



Showing That We Care: Keshet for Lone Immigrant Soldiers

PROGRAM PROPOSAL

JULY 2008





Showing That We Care: Keshet for Lone Immigrant Soldiers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are 2,500 lone soldiers serving in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). These soldiers serve in units along the northern border, in Judea, Samaria, the Gaza Strip and other high-risk areas throughout Israel. Many of these young soldiers have not had the opportunity to see their parents since they immigrated to Israel, in some cases as many as eight years. This is typically due to the families' financial situations and their lack of resources to afford a plane ticket.

For the parents of these young soldiers, one can only imagine the anguish and concern of being that far away from your child and not having the opportunity to see for yourself that they are all right. Phone calls connect, but cannot supplant for even a minute the opportunity to hold your son or daughter and look into their eyes.

For the soldier, one can only imagine what it must feel like to see all of your friends go home to their families, and have nowhere of your own to return. The feelings of loneliness, separation, and longing begin to amplify over time, in some cases driving the soldier into a state of deep depression. The power of a hug from Mom or Dad is worth more than one million phone calls, pictures or emails, and is priceless to a lone soldier thousands of miles away from home.

As we celebrate 60 years of a Jewish state, let us not forget those who put their lives on hold to ensure a strong and stable Jewish future, in Israel. Please join us in showing these lone soldiers and their parents that we care. Together we can provide these brave soldiers with the support for which they yearn, a hug from Mom or Dad.

This proposal is an invitation to become a partner in Keshet.

Each parent who visits their child in Israel as part of Keshet costs \$1,200. We welcome donations of variable amounts to support individual parents as well as groups. Please join us in showing lone immigrant soldiers in Israel that we care.



PROGRAM RATIONALE

Even with the complete support network provided by the IDF, the burden of military service is especially difficult for lone immigrant soldiers and their families. Native Israeli soldiers return to their homes and families during leave on weekends and holidays, and are able to feel all the support and comforts of home. Lone immigrant soldiers lack this crucial support system, and are forced to spend their downtime with adopted families or the families of soldiers in their army unit. Although this is a generous gesture on the part of those families, there is no replacement for hugging and being with one's biological parents.

Keshet makes it possible for families of lone immigrant soldiers that cannot afford to travel on their own to visit their children in Israel and spend 10 precious days with them. By providing the small cost of the trip to the parents, we can provide the priceless moments of reuniting these families.

TARGET POPULATION

Keshet is offered to lone immigrant soldiers currently serving in the IDF whose families cannot financially afford to visit their children in Israel.

Program Goals and Objectives

- To provide the priceless experience of reuniting lone immigrant soldiers with their families
- To provide the families of lone immigrant soldiers the opportunity to be with their children and view firsthand their child's new life in Israel
- To provide absorption information and opportunities for both the soldier and soldier's families

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

"Keshet" (rainbow in Hebrew) brings parents of lone immigrant soldiers from around the world to Israel for a ten day visit. Keshet allows parents to support their brave children in the military and to see them integrated into Israeli society. In addition to family reunions, this visit often serves as a catalyst for the family members remaining overseas (often in the FSU) to make a positive decision about their own Aliyah. See-



ing their children's successful absorption into Israeli society, with all of the opportunities that it provides, makes Aliyah and joining their children in Israel a realistic option. The visit is an opportunity for parents to consider the important decision about joining their children and building a new life in Israel.

During the visit, participants are provided with relevant information and introduced to services and opportunities available to them as immigrants, including family absorption programs, employment opportunities, academic and professional training. Program participants tour Israel meeting Jewish Agency and IDF representatives while visiting a variety of absorption frameworks they can consider and enter if desired.

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Program evaluation is conducted by means of a questionnaire filled out by the parents. Inquiry is made through both specific and open-ended questions in which the parents express their opinion of the program and make recommendations.

During a recent program evaluation, the results showed that:

- For 84% of the parents, it was their first visit to Israel
- 72% of the parents stated that participating in Keshet strengthened their desire to make Aliyah
- 68% said they were very satisfied with the program
- 32% said they were satisfied

The answers to the open-ended questions were also very positive. Following are some examples:

"A very comprehensive program that left us with a lot of food for thought. An amazing program, a lot of information and a lot of experiences from the tours."

"The program helped me get together with my son, to get to know Israel and to learn about my son's life, his military service and mainly about the possibilities for him and for us. Thank you so much!"



“We were impressed by the program. Everything was great, especially the depth and accessibility of the information [on Israel] and the life of a lone soldier. We would have liked to spend the whole seminar with the children.”

A number of parents expressed the desire to spend more time with their children during the program and said that it would have been worthwhile for them to also attend the various meetings on absorption opportunities. We are working to evaluate whether certain elements of the program conflict with each other in terms of time constraints and how we can maximize participants' availability for activities to achieve the program's goals.

[Funding Request](#)

Each parent who visits their child in Israel as part of Keshet costs \$1,200. We welcome donations of variable amounts to support individual parents as well as groups.

Please join us in showing lone immigrant soldiers in Israel that we care. Only through partnership initiatives such as these we will be able to ensure that these soldiers have the opportunity to see their families.