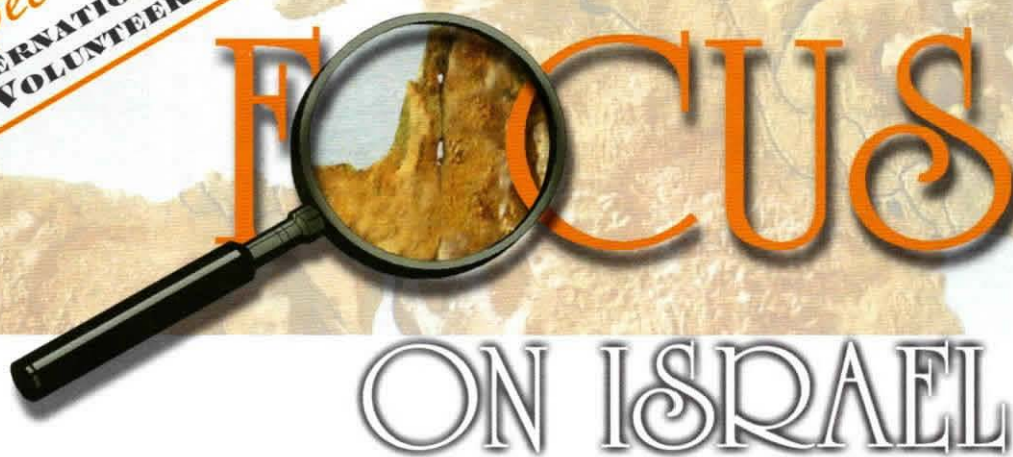


Special Issue  
INTERNATIONAL YEAR  
OF VOLUNTEERS 2001



# FOCUS ON ISRAEL



## A VOLUNTARY EFFORT

By Esther Herlitz and Matti Weill

Almost one third of all Israelis are volunteers. In fact, Israel itself may be regarded to be the result of a very successful voluntary effort. Zionism, the movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland, rallied political support and engaged in practical work, entirely on a voluntary basis. Moreover, the Zionist movement created voluntary agencies to serve the individual and the community while still under British rule.

Even during 400 years of Ottoman Turkish rule, the small Jewish community in Palestine had its own mutual aid societies as well as links to voluntary agencies throughout the world.

**T**he scholars who supervised the “Community Chest” in Talmudic times were volunteers and the *Tzdaka* (charity) tradition, which emerged from the injunction to “love your neighbor as yourself,” encourages all people to help *each other* in times of difficulty or crisis – not just the rich to help the poor. Jewish schools – *Cheder*, *Talmud Torah* and *Yeshiva* – were voluntary institutions, as were the burial societies, bath facilities, brides’ aid groups and more. Most philanthropy was handled confidentially and often as *matan baseter* “secret giving.” Wherever possible, Jewish communities worldwide functioned under voluntary self-government.

In the period preceding Israel’s Independence in 1948, the Jewish community had its own autonomous institutions. It established its own school system, and to protect Jewish settlements, life and property, the *Haganah*, a clandestine self defense organization, was established; later the *Haganah* spearheaded the struggle for independence and ultimately became the basis of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

### A JEWISH TRADITION



More than anything, the *kibbutz* and *moshav* are based on voluntarism. Both the *kibbutz* (collective settlement) and the *moshav* (cooperative village) represented an effort to develop agricultural settlements under very difficult conditions, by voluntary communal effort.

Voluntary organizations were soon founded: *Magen David Adom* (Red Star of David – equivalent to the Red Cross and Red Crescent) for first aid; *Akim*, for the mentally handicapped; *Ilan* for handicapped children; *Zehavi*, to help large families; the Soldiers Welfare Association; and the Society for the Prevention of Road Accidents. Voluntary women's organizations such as *Na'amat* (the *Histadrut* Labor Union's Working and Volunteering Women), *Wizo* (Women's International Zionist Organization) and *Emunah* (National Religious Women's Movement), immigrant aid societies and youth movements all played an important role in those early years.

## VOLUNTARISM SINCE INDEPENDENCE

**I**ndependence in 1948 brought about changes in the attitude towards and the practice of volunteering. Many functions, which had been performed by voluntary organizations, were turned over to the newly formed government. The *Haganah* and other voluntary fighting units gave way to national military service and many community services, once handled by volunteers, are today managed by government agencies.

Pressure to get things done, and done quickly, was great. Immigrants poured in by the tens of thousands – after all, the “open gate” policy was Israel's *raison d'être* – and they needed special assistance. Nowhere in the world was so much aid provided by government agencies to newcomers, yet voluntary help was also needed.

In 1971, then Prime Minister Golda Meir appointed a commission to study Israel's disadvantaged children and youth. It recommended a renewed emphasis on voluntary efforts and in 1972 the government-funded “Israel Voluntary Service” was established to encourage and coordinate voluntary activities of independent agencies. Volunteer coordinators were appointed in the Ministries of Education, Social Welfare, Health and Immigrant Absorption as well as in local councils and voluntary organizations.

Fundraising bazaar



Today the voluntary effort is coordinated by The National Council for Voluntarism and by local volunteer councils. Funded by the Prime Minister's Office, it is comprised of representatives of voluntary organizations, government ministries and agencies and academic institutions, as well as private citizens. The National Council for Voluntarism is affiliated with international organizations such as the International Association of Volunteer Effort (IAVE), the Association for Voluntary Administration (AVA), the World Alliance for Citizen

**RECOGNITION**

**FACILITATION**

**NETWORKING**

**PROMOTION**

## **OF VOLUNTEER SERVICE**

The United Nations General Assembly has designated the United Nations Volunteers Program as coordinating center for the preparation, implementation and follow-up of the Year.

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**INTERNATIONAL  
YEAR OF  
VOLUNTEERS  
2001**



### **On September 3, 2000, the Israel Government resolved as follows:**

The Government notes with satisfaction the United Nations General Assembly Resolution declaring the year 2001 as the Year of Volunteers. The National Council for Voluntarism in Israel will be responsible for implementing the United Nations resolution.

The Council for Voluntarism has appointed a Committee to coordinate its activities during 2001.

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## The Israel Committee for the International Year of Volunteers 2001 is planning the following activities:

- The events of the Year of Voluntarism will be opened by H.E. the President of Israel, on January 9, 2001, at his official residence.
- A delegation of Israeli volunteers will attend the World Volunteer Conference in Amsterdam, in January 2001, which will inaugurate the International Year of Volunteers.
- The Committee will call on government and municipal agencies, and on all voluntary organizations, to plan and schedule events during the Year of Volunteers.
- The Ministry of Education will devote this year to the topic of voluntarism, under the slogan: "Contribution and Commitment – Every girl counts, every boy counts."
- A "March of Volunteers" is planned for the spring of 2001. It will start off in Dan (in the very north) and end in Eilat (at the southern tip of the country). Special events, such as receptions, rallies and bazaars are planned in towns en route.
- A forest, to be named VOLUNTEERS FOREST, will be planted by volunteers in the Negev.
- A *Hitnadvutrom* – a whole day of volunteer recruitment on radio and television – is planned for early summer 2001.
- It is hoped that a special session of the Knesset (Israel's Parliament) will be dedicated to Voluntarism.
- A comprehensive directory of voluntary organizations in Israel will be published.
- A comparative national survey of volunteers (at the beginning and at the end of 2001) will be conducted.
- In cooperation with IAVE (International Association of Voluntary Effort), a Global Forum will be held in Jerusalem on the subject of Volunteering and Absorption of Displaced Persons. Israel's experience in absorbing immigrants from the four corners of the world, and the volunteers' role in creating a new, multi-cultural society will be presented. Some 400 participants are expected to attend the Forum.
- A postcard, the reverse side a questionnaire (in Hebrew) to be completed by potential volunteers and returned to the Committee, has been designed and will be widely distributed.



It is hoped that an atmosphere of volunteering will be created during the International Year of Volunteers, and that the number of volunteers in Israel will increase substantially.

Participation (CIVICUS), the European Network Agencies for Voluntary Action (VOLUNTEUROPE), and l'Association pour le Volontariat Européen (AVE), and is represented on the governing bodies of many international voluntary organizations.

Over the years, "one-on-one" programs have been introduced for tutoring in kindergartens, day-care centers and schools. University students also tutor teenagers (receiving a partial stipend) through a service called *Perach* (flower), becoming role models for disadvantaged children. Specially trained legal advisors to "claimants," have been introduced into the Small Claims Court. Volunteers maintain the Citizens Advice Service (advising on work, taxes, social security and legal matters), hot lines and an advisory service for the aged, for youth and for women.

Immigrant aid associations burgeoned with the influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and from Ethiopia. The massive wave of immigration in the 1990s of more than one million people from the former Soviet Union, gave rise to volunteering among Israelis who had themselves come from Eastern Europe in the 1970s; their assistance in the absorption of the newcomers is immeasurable.

Israel's security needs called for voluntary efforts. Several thousand men, women and teenagers joined the Civil Guard, which operates under the Israel Police. During Israel's wars, volunteers filled the gap, took the place of enlisted men in the social services, in hospitals and much more.

Volunteers from eight rescue teams arrive promptly on the scenes of emergencies throughout the country. Sometimes working with IDF helicopters and mountain climbing equipment, they often risk their own lives to save the lives of hikers and others who become lost, injured or trapped. Volunteers from these units have also gone abroad to help in disaster areas, e.g., after the earthquakes in Turkey.

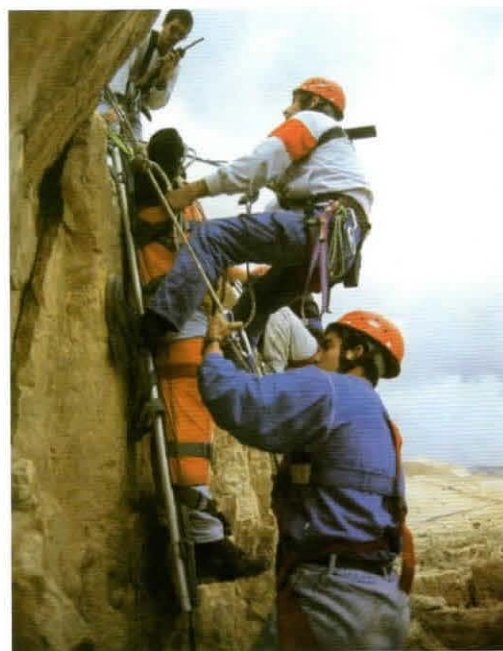
A new corps of volunteer environmentalists and nature lovers assist in environmental problems. *Ya'al* (Helping Hands) groups volunteer in all hospitals, while other groups attend to the needs of the handicapped, the disabled and bereaved families. Prevention of traffic accidents is another important voluntary task. Many international voluntary organizations such as Rotary, Lions, Variety, *B'nai B'rith* and the Soroptimists also have branches in Israel. A new, country-wide project named *WITH ALL MY HEART* has been initiated

## VOLUNTARY TASKS



Werner Braun

Tutoring a deaf child



Volunteer Rescue Team



with the blessing of Prime Minister Barak, to assist families with low income. All major voluntary organizations participate in the project by collecting and distributing foodstuffs, household goods, clothing, school accessories and more.

## VOLUNTEERS FROM ABROAD

**S**everal programs offer volunteers from abroad a chance to serve in Israel, usually on a short-term basis. Many come each summer to help on archeological excavations. Some work on *kibbutzim* while others help in social services. Some young German volunteers view their service to the elderly and sick as atonement for the war crimes of their country against the Jewish people.

## TRAINING

**T**he successful volunteer is a skilled one. Thus, training for volunteers and organizers is in great demand. Training programs are offered by the National Council for Voluntarism as well as by some universities and many colleges and agencies.

Educating the young toward social action starts during their last years of high school. Students are required to engage in volunteer activity several hours a week, helping the elderly, the disadvantaged, new immigrants and the handicapped. (In national emergencies, high school students have assumed important voluntary tasks most successfully.) It is hoped that they will continue to volunteer in some capacity throughout their adult lives.

## BENEFITS

**A**lthough the rewards of volunteering are mostly intangible, awards have been introduced by various agencies. The President of Israel, in conjunction with the National Council for Voluntarism, presents the "President's Volunteer Award" to twelve volunteers each year, both Jews and Arabs.

Volunteers are also insured free of charge under the Work Accident Insurance Bill handled by the National Insurance Institute.

## CONTEMPORARY VOLUNTEER FORCE

**T**he composition of the contemporary volunteer force differs from that of previous generations. Since a majority of Israeli women are part of the work force, they do not have much free time to devote to volunteering, but longevity provides many retirees, both men and women, with time to volunteer. There is a substantial number of male volunteers in the religious community and in security related volunteer tasks. As a result, the number of male and female volunteers is almost equal.

Today, 32% of the adult population in Israel are volunteers of one kind or another. Of the total number of volunteers, the younger generation accounts for 25%, while the largest group is made up of those aged 51-64.

Volunteers tend to be alert to needs in the community and thus often become pioneers in new services and lobbyists for new legislation. By

definition, volunteers are flexible and can shift their activities as needs change. People volunteer for a variety of reasons: to help; to improve society; to keep busy; and to make friends and meet new people. Research has shown that the problem of rejection of the volunteer by the client, known in other countries, hardly exists in Israel.

Voluntarism is very much a part of the Israeli ethic. It seems that Israelis have taken to heart the question posed by a Jewish sage long ago: "If I look out for myself only, what kind of a person am I?"



## SOME VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

### ***Acri - Association for Civil Rights in Israel (1982)***

is a "watchdog" organization, covering the entire spectrum founded of human rights and civil liberties; its work is mainly legal and legislative. It has a membership of 1,200.



### ***Akim - National Association for Habilitation of the Mentally Handicapped (1951)***

provides services supporting mentally handicapped children and adults, and their families. Its 5,000 members also seek to safeguard the rights of the mentally handicapped.



### ***B'nai B'rith - Israel (1843)***

was founded as an International Jewish Organization. It has established several settlements in Israel, a home for the aged and clubs for the elderly, libraries and Hillel Houses on University campuses. *B'nai B'rith* also supports new settlements in rural areas.



### ***The Civil Guard (1974)***

was organized by the Israel Police to allow citizens to take part in the protection of their neighborhoods. Today, some 50,000 volunteers participate in street patrol, traffic control, rescue work, theft prevention and prevention of juvenile crime.







### ***The Council for a Beautiful Israel (1970)***

is an association of volunteers and professionals who work to safeguard, develop and beautify the environment by: teaching judicious planning of the built environment; increasing awareness through educational programs; establishing public gardens, playgrounds and therapy gardens – many in disadvantaged areas; creating and overseeing community do-it-yourself projects to beautify neighborhoods; developing special playgrounds and school yards for disabled children; and seeking solutions to environmental issues affecting the country.



### ***Emunah - National Religious Women's Organization (1939)***

provides broad education through day care centers and schools; offers welfare services to children from disadvantaged families; sponsors family counseling centers, golden age centers and new immigrant absorption programs.



### ***Elem - Youth in Distress in Israel (1982)***

helps troubled teenagers become productive adults by providing outreach, educational and consultation programs for youth at risk as well as treatment and rehabilitation of under-privileged, neglected, abused, alienated and delinquent youth. Several hundred volunteers operate crisis shelters for homeless youth, outreach vans, street teams and youth counseling centers.



### ***Eran - Israeli Association for Emotional First Aid (1971)***

is a 24 hour-a-day, year-round phone hot line. Some 750 volunteer counselors handle 80,000 calls each year providing a listening ear, support, encouragement, guidance, information and referrals.



### ***Eshel - Association for Planning and Development of Services for the Aged in Israel (1969)***

is concerned with the ever-growing elderly population. It offers innovative services to improve the quality of life of old people, through local and communal voluntary organizations.



### ***F.I.R.S.T. - Fast Israeli Rescue & Search Team (1995)***

480 highly trained members are ready to respond to every SAR (Search and Rescue) call from Israel, and abroad. Equipped with state-of-the-art rescue gear, its teams endeavor to minimize loss of life and injuries of hikers and persons trapped in inaccessible places.



### ***Hadassah-Israel - Local Chapter of Hadassah (US) (1983)***

works mainly in support of the Hadassah Medical Organization, with a membership of about 2,000. It aims at promoting better health, especially of women, children and new immigrants.



### ***Ilan - Israel Foundation for Handicapped Children (1952)***

serves the physical, emotional and educational needs of some 15,000 children suffering from neuro-muscular disabilities. Its 3,200 members offer a wide range of services to individuals and groups throughout the country.



### ***The International Organization of Lions' Clubs (1917 - in Israel since 1960)***

encourages citizens to serve their communities. With 800 Israeli members, the Lions' Clubs provide medical equipment, raise funds for hospital projects such as an eye bank, heart check monitor and diabetes research, and organize blood collection drives. They give grants to needy schoolchildren, operate free transport for soldiers, assist the blind, elderly and infirm (by providing blankets, heaters and home repairs), distribute food to the needy and participate in road safety campaigns.



### ***International Rotary Club (1929)***

is an association of business and professional people who volunteer with the goal of helping their fellow man. With 1,700 Israeli members, Rotary clubs assist with professional arbitration, give scholarships, arrange organ donations and organize international youth exchanges. They give aid to the mentally disadvantaged, and are active in the war against drugs. Rotary assists hospitals, clinics, homes for the aged and soldiers, and is active in environmental preservation projects.



### ***Israel Cancer Association (1952)***

serves cancer patients and their families. The ICA also works for research, prevention and early detection of the disease, as well as involvement in all aspects of rehabilitation. It also expands medical services and augments professional training. The ICA is at the forefront of the campaign to educate the public about the importance of prevention and early detection.



### ***Magen David Adom (1930)***

functions as Israel's National Red Cross Society, offering emergency first aid and other critical health services through its ambulance service, first aid stations, blood banks, and first aid training courses. Some 6,000 young people volunteer every year for eight hours a week.



### ***Na'amat - Working and Volunteering Women of the Histadrut - General Federation of Labor (1921)***

seeks to advance the status of women of all ages, to protect their rights and to improve their quality of life by offering a variety of services. Na'amat provides early childhood care and maintains a home for battered women. Recently Na'amat established a hot line in their Center for the Prevention of Violence. Na'amat also promotes changes in legislation and the selection of qualified women to serve in local and national government positions.





### ***The Society for the Protection of Nature (1953)***

is one of the largest voluntary organization of the country, with a membership of 35,000. Its concerns are the protection of nature and the environment. It endeavors to influence legislation and provides extensive educational programs.



### ***Wizo - Women's International Zionist Organization (1933)***

operates institutions and services for infants, children, youth, the elderly and new immigrants. It also works to advance the status of women and to strengthen the bond between World Jewry and the State of Israel. It is a voluntary Zionist women's movement with 50 Federations worldwide.



### ***Yad Sarah - Home Care Support Organization (1976)***

aims to make life easier for the sick, disabled, elderly and those recuperating by lending medical and rehabilitative equipment on a short-term basis free of charge. Other services include transportation and day care centers for the disabled, drop-in centers and personal computerized emergency alarms for the elderly, monitored 24-hours a day. More than 6,000 volunteers serve approximately 250,000 Israelis each year, saving the economy some \$250 million annually.



### ***Yedidim - (friends in Hebrew) (1991)***

is an organization of young volunteers who assist and befriend immigrant children and youth, whose living conditions put them at risk. Its 1,500 volunteers work with some 5,000 youngsters in 55 centers.



### ***The Zionist Forum (1988)***

was established by former "Prisoners of Zion" to help new immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the absorption process. It has 54 branches and serves as an umbrella organization for some 40 volunteer and professional organizations of newcomers offering counseling services, legal and civil rights protecting services, and cultural and library activities.



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