

# The WIZO Impact



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My dear Chaverot,

We gather with our friends and families in all the corners of our Jewish world to celebrate the Festival of Lights, Chanukah, which is also the festival of miracles. We remember the miracle of miracles even after the Maccabees sensationally defeated the ruling Hellenist Army, over 2,000 years ago, resulting in the rededication of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem when there was only enough oil to light the lamps for one night and yet, that precious drop of oil excelled itself and lasted for eight nights.

Just as YOU, dear Chaverot, excel. I have recently returned from *shlichut* to Canada and Italy. In both of these far off lands, I spoke of the vast contribution that is made by WIZO to the wellbeing of those who benefit from our services, from education, social welfare, the advancement of women, the protection of those at risk and so on. I was privileged to be among many of the women who make up the 'miracle of a global sisterhood' that brings to our table a generosity of spirit, of time, of donations that so handsomely support our shared cause.

Whenever I visit our chaverot abroad, in whatever country, I am always inspired by the WIZO chaverot I meet; and I never underestimate the importance of sharing our WIZO, its successes and achievements, and the 'naches' that emanates from the stories that warm the hearts and reinforce our commitment to make more and more WIZO miracles.

As you gather with family and friends for eight nights to sing songs, eat suvgniot and watch the animated faces of the children spinning dreidels and basking in the glow of the candles, remember also that **YOU, through your devotion to our blessed WIZO, are also the miracle, not just at Chanukah but always.**

I wish you and your dear family Chag Chanukah Sameach. May you be blessed for your giving and for the power of good that is in your heart.

Fondly,

Prof. Rivka Lazovsky  
Chairperson, World WIZO

May  
Love and  
Light bring  
warmth  
to your  
hearts and  
homes  
this  
Chanukah



## Coming home to WIZO

When a plane touches down at Ben Gurion airport, there is always jubilation, a euphoric sense of homecoming. Because wherever we live in the world, it is to Israel that we return, Israel - our spiritual homeland. It is Jerusalem that we turn towards in prayer from all corners of the globe. We have yearned for her through the trials and tribulations of the history of our people, in times when all but our faith was stripped from us. In every instance from deep despair to immense joy since time immemorial *Jerusalem* has always remained the very focus of our being, and will always be so.



Just as King David tells us, and we quote it often: **אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני** *If I forget thee Oh Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning.* It is our both our birth right and our obligation to never forget Hashem's Holy City - the eternal and forever capitol of our beloved State of Israel.

Today, as rampant anti-Semitism cloaks itself in animosity towards Israel in an attempt to shroud its true agenda, it is the citizens of the State of Israel who pay the ultimate price for the actions of twisted ideologies that fan the flames of hatred into waves of terror. Against this backdrop of reality comes other stark actualities that Israelis have to contend with. The ever-widening poverty gap, the fact that one in three Israeli children go to bed hungry, the astronomic cost of living, the high incidence of domestic violence and family dysfunctionality are to name but some of the hurdles that the citizens face.

Israel as a melting pot, in its absorption of so many diverse populations who have 'come home' to Israel, has benefitted greatly from the vibrancy of these varied peoples but at the same time, each wave of Aliyah brings with it its own tensions, its own challenges and through it all, WIZO is there with an outstretched hand to support, to encourage and to care.

WIZO is at the heart of Israeli life, actively addresses all the issues through her 800 strong network of social and educational projects here in Israel, supported by a worldwide sisterhood of *Chaverot* who identify with WIZO's founding principles and ethos of turning obstacle into opportunity for tens of thousands of Israelis every day and who are proud to be of service in the strengthening of Israeli society.

**When a WIZO Chavera from the diaspora comes to Israel, she comes home to WIZO - to her family. She reconnects and draws strength from the children, the youth, every woman, man and baby who has benefitted from WIZO's beneficial impact so pivotal in building an Israeli peoplehood whose resilience will serve them well for whatever the future may bring.**

In her homecoming, the WIZO Chavera is present in the moment. She looks deep into the eyes of a poverty stricken mother grateful for the milk with which she can finally feed her baby. Our WIZO chavera sees the gratitude in the eyes of a youth for whom the WIZO Youth Village is the only home he knows. We will pass her a tissue to wipe the tears from her eyes as she listens to the story of a young mother with bruises who has fled to the safety of a WIZO Women's Shelter from the husband who promised, not once, not twice, that he would never raise a fist to her again. And at the *Kabbalat Shabbat* on a Friday morning at a WIZO Day Care Centre, when our Chavera is blessed by the 'Shabbat Imma and Abba' surrounded by the gorgeous children of Israel, we rejoice in her enthusiasm at being part of something so much bigger than herself - being part of the movement that allows her to practice her Zionism her way - the WIZO way.

**In WIZO, you are with family, with those you care for and those who appreciate you. In WIZO, you come home to Israel - to your spiritual homeland, to YOUR people. By YOUR devotion to the 'Z' in the acronym WIZO, you fulfil the obligations of *tikkun olam* - constructing Israel's people for eternity.**

## Omar & Shoshi sing songs of peace

Two-year-old Omar and his little classmate Shoshi have attended the WIZO France-sponsored Casa Matilda WIZO Day Care since they were both six months old. The day care centre is situated in an area of Jaffa Tel Aviv populated by both Arabs and Jews. Despite the neighbourhood being poor, it is a vibrant example of the multicultural fabric of Israeli society.

Omar, an Arab Israeli, lives with his parents and six siblings. He is the youngest child. His father works long hours in the building trade and his mother, Fatima, stays at home and looks after her children.



*Photo for illustration purpose only*

At first, Fatima did not want to send Omar to day care at such a young age. However, with having to look after her sick and elderly father after her mother died and with all the pressures of taking care of her large family, she agreed to send him to Casa Matilda. Her friend and neighbour, a Jewish woman whose daughter, Shoshi, had just started to attend Casa Matilda had told her how pleased she was with the WIZO Day Care Centre where babies and children of all backgrounds attended.

*“Fatima, you must send Omar there. I promise you that he will be in safe hands. You can take my word for it.”* Shoshi’s mother told her.

Fatima was still apprehensive when she took Omar there for the first time, but the kindly manner of the metapelet (caregiver) who took Omar in her arms and spoke softly to him reassured her. Omar rewarded the metapelet, a young Ethiopian woman, with smiles and laughter as she took him from his mother and set him down on the padded floor mat next to Shoshi and the other babies who were being watched over by an Arab lady whose eyes twinkled as she played with the wide-eyed babies.

Both Shoshi and Omar are now happy little toddlers who play together along with their little day care centre friends, children from all colours of the rainbow, from all races and religions. Together they celebrate the festivals of Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions, and they sing songs of peace and coexistence.

Omar’s grandfather has since died and so Fatima finds she actually has time on her hands now. With Omar attending WIZO Casa Matilda and her older children all at school, she is undergoing a WIZO-operated course to retrain as a metapelet and she often comes into the day care centre to volunteer. She says, in her own words:

*“It fills my heart with such great pride to see all the children so well cared for and happy. My husband was resistant to Omar attending the day care centre, but since he came and saw for himself how beautifully all the children play together, and how the parents gather to join in all the different religious festivals, he was very impressed and he has encouraged me to volunteer here. I know I will make a great ‘metapelet’ with my own experience as a mother and the WIZO training course that has opened up a new world for me. And the babies? To me, they are all Omar and Shoshi. I love them all as my own!”*

Through Fatima’s involvement with the WIZO Day Care Centre, her social circle has also widened and she now enjoys the company of many of the other mothers, who though different in culture and religion, are just like her – mothers in Israel who only want the best for their children.

In this way, and in so many other ways, **WIZO actively encourages co-existence and mutual respect for the other to facilitate peace** and we like to start this beneficial process at a very early age.

As World WIZO Chairperson Professor Rivka Lazovsky says, **“All children are born equal. To WIZO, it does not matter if a child is Jewish or Arab, Christian or Muslim: they all have the same basic needs and receive the same loving care. WIZO strives hard to close educational gaps so that all the children have the best chance of starting their formal education on the same level.”**



## Reading in Pyjamas with Mother

In an apartment in Kiryat Nordau, three-year-old Alysha sits on her mother's knee listening intently to a story that one of her elder brothers reads to her from the colourful picture storybook she received at day care. As he reads to her and her elder sisters, Alysha's mother points to the pictures and repeats the words in Hebrew after him.

Alysha's mother and father do know how to read and write in Hebrew although they do speak a little, just enough to get by. In their local community, so heavily populated by low-income Ethiopian families like themselves, Alysha's father, a manual worker, never saw the need to learn Hebrew. At home, and in the neighborhood they speak in their native language of Amharic to friends and neighbours while they rely on their Israeli-born and educated children to translate written Hebrew words for them.



In the evening, when the younger children are in bed, Alysha's mother takes out the storybook and copies down words in Hebrew into a notebook. This way, she learns as she always wanted to do, but felt embarrassed to tell her husband, and so she keeps it a secret shared only with her eldest son and Etti, the director of the WIZO UK-sponsored Grete & Henry Abrahams Day Care Centre in Kiryat Nordau, where Alysha attends. Her eldest son often sits with his mother and sets her small written exercises, using words found in the storybooks that Elysha receives from the WIZO Day Care Centre.

These storybooks are part of the **Pyjama Library, (Sifnat Pajama)** a reading initiative that aims to instill literacy and Jewish values. Every month during the school year, kindergarten classes of all WIZO Day Care Centres throughout Israel take delivery of a new book from the Pyjama Library, selected by WIZO's pedagogic specialists and after the children enjoy the story and enrichment activities based on the story in the book, each child is given a new copy of the book to take home with them so the role play and love of words can be enjoyed in a family setting as well as in the classroom.

Day care centre director, Etti, explains: *“Every child loves getting his or her very own book to take home, and here where the population is so poor, buying books is not on the parents' priorities so it is a real and meaningful gift. It promotes not only a love of reading, but it generates quality family time where parents actually sit down with their children and they read the stories together.”*

*Alysha's mother is not alone. Many of our parents cannot read and write Hebrew, and the Pyjama Library enhances their own Hebrew as well as their children's reading skill. Because the family sits down together with older siblings who do read and write in Hebrew, everyone benefits. These books are the perfect way to encourage those parents to work on their own Hebrew literacy skills, which is really a win-win situation.”*

Etti also says that since the introduction of the Pyjama Library, more and more parents and grandparents are volunteering to take part in the activities based around the books at the day care centre, and this has had a very beneficial effect in bridging gaps, particular between the Hebrew speaking children and Amharic speaking grandparents.

Alysha's mother says that a whole new world has opened up for her as her Hebrew literary skills have improved and she is as excited as Alysha by the prospect of having a new book from the Pyjama Library to read, and she recently told Etti that she looks forward to the time when SHE will be the one who reads bedtime stories to Alysha in Hebrew. Indeed, the day care centre has given Alysha's mother some old children's books to read for her to practice her new found skill.

The Pyjama Library is the Israeli version of an international program called the PJ Library of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation who cover 50% of its costs. **Its introduction and first two years of its operation in WIZO Day Care Centres was made possible by the generosity of WIZO USA. Now, more and more WIZO Federations around the world are supporting this early education-enhancing initiative,** which not only promotes Hebrew literacy but also invites a healthy interest in the written word, not just for the children but, as is seen here, for many of their parents - and grandparents, too.

## Ahuzat Yeladim saves Arie

Arie (not his real name) was always a well-mannered and gentle boy. He was studious and excelled in his schoolwork. When his father suffered a massive heart attack and died suddenly when Arie was just eight years old, he became the greatest source of comfort to his mother and they were very close and despite the trauma of losing his father, Arie continued to be what his mother described as *'her shining star on a dark night.'*

It was only when his mother remarried some years later that Arie's world fell apart. He became restless and angry, and his studies suffered. When his teachers tried to engage him, he would stare out of the window careful not to look them in the eye. He would lose his temper easily and even raise his fists to his classmates. He was branded as a troublemaker. His mother was called into school many times. One day, when he was sent in disgrace to the headmaster, he broke down in tears and explained that his new stepfather was a violent man who would lash out at his mother, abusing her verbally and physically but when Arie had tried to tell his mother of his fears, she refused to listen to him and the one time that he tried to come to her defence his new stepfather pushed him out of the way, knocking him to the ground.

His school contacted the welfare services and Arie was referred to the WIZO Ahuzat Yeladim Youth Village sponsored by WIZO Australia.

When he first came to the youth village, Arie was very anxious, displaying the classic signs of witnessing domestic abuse; he blamed his mother, herself the victim, for his overwhelming fear, poor concentration, difficulties in coming to terms with puberty and limited social skills. Slowly but surely, he responded well to therapy from WIZO counselors under whose care he was placed. With patient guidance from teachers and village personnel, he regained his enthusiasm for study, and he adapted well to living in the dormitory. Psychologists set to work on his anger issues that all centered around his stepfather's behaviour towards his mother and although he continued to blame his mother, it was evident that he worried about her.

Within the nurturing framework of the youth village, Arie lost his anger and began to feel 'at home' - and once again he started to focus on his schoolwork. He made friends easily and was popular at Ahuzat Yeladim, always the first one to put his hand up with the right answers, and always happy help his classmates. He loves to spend time in the pet therapy centre, and volunteers in cleaning the cages of the birds, and the rabbit pen.

The youth village social workers also worked closely with Arie's mother, advising her about the steps she must take to end the cycle of violence of which she and Arie were victims.

In the early days, Arie would spend his weekends and holidays at the Shabbat House at Ahuzat Yeladim, where the house mother made sure that he was well-fed and well cared for. Now that his mother lives alone again, Arie looks forward to going home at weekend. His relationship with his mother, which was so fractured when the stepfather was on the scene, is becoming close once again.

There is no doubt that Ahuzat Yeladim has been the saviour in Arie's story. The youth village has provided him with the all-encompassing environment he needed to heal from previous traumas. He has greatly benefitted from counselling to address the grief of losing his father at such a young age, and strategies to manage his anger. Arie now has the confidence and social skills for a successful life. He is a star pupil and will do well in his matriculation exams. Arie has a part-time job in town working in a book store. Ahuzat Yeladim arranged this for him, even organizing a bank account for him to manage his wages. Arie has become an avid reader. He takes a keen interest in his little job and the store owner is delighted with his work.

Arie looks forward to a meaningful army service, after which, he says, he would like to study adolescent psychology at university as he recognizes and appreciates the beneficial effect that this has had on repairing his own broken youth.



*Photo for illustration purpose only*

## *Not just Mum who bears the scars*

Adam cowers under the cushions as his father lashes out at his mother. He tries to drown out the noise as his mother pleads with his father to stop. Adam puts his hand to his mouth to stifle his own cries. He knows that to draw attention to himself will result in him also being dragged off the chair and pushed to the floor just as his mother had been. His heart pounds in his chest. He is terrorized, and yet he is powerless. As powerless as his poor mother, if not more so.

Later, when his father storms out of the room and he hears the front door slam, Adam goes towards his mother, who is sobbing uncontrollably. She draws him to her and hugs him close to her chest.

*"It's OK, Adam,"* she says through her tears. *"It's nothing really, don't tell anyone. Daddy doesn't mean to do me any harm."* Adam cannot internalize such a confusing message. He is, after all, only six years old.

How is it that his father, the fun-loving, easy-going person who brings chocolates and flowers for mummy and toys and books for him can become so wild and lash out like a crazy animal? Daddy always tells Mummy that he loves her. He always tells Adam to be good boy for mummy. Adam just does not understand.

He wakes up to arguing. *"Please don't hit me,"* his mother begs. Adam hears the clattering and banging of dishes in the kitchen. His mother screams. He hears a loud thud. That feeling of terror wells up inside him. The front door slamming and then - silence. Adam creeps into the kitchen to see his mother laying on the floor bleeding. She whispers to him, *"Go next door, Adam. Get Sima (the neighbour)."*

He hears the sirens of the ambulance. Sima puts her hands to his ears and tries to soothe him as he sobs uncontrollably. A kind police officer is trying to calm him. She offers him chocolate and toys. She tells him not to worry, that Mum will be OK but that they must go away to be safe. He is confused and scared. The police officer instructs Sima to pack a bag for Adam's mother and one for him.

Adam and his mother are reunited at the hospital. She tells Adam that he has to be a big brave boy now, that she was sorry that he had to witness her being hurt by Dad, and she knew that it hurt Adam to see it. It was the very first time that Mum did not apologize for Dad's behaviour, the very first time she actually admitted that Dad had done something wrong.

Adam and his mother were given refuge at a WIZO shelter for battered women. When they first arrived, Adam began wetting the bed. At first he refused to speak to the child psychologist, or to join in activities with the other children living at the shelter. His mother seemed to be occupied, she was always talking to the social workers and housemother and she had found her smile. She would say to Adam, *"we are safe here. No one can harm us."*

The pair spent over six months at the WIZO shelter, in which time Adam's mother benefited from legal advice and counselling. She started to make plans for a life far away from the husband that she now believed would one day murder her. Adam settled down at a school near the shelter and started to open up to the WIZO shelter child psychologist assigned to him. The heavy load of doubt lifted from his little shoulders.

Adam's mother picks up the pieces of her life. She has learned to value herself more and is equipped for a new life far removed from the abuse she once suffered. For Adam, the scars take longer to heal. He is just a child - and growing up is difficult enough without the inner turmoil of his early years witnessing the violence of one parent who he loves dearly towards another who he also loves with all his heart yet was always powerless to protect.

**For Adam, for his mother, for the many thousands of families living with domestic abuse and the many tens of thousands of children who live in the shadows of this plague in Israel, there is WIZO to turn to. Through its care, counselling, guidance and education, the victims, their families and even the perpetrators are given the tools they need to end this cycle of violence, despair and destruction - thus building a stronger, more resilient Israeli society.**





## A reason to get up in the mornings



*Early Age  
Day Care Centres*

*Parental Support*

*Warm Homes for  
children at risk*

*Schools*

*Youth Villages*

*Vocational Training*

*Enrichment Courses*

*Youth Centers*

*Counselling*

*Welfare*

*Respite Care*

*Trauma Counselling*

*Community Care*

*Women's Shelters*

*Family Therapy*

*Women's  
Leadership*

*Citizens Advice*

*Legal Services to the  
family*

*Golden Age Home*

Eighty-seven-year-old Golda Levi apologizes, *"Don't take my picture, dear. I have not had my hair done yet. I've had no time, there is always so much to do here!"*

Five years ago, Golda's husband of 66 years, passed away leaving her bereft. *"My Hymie was such a good man. He was my prince and I was always his princess,"* she said. *"I did not know what it was to pay a bill, to call out the electrician, nothing! Why would I? Hymie took care of everything."*

Golda's children and grandchildren live in Canada. When their father died, they pleaded with Golda to come and live there but she refused. *"Israel is my home; all my memories live here, in Tel Aviv. Why would I go and live in a foreign country?"*

For the first year after Hymie's death, Golda insisted on living in her own home. She refused to even think of living in a facility for old people, but as so many of her friends had passed away, and with a growing feeling of isolation, Golda became depressed and lonely. She depended heavily on neighbours who lived in the same apartment block but they both worked long hours, although they did try to check up on her every day.

When Golda's son visited from Canada, he was disturbed to see that his once always-immaculate mother had neglected herself and took the matter into his own hands, by taking her to view various retirement homes.

They came to the WIZO Beit Horim in the heart of Tel Aviv.

*"The moment I walked in, I knew that I could be happy here. You could just sense the warmth and feeling of 'home'. Everywhere I looked there were people of my own age sitting, some reading, some engaged in chat – and some playing cards, which I love to do. Oh, how I missed a good game of cards!"*

In Golda's well-appointed, cozy room, framed pictures of her and Hymie, the children, and grandchildren adorn almost every inch of the walls. On her dressing table, and on the windowsill she keeps her collection of dolls in their national costumes from all around the world, that Hymie bought for her when they went on their many cruises.

On Shabbat and all the High Holy Days, Golda prays in the synagogue at Beit Horim. She points to a plaque honouring the parents of Raya Jaglom z'l and says, *"Oh what a woman, what a star. We used to go to the same hairdressers. I was always in awe of her."*

Golda enjoys movies and lectures on a whole host of subjects, and she takes advantage of the manicures, pedicures, and hairdressers. She even tried reflexology and loves her yoga sessions. She is popular, is often to be found going down memory lane, and talks incessantly about her Prince Hymie and her seven grandchildren, her 'angels' - who come to visit in the summer months.

*"Do you know what it is like to have a reason to get up in the mornings? Because I do. WIZO Beit Horim has given me a new lease of life. My biggest decision is what to wear, just as it always was. Everything else is taken care of. I do believe that Hymie would have loved it here, too. He rests well, knowing that his princess is being looked after so well."*



*Chairperson Riki Cohen (right) with residents of WIZO Beit Horim*

## Solving problems, showing we care



**Tricia Schwitzer**  
Executive Member  
Special Projects

**“Donors don’t give to solve problems because those problems are big, but because those problems are solvable.”** This quote resonates with me. Only last month I was honoured by World WIZO for a donation that I gave in memory of my dear mother who shared my love for the babies of Israel.

I had seen the problem and it was solvable. The babies and toddlers in the Neve Noff Day Care Centre in Lod, where I chose to make my donation were playing in sand playgrounds, in an area where local drug addicts were throwing used hypodermic needles over the wall, which were becoming embedded in the sand. The day centre director had to rake the sand every morning to ensure the kids were safe.

And so, I donated for the renovation of the babies playground. World WIZO donated the renovation of the toddlers playground and the sponsoring federation renovated the infants playground and the internal renovations. The ceremony, shared with the presidents and chaverot from WIZO Belgium/Luxembourg, family and friends was a very, very happy day for me. Seeing my dear departed mum’s name up there on the plaque was like truly putting her to rest in a place where she could do what she always loved to do, watching Israel’s babies play.

It is a very moving moment to see the name of a loved one on a plaque but I am mindful that the babies and children will never give that plaque even a first look. They care not about *Leila Niman z’l*, or me, the daughter that misses her every day, or the loved ones who joined me in honouring her memory and that is OK. **The real reward is in the fact that by the giving of a gift that makes a difference, we receive far more in return.**

Just yesterday, during a visit to the Rebecca Sieff Centre for the family, a taxi drew up outside the battered women’s shelter and the taxi driver helped the young woman, her baby and two young children out of the car. She was met by team members from the shelter who greeted her with warmth and compassion, leading her and her children inside. I can only imagine the thoughts of this woman, how she feels walking into the unknown. She will care not about the magnificent renovation of this life-saving facility, or the names on the plaques. She will, and must, focus on repairing her own life and that of her children.

**We, WIZO women, who care enough to provide the safe, comfortable and nurturing environments for those in our care, we who contribute in so many different ways, are rewarded by that ray of inspiration, the wiping away of tears, and by the knowledge that we really do have the means to solve problems.**

And the plaque? Each of us have our own plaques, that we hang in our hearts, and they are all inscribed with the same words, “Through WIZO, we show our love for the citizens of Israel” - and we do!



Written & Edited by  
TRICIA SCHWITZER  
[trishas@wizo.org](mailto:trishas@wizo.org)

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we  
cannot  
show their  
**FACES**  
but we  
can show  
them our  
**LOVE**

