



Woman to Woman

Jerusalem Shelter for Battered Women

Newsletter P.O.B. 10403, Jerusalem 9110301 | www.jerusalemshelter.org.il | jshelter@netvision.net.il Summer 2016

Natasha – From depression to optimism

“Further to our telephone conversation, I want to bring you up-to-date about our therapists’ serious concerns regarding Natasha’s condition. Despite the ongoing intensive intervention on the part of the psychiatrist who works with the Shelter, no impact whatsoever, not even a partial one, has been evident from the drug therapy prescribed. She continues to be unable to respond to the needs of her five-year-old daughter Anna, for whom she is effectively a non-functioning parent suffering from clinical depression. We request an urgent meeting here at the Shelter, with the participation of a court-appointed social welfare official, to consider the possibility of transferring Anna to an appropriate out-of-home residential setting.”



רגע של נחת עם אמה (צילום: ענת דיציאן)
A mother’s moment of contentment (Photo: Anat Dycian)

This is an extract of the letter we sent to the Municipal Welfare Department two months after Natasha came to the Shelter.

37-year-old Natasha immigrated to Israel when she was 15 and settled in Akko with her mother and sister. She gave birth to her eldest son when she was only 18, involved in a relationship with a partner who was malicious and emotionally abusive, and whose parents exerted total control over how their 3 grandchildren were raised. Her partner forced Natasha to hand over the salary she earned, and when she was finally able to separate from him, he made sure that their 2 sons remained with him.

Raising her daughter on her own, Natasha met her second partner some 6 years after divorcing her first husband. She became pregnant with Anna shortly after moving in with him, but he insisted that she continue to work full-time throughout the pregnancy. His restrictive domination of Natasha’s movements was coupled with physical violence. That, together with his overt hostility toward the older daughter she had brought with her into the new relationship, eventually forced Natasha to flee the home and seek help at the Shelter, while her older daughter was sent to a boarding school.

When Natasha came to the Shelter with young Anna, she exhibited and admitted to insecurity and utter helplessness

about her ability to care for her daughter. She was deeply depressed, and her pathology prevented her from being aware of Anna’s needs and responding to them. She found nothing to occupy her and would spend most of the day sleeping or sitting apathetically on the sofa. In one of her sessions with her case worker she expressed concern over the effect her condition had on her daughter: “I’m so very scared that I won’t be able to take care of Anna.”

Treating Natasha and setting her on the path to rehabilitation demanded coordinated efforts and cooperation from everyone at the Shelter – the Children’s Center staff, her social worker, volunteers, our National Service volunteer, and the psychiatrist. There were disappointments but also uplifting triumphs, with everyone pulling together in an ongoing and concerted attempt to provide Natasha and Anna with a supportive setting. After years of not having been able to relate to her daughter, Natasha is now sensitive to Anna’s

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▶▶▶ needs and can empathize with her positively and lovingly. Thanks to the process of growth she experienced – and continues to experience – with Woman to Woman’s support, Natasha has revealed herself to be not only an intelligent and confident woman, but also a reliable and nurturing mother.

It’s been well over a year since Natasha and Anna came to the Shelter, and nearly a year since our desperate letter to the Welfare Department. Mother and daughter now live in one of our Halfway Housing apartments. With the support of Woman to Woman, Natasha has enrolled in a secretarial

“Hakhel – Minyan Shivyoni” A mainstay of neighborhood support

For a number of years, the women and children at the Jerusalem Shelter have been the recipients of the kindness and concern of the Hakhel congregation – an egalitarian Partnership *Halachic minyan* that strives for equal participation of both women and men in religious life within the boundaries of *Halacha*. The synagogue is located in

The community helped realize 12-year old Noa’s bat mitzvah dream

the same neighborhood as the Shelter, and the physical proximity allows for frequent and convenient exchanges with Shelter residents. The members of the community, particularly the women, have “adopted” our women and children and welcome them to synagogue services every holiday and feast day. They also generously open their hearts

to help them cope with special difficulties and share in celebrations of significant family or personal events. The *brith* of the first son of Shelter resident Ayelet, for instance, was a particularly moving event, with Hakhel community members providing not only delicious homemade refreshments, but also a meaningful emotional context for the ceremony.

12-year-old Noa, too, was the fortunate beneficiary of the community’s good will. A former resident of the Shelter, Noa

course, and everyone who has been in contact with her has high hopes for her success. A combination of group therapy, and ongoing intensive individual counselling, has helped extricate her from the depression that kept her from moving forward. “Sometimes I get annoyed with Anna,” she says, “but there’s no anger in my heart anymore.”

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now lives in a rented apartment in Jerusalem with her mother and brothers. She dreamed of having a bat mitzvah party like that of her school friends, never thinking it would become reality. But the Hakhel community helped the dream come true, investing time, energy and tremendous will in ensuring that Noa and her family could celebrate the significant event in her life as beautifully as she could ever want.

Always ready to initiate new activities and give of themselves, the community’s members are quick to respond to our requests for assistance. Recently, two members attended a Shelter staff meeting to gain a deeper understanding of our needs so that Hakhel’s responses could be more focused. They learned, for instance, that there are no Children’s Center staffers on duty over Shabbat, which means that keeping the children occupied is a challenge which can be daunting for mothers in a state of crisis. Consequently, the community’s members have taken steps to bring neighborhood high school students into the picture to help keep the children engaged in productive as well as entertaining activities.

The contribution and efforts of the Hakhel community members to our Shelter is profoundly appreciated by all of us, women, children and staff alike, and we extend our sincere thanks for their commitment and assistance.



הפסקת שתייה (צילום: ענת דיציאן) (Photo: Anat Dycian) Keeping it cool



קיץ בחצר המקלט (צילום: ענת דיציאן) Summer in the Shelter yard (Photo: Anat Dycian)

Banking accessibility for women in shelters

The Association of Banks in Israel and representatives from the country’s major banking institutions recently signed a

Financial inexperience can be one more factor keeping an abused woman at home, or tempting her to return to her partner after she has taken that first brave step away from him

ground-breaking joint understanding. It is aimed at ameliorating the financial plight of all too many women who leave their aggressive partners to seek refuge in women’s shelters. The provisions of the understanding have already enabled scores of women to overcome some of the many trials that almost inevitably beset women on the road to independent lives.

Today’s economic uncertainty is a challenge for most of us, certainly for women whose life experience has not included handling money. Many abused women have never managed their personal or household finances and never had any experience with banks; their partners held full control of finances. Financial inexperience can be one more factor keeping an

abused woman at home, or tempting her to return to her

partner after she has taken that first brave step away from him. Exchanging the dubious security of life with a violent husband for the uncertainty of life alone is intimidating, especially when independence brings with it new dilemmas to contend with.

Woman to Woman is fortunate to have one of the Bank of Israel’s volunteer network involved with us. She was struck by the evident need for assistance in financial-banking matters for women who have left their abusive partners. After a thoroughgoing inquiry into the situation, and thanks to her background, she was able to enlist the cooperation of the Association of Banks in Israel and senior representatives of banks in Israel in putting together the joint understanding. The aim: to ease the way into normative society by removing the burden of unrealistic debt repayments. Each bank has a representative authorized to decide on issues such as loan repayment and mortgage premium deferrals (up to six months). Efforts are made to separate joint accounts so that the wife can be unshackled from liability for debts incurred solely by the husband, often without the wife’s knowledge.

The willingness of the banking sector to take these steps is an encouraging sign of understanding, and we hope that other social institutions follow suit.

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9110301, ירושלים ת.ד. 10403, "אישה לאישה", ת.ד. 02-6717386 | jshelter@netvision.net.il

התרומות מוכרות על-ידי הרשויות לצורכי מס הכנסה