools, our teens felt more isolated than ever. ELEM staff reached them with the vans and private cars. When that was impossible, they met youth on Zoom and kept in daily touch with them through texts and phone calls.

ELEM also participated in an initiative called *I See You*, launched by the Ministry of Welfare. ELEM went out on the streets in specified municipalities (many of them in the Arab community) to locate youth who could not safely stay at home. We helped them to find alternative housing and provided immediate assistance when needed.

In 2020 we also launched our *Young Mothers at Risk* program for a demographic that often fell between the cracks. Young mothers, usually still at-risk youth themselves, suddenly became caretakers. The state grants assistance to a child or to a single mother, but it doesn't take into account that the mother herself is still a young woman at risk. We stepped in to help young mothers with financial planning, preparation for job interviews, securing their rights, and sometimes simply going to the store to buy food and supplies together. The program has since expanded, and we're working for policy change in the handling of young mothers at risk nationwide.



*Van Staffers Scouting Youth on the Streets During COVID*

2021

For years, ELEM has attended rave gatherings and unsupervised parties to assist youth. The annual Lag B'Omer celebration at Mt. Meron attracts hundreds of thousands of people. Many are youth, who manage to access alcohol and dangerous substances, and they often need immediate assistance. This is why ELEM's vans go there every year.

In 2021, a bottleneck situation next to a staircase led to a disaster that left 45 people dead and 150 more injured. ELEM staff members were there, providing victims with initial support. One of our volunteers lost a child that night in what is known as the deadliest civil disaster in the history of the State of Israel.



*Kids and Youth at a Lag B'Omer Celebration, Taken by an ELEM Staffer*



*Orshina Center* for teenage boys and young men who experienced sexual violence opened in Jerusalem. It is the first of its kind in Israel, as treatment for sexual violence is usually focused on girls. Studies show that up until the age of 12, there are a similar number of female and male victims, but male victims traditionally don't report the incidents as much. This is what makes *Orshina* so important, even more so knowing that *Orshina in the City* is also at play. *Orshina in the City* is an initiative that takes the staff out of the center and to the streets, where they offer a safe space for youth to talk.



*Orshina Staff Out on the Streets as part of Orshina in the City.*

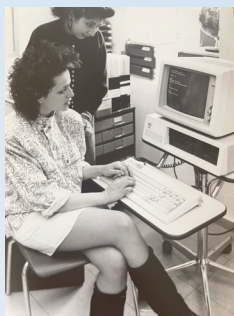


*Staff Members, Council Members, and Additional Guests at a Florida Event*

This year also brought with it the expansion of ELEM USA. In New York since 1982, we launched two new offices, one in Florida, and one in California, growing our development efforts in communities on both coasts. In Florida, we also established an advisory council.

### Moving Forward

So here we are, looking back at 40 years of saving lives and helping youth envision better futures. There's always something to improve, more youth who need us, more awareness to raise, and injustice to fight. One of these steps forward is ELEM's participation in the new Housing First program, the first of its kind in Israel. Housing First is a model that offers unconditional, permanent housing as quickly as possible to homeless people and other supportive services afterward. This is because experience shows that housing alone isn't enough to reacclimate people who are used to surviving on the streets. They need close mentorship and emotional support to ensure they don't revert to what they've known for so long. For many of them, it takes a long time to feel safe, and we're proud to be an organization involved in this exciting pilot, pioneering another new model that can change the lives of young people in Israel.



**SUPPORT ELEM**