Soon after Lehrhaus, a self-described Jewish tavern and house of learning, opened in Somerville, Mass., last year, the accolades began to pour in — the kind of buzz that most restaurants only dream of, let alone kosher restaurants. 

*Eater Boston* put it on its list of the most-anticipated restaurant openings in 2023. *Esquire* named it to its list of the 50 best new restaurants in America. And perhaps most surprisingly, *Boston Magazine* placed Lehrhaus on its list of best fish-and-chips in Boston, a city where it feels like every other block has an Irish pub serving the dish fresh out of the fryer.

Now, the popular restaurant and bar is planning to open a second location in Washington, D.C., early next year, the first step of an ambitious nationwide expansion plan that aims to have a Lehrhaus in eight locations by 2030.

“‘The narrative here was always, ‘I think this is a great idea. It’s a new idea, there’s never been a place like Lehrhaus in the world, so let’s test it out and see how it works, and if it works here, it will probably work in other places, too,’” Lehrhaus’ director, Rabbi Charlie Schwartz, told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. “And it really, really works here.”

In Washington, the Lehrhaus team sees a city that’s a similar size to Boston, and with a similarly large young Jewish population. Like the Boston area (and Cambridge-Somerville in particular), Washington has very few kosher restaurants.

“It’s the energy of the city, and the uniqueness of it. There’s a flavor to what happens in D.C. that we think will be exciting to tap into — the amount of young people that are there and that are constantly flowing through there,” Schwartz said. “The D.C. area has some great kosher establishments, and there’s probably room for a world-class kosher cocktail bar and pescatarian restaurant.”

Washington foodies still have a ways to go until they can visit Lehrhaus, which is in the process of choosing a location, hiring a director and raising money for start-up costs. The location will likely be somewhere in Northwest Washington, probably in the vicinity of Dupont Circle, Columbia Heights and Logan Circle. The Lehrhaus team hopes to find someone who knows D.C. well and is a great manager; culinary experience is not required.
As for someone who might lead the D.C. location, Schwartz, whose background prior to running Lehrhaus, which operates as a nonprofit, was as a Jewish educator at Hillel International and Brandeis University said: “There are certain roles in the Jewish nonprofit world that if you do them, you can basically do anything. So if you’ve run a summer camp, you can kind of do anything. If you’ve run a Hillel well, you can basically do anything.”

Lehrhaus’ menu draws from Jewish cuisine across the globe, and Schwartz said he expects there to be a good amount of overlap between the menus in Boston and D.C., while allowing room for the chefs they hire to experiment. (One point of excitement: tapping into Washington’s Happy Hour culture, since drink specials are illegal in Massachusetts.)

The establishment also offers a “house of learning,” with classes taught in Lehrhaus’ intimate library on most nights that the restaurant is open. Many are taught by local Hebrew College rabbinical students or Harvard Divinity School students. In Washington, Lehrhaus will also offer classes and events, but Schwartz expects them to have a slightly different tenor.

“The intellectualism in D.C. is a little bit different. Like, here, people are nerdy. And in D.C., people are wonky,” said Schwartz. It’s a distinction that would make sense to Washingtonians, a city of unrepentant policy wonks who show up for State of the Union-themed drink specials at local bars. “My gut is things will be a little bit more political in nature than they are here.”

Since Lehrhaus opened in Somerville, located less than a mile from Harvard and just over the Charles River from Boston, it has become a cult hit in the local community — including among non-Jews, who Schwartz sees as an integral part of Lehrhaus’ clientele. (One FAQ on Lehrhaus’ website asks if someone can come if they aren’t Jewish. “Of course! Just like you don’t have to be French to enjoy a French restaurant, you don’t have to be Jewish to enjoy a Jewish tavern and house of learning.”)

At a recent event that was part-Purim party, part-anniversary party, hundreds of people showed up to a standing-room-only gathering to drink Purim-themed cocktails, eat gourmet hamantaschen and listen to a speed-reading of the Megillah.

“This is a real place of pride for the Jewish community,” Schwartz said. “I’m excited for what that means for another community to have a place that can be that beacon of light.”

The significance of the planned recognition of a Palestinian state by Ireland, Spain and Norway is largely symbolic, experts told Jewish Insider.

“The consequences are not legal; it’s more about the message,” CEO of European pro-Israel group says as Israel recalls ambassadors

By Lahav Harkov

The moves by the European countries are damaging “in terms of the message it sends – commit Oct. 7 and you’ll obtain what you couldn’t before,” Emmanuel Navon, CEO of Europe-Israel relations advocacy organization ELNET and an international relations lecturer, said.

“The consequences are not legal, it’s more about the message,” he said, adding that the practical implication is probably that “instead of the PLO embassy having a plaque saying ‘Palestine Liberation Organization,’ it’ll say “State of Palestine, but that’s about it.”

Navon also pointed out that the recognition is not of a state in specific borders.

Yonatan Freeman, an expert on International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, said that “what matters more about this recognition is the timing. It seems like they are piling on to the kind of mantra we’ve been hearing from the [International Criminal Court] and about the Rafah operation, lawsuits against Germany — all of these things are accusations that we are committing war crimes or genocide.

“The timing is the challenge,” Freeman added, “but I think if you look at what it really means in terms of practical policy changes, I don’t think we should fear the possibility that these countries will now announce that they’re not trading with Israel or some kind of sanctions...I don’t think there will be a significant impact.”
Ireland, Spain and Norway plan to take the steps necessary to make their recognition of a Palestinian state official by May 28.

In response, Hamas said other countries should “recognize our legitimate national rights, support the struggle of our people for liberation and independence, and end the Zionist occupation of our land.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that “the intention of several European countries to recognize a Palestinian state is a reward for terrorism.”

“Eighty percent of the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] support the terrible massacre of Oct. 7,” Netanyahu added. “This evil cannot be given a state. This would be a terrorist state. It will try to repeat the massacre of Oct. 7 again and again; we will not consent to this.Rewarding terrorism will not bring peace and neither will it stop us from defeating Hamas.”

Freeman noted that Ireland, Norway and Spain have been very critical of Israel's actions towards the Palestinians for many years.

As to whether the move by Spain and Ireland can pressure the European Union to follow suit (Norway is not an EU member), Navon said, “There's never consensus in the EU about foreign policy about anything. There are three or four camps in the EU on the question of the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict. [EU foreign policy chief Josep] Borrell speaks for himself; whenever he says something, countries say 'that's not our position.’ There is no EU foreign policy and there probably never will be.”

Navon was skeptical that the three countries would set off a broader wave of Palestinian state recognition across the continent.

“The Spanish prime minister is a complete opportunist who is just doing this to pacify the far left in his government ... Ireland is always an outsider in terms of foreign policy. They're still stuck in the 1970s. I don’t think this will create a general trend in the EU,” he said.

National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Wednesday that President Joe Biden is “emphatic that a two-state solution should be brought about through direct negotiations through the parties, not through unilateral recognition.”

According to Freeman, “the fact that the U.S. is taking a very strong position against [unilaterally recognizing a Palestinian state] and saying we only accept it in negotiations could cause these countries to say something, but not translate it into actually doing something, because of U.S. influence and impact.”

“Just like the ICC [move towards arrest warrants for Israeli leaders] sparked a major consensus in Congress, [seeking] sanctions ... An American response can be very significant when it comes to what these countries may elect to do against Israel,” Freeman added.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz called Israel’s ambassadors to Ireland, Spain and Norway back to Jerusalem on Wednesday, after the announcement that they would recognize a Palestinian state.

Katz also summoned the European states’ ambassadors to the Foreign Ministry on Thursday, for a meeting in which he showed them the newly released video of female IDF soldiers in their pajamas, being tied up, taunted and shoved into jeeps by Hamas terrorists.

“After the Hamas terrorist organization perpetrated the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, after it perpetrated the terrible sex crimes seen by the world, these countries chose to give Hamas and Iran a prize,” the foreign minister said.

The European states’ decisions are also damaging to efforts to free the 128 hostages who remain in Hamas captivity in Gaza, Katz added.

“This is a tailwind for Hamas' jihadis,” he said. “The march of folly...does not deter us. We are determined to attain our goals, to bring security back to our citizens, to dismantle Hamas and to return the hostages. There are no aims more just than these.”

Katz was in Paris on Wednesday, where he met with his French counterpart, Stéphane Séjourné, who expressed opposition to unilaterally recognizing a Palestinian state, according to the Israeli readout of the meeting.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, responding to Ireland, Norway and Spain's recognition of a Palestinian state and the International Court of Justice considering arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, called on Netanyahu to halt the transfer of Palestinian Authority tax revenue, which had been funneled through Norway since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

“The Palestinians are acting against Israel using diplomatic terrorism and are advancing unilateral steps in the world, and I don't have to continue transferring them money,” Smotrich said. “If this makes the Palestinian Authority collapse – so it'll collapse. I will not artificially revive the PA in order for it to act against me.”

The EU supports a two-state solution. EU member states that were previously part of the Eastern Bloc — Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria — as well as Cyprus and Sweden already recognize a Palestinian state. The majority of U.N. member states – 140 out of 193 – recognize a Palestinian state, as well.

In March, the leaders of Spain, Ireland, Slovenia and Malta announced their "readiness to recognize Palestine," and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said he hoped a “critical mass” of Western countries would do the same.

Belgium, Luxembourg and Portugal were originally in the EU group discussing recognizing a Palestinian state, but they left, with Belgium accusing Sánchez of using the move for domestic political needs and saying the Palestinians should reach specific milestones before being recognized as a state.
New lawsuit against Harvard alleges celebration of Hamas terrorism, threats against Jews

The Brandeis Center’s lawsuit also claims professors have spread ‘antisemitic propaganda’ in class

By Haley Cohen

A federal lawsuit filed on Wednesday morning against Harvard University alleges that since the Oct. 7 terrorist attacks in Israel, students and faculty on campus have called for violence against Jews and celebrated Hamas’ terrorism daily as the university ignored harassment — including a physical assault — of Jewish students, Jewish Insider has learned.

Filed in federal court in Boston by the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Right Under Law, the complaint comes five months after the group filed a previous complaint against the university’s John F. Kennedy School of Government for violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Since the Title VI complaint, “things have only gotten worse,” Kenneth Marcus, founder and chairman of the Brandeis Center and former U.S. assistant secretary of education for the Bush and Trump administrations, told JI. “This is what happens when an institution refuses to address even admitted violence. It is rare to see an institution admit as much as Harvard has had to admit and yet do as little to address the problem as Harvard has.”

The lawsuit, a copy of which was first obtained by JI, states that Harvard allowed student protesters to occupy and vandalize buildings, and interrupt classes and exams. “Professors, too, have explicitly supported Jewish and Israel terrorism, and spread antisemitic propaganda in their classes,” according to a Brandeis Center statement. “Jewish students are bullied and spat on, intimidated, and threatened, and subject to verbal and physical harassment.”

According to the complaint, a Harvard student’s message board provides a window into the toxic environment for Jewish students, describing it as being “filled with vile antisemitic slurs, threats and conspiracy theories, including calls for Jews to ‘cook’ and the Harvard Hillel to ‘burn[ ] in hell,’ and an antisemitic cartoon resembling Nazi-era propaganda that depicts a hand etched with a Star of David and a dollar sign holding a noose around the necks of what appear to be a Black man and an Arab man. The cartoon was posted not only by student groups but also by a faculty,” according to the Brandeis Center.

“We have been urging Harvard for quite some time to address antisemitism, even well ahead of Oct. 7,” Marcus told JI the day before the lawsuit was filed. “Their failure to do so is exactly what has led to the current catastrophe.”

Another example of harassment mentioned in the complaint involves the physical assault of a Jewish student. “When protesters realized a student was Jewish and/or Israeli, from a blue bracelet he was wearing in solidarity with Israel, a mob swarmed and surrounded him, and began physically accosting him and yelling in his face,” according to the Brandeis Center.

“The student pleaded with them to stop but, assailants violently grabbed him, pushed him, and he was physically attacked. The assault was captured on video, yet Harvard took no action to redress the physical assault. And even now that the perpetrators have been charged with criminal assault and battery, Harvard has yet to discipline, suspend, or expel the attackers, or remove them from their leadership positions.”

The lawsuit also addresses harassment that predates Oct. 7, including the Title VI complaint from last October, which involves accusations of discrimination and harassment toward Jewish Israeli students Amnon Shefler, Gilad Neumann and Matan Yaffe. The alleged harassment took place in professor Marshall Ganz’s “Organizing: People, Power, Change” course last spring in Harvard’s prestigious Kennedy School of Government.

According to the complaint, Ganz told the students they could not use the term “Jewish democracy” to describe Israel — stating that using the words “Jewish” and “democracy” in regard to the Jewish state was akin to a project promoting white supremacy. When the students decided to stick with their project as designed, Ganz threatened them with academic consequences.

“Professor Ganz admitted he had never told students in any other class that they could not present their work, even when it centered on controversial topics. During the final class, two of Ganz’s teaching fellows taught a lesson on how to recruit support for Palestinians,” the complaint from October said, noting that while the topic itself was not objectionable, “it led to students making hostile claims, inaccurate characterizations and false accusations against Israel and Israelis. Ganz refused to let the Israeli students provide a response or any counter-arguments to the wildly inaccurate data presented.”

Marcus called Harvard’s case “unusual in its breadth and depth.”

“We have been able to show over a period of time repeated harassment of Jewish students and failure of the administration to do anything about it,” he said. “In particular, it is remarkable that Harvard has essentially admitted to Jewish student based discrimination, particularly at the
Harvard Kennedy School and yet, they refuse to take prompt and effective action to address it. That’s why you end up with the sort of problems we’re seeing now.”

The legal team suing Harvard includes several law firms in addition to Brandeis Center: Holtzman Vogel, Baran Torchinsky & Josefiak PLLC, Vogel Law Firm PLLC, Libby Hoopes Brooks & Mulvey PC, and Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP. “We’ve already seen intensive interest by the House Oversight Committee, leading of course to the resignation [in December] of Harvard’s president [Claudine Gay] and the recent report from the House Education [and] the Workforce Committee,” Marcus said, adding that the House committee report released last Thursday, “details some of the extraordinary failures of Harvard leadership, including their unwillingness to take actions that are suggested by their own antisemitism advisory committees.” The House report also highlighted a series of incidents of antisemitism on Harvard’s campus for which the school could not point to any specific response or disciplinary action it had taken.

MAY 22, 2024

Jewish support for Iranian protesters flags as attention shifts to Israel and antisemitism

Activists lament American Jewish community’s diminished attention on Tehran, despite its role in the Oct. 7 attacks, call for renewed interest in highlighting opposition to Islamic Republic regime

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

A year and a half after the start of the Women, Life, Freedom protests in Iran, the American Jewish community’s enthusiasm for supporting the people of Iran and their demonstrations against the country’s regime appears to be faltering, as attention shifts to the war in Israel and rising antisemitism at home.

All the chaos only serves as a distraction, Matthew Nouriel, community engagement director at JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, told eJP.

“This is what [the Iranian government] wanted,” Nouriel said, pointing out that with the world’s eyes elsewhere the Islamic Republic cracked down on protesters. Last year, executions in Iran reached an eight-year high. In April, Persian rapper Toomaj Salehi received the death sentence for participating in the Woman, Life, Freedom protest movement, and this week, acclaimed film director Mohammad Rasoulof fled the country after being sentenced to eight years in jail due to his work’s criticism of the regime.

As the world waits to see the outcome of the political upheaval in Iran after the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, known as the “Butcher of Tehran,” in a helicopter crash over the weekend, Iranian Jewish advocates say the greater Jewish community should focus initiatives on celebrating the richness of Iranian Jewish culture and the wealth of history between Jews and Iranians because our futures are interconnected.

“Everywhere I go, I’m constantly talking about it,” Nouriel said. “Because it’s a coalition that needs to be nurtured.”

In Jewish communities, where there had been programming based around the protest movement in Iran, today there is little acknowledgement of it.

Even though many young Persians in America are unlikely to be seen supporting Israel, the young generation living in Iran, no matter their background, are passionate about fighting the Islamic Republic and see Israel as an ally, Rabbi Tarlan Rabizadeh, vice president at American Jewish University, told eJP.

“In Iran, they’re loud. They’re literally saying they don’t care if they die,” she said. “I just don’t understand how we’re not helping them.”

Even though they are still passionate about the Iranian freedom movement, many Persian Jews have shifted their energy too, according to Sharon S. Nazarian, the president of the Y&S Nazarian Family Foundation and senior vice president of International Affairs for the Anti-Defamation League.

Last March, the Jewish Committee to Support Woman Life Freedom in Iran launched with Nazarian as a member of its steering committee, providing micro grants to support Jewish protesters outside of Iran — principally Persian Jews — but no one has applied for grants for months, she said.

After Oct. 7 many Persian Jews focused their attention toward Israel and antisemitism, especially since many of the campus protests are occurring in New York and Los Angeles, both of which have large Persian Jewish communities.

“Yes, our heart is with the people of Iran, wanting better for our homeland where we were born,” Nazarian said. “But right now, the threat is very personal. It is in our communities where we live today.”

And yet Nazarian stressed that all of
these things are interconnected: Iran’s Islamic Republic clashing with Israel directly and indirectly, through proxies such as Hamas and Hezbollah; the war raging through Gaza; and the protests flaring on American campuses. The “bigger picture” that Jewish organizations should focus on is that “this regime [is] showing up over and over again as an oppressor,” Nazarian said.

She added that Persian Jews can offer a special voice on these cultural trends emerging on college campuses and among young Americans in general, as they both shatter the myth of all Jews being white and can also share their communities experiences, particularly as it relates to student protests. “What happened in ‘78 in Iran and ‘79 started on university campuses. It started with this desire for democracy, for freedom. Then the Islamic Revolution hijacked the democracy revolution. That’s a very important lesson,” she said.

Jewish organizations should be motivated by the history of, and amplify a message of, Jewish and Iranian unity, Hooman Khalili, who describes himself as a politically conservative Iranian who was born Muslim, converted to Christianity and now lives in Los Angeles, told eJP.

“Persians have been friends of the Jews for 3,000 years,” Khalili said, “when we’ve only been enemies for less than 50.”

Since the Oct. 7 massacres, Iranian protesters of all backgrounds have rallied in in America, the United Kingdom and France, waving Israeli flags and the pre-1979 Iranian flag, emblazoned with the lion and the sun, a symbol of resistance against the Islamic regime. A popular chant that has bellowed through the crowds has been: “Not Gaza, Not Lebanon, My Life Only for Iran.”

Khalili designed 12 murals for sites throughout Israel supporting women's liberation in Iran, including a mural on the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem, featuring images of Mahsa Amini and Shirel Haim Pour, both of them Iranian women — one Kurdish and one Jewish. Amini's September 2022 death sparked the Woman, Life, Freedom movement after she died while detained by the Islamic Republic's morality police for improperly wearing a hijab. Pour was an IDF soldier who was killed by terrorists on Oct. 7 at the Nahal Oz base near the Gaza Strip. "Esthers of the world rise up," the mural says, referencing the Persian heroine of the Purim story.

As Persian Jews stand at the crossroads of so much, one way Jewish organizations in the greater community can support them is by learning about the richness of their culture, Rachel Sumekh, lead consultant of TEN: Together Ending Need, told eJP. If all you know about Persian Jewish culture is their scallion-assisted version of the Passover song Dayenu (in which Persian Jews whip each other with the allium), “you have to ask how we can do a better job of bringing our Jewish community's cultural richness into communal spaces.”

She recently helped plan a Persian Shabbat at the Reboot Summit, an annual gathering of Jews who are part of the Reboot Network, an arts and culture organization. "What was really special was, they didn't just say, 'Here, you have two minutes, talk about Shabbat.' From the cocktail hour to the dinner menu to the music to the framing and remarks, there was support and resources invested to bring our magic to the dinner. It was the most celebrated and least tokenized I've felt being asked to share in a Jewish space.”

MAY 21, 2024

Dark money group backing anti-Israel campus activity faces scrutiny for its practices

The Tides Foundation and its affiliated entities have a budget of nearly $1 billion, focused on left-wing causes

By Lahav Harkov

The Tides Foundation, which backs several organizations involved in anti-Israel protests on college campuses and beyond, is facing scrutiny from the House Ways and Means Committee for serving as a conduit to hide the identity of donors to its grantees.

Tides' entities – the foundation, as well as the Tides Network, Tides Center, Tides Inc. and Tides Advocacy – have a combined budget of almost $1 billion to support progressive causes, NGO Monitor, which researches nonprofits, found. In many respects, they operate as a dark money group, allowing other organizations to hide sources of funding and expenditures.

Ways and Means Committee Chairman Jason Smith (R-MO) pressured the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to disclose the ultimate sources of its foundation's receipt of $12 million from Tides, arguing that funding from the progressive donor-advised fund may conflict with its tax-free status.

“Getting $12 million from Tides and then
trying to say it’s really not from Tides, it’s from someone else, that makes me want to look harder,” Smith told The Hill.

The Tides Foundation did not respond to a request from Jewish Insider for comment.

The probe is one of many nonprofits whose tax-exempt status Smith has been examining, including to determine whether universities are failing to prevent antisemitic activities.

According to its 2022 tax filings, Tides entities contributed to nonprofits involved in recent campus and other anti-Israel activism, including Jewish Voice for Peace, Council on American Islamic Relations chapters (CAIR) in Georgia, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Minnesota, IfNotNow, CODEPINK and others, as well as WESPAC (Westchester County Peace Action Committee), which, in turn, supports National Students for Justice in Palestine and American Muslims for Palestine.

Tides also supports Palestine Legal, which has sued universities for cracking down on anti-Israel protests, and the Adalah Justice Project, which began organizing protests within days of Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel, through a fiscal sponsorship since 2013 and 2016, respectively.

This arrangement obscures NGOs’ financial operations, including their donors, donation amounts, staff, salary and other expenditures, and makes it nearly impossible to trace sources of funding or whether donations are being used for their intended purpose.

Legally, the fiscal sponsorship means that Palestine Legal and Adalah Justice Project are part of the Tides Foundation, which files tax documents on their behalf, even though the former presents itself as “an independent organization” and the latter says it is “a Palestinian-led advocacy organization.”

Nonprofits that receive “Model A Fiscal Sponsorship” manage their entire backends through Tides; they fall under Tides’ 501(c) (3) nonprofit status, Tides does their financial accounting, payroll processing and human resources management, provides benefits to employees and administers grants, among other services, and collects a 9% fee.

In 2022, the last year for which Tides’ IRS disclosures are available, the five entities reported spending $18,217,539 on salaries. Yet the reported “officers, directors, key employees and highest compensated employees,” as well as the major independent contractors of Tides entities, add up to $36,554,485. The remaining $121.6 million is unexplained. Tides pays the salaries of employees of fiscally sponsored organizations, such as Palestine Legal and Adalah Justice Project.

Fiscal sponsorship allows NGOs like Palestine Legal and Adalah Justice Project not to disclose their donors, though in their case, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund contributed close to $1 million to Tides in 2023 and earmarked more than half for them.

George Soros’ Open Society Foundations contributed $25.8 million between 2020 and 2021. In 2019, $225,000 of its donations to Tides were for pro-Palestinian causes.

Other notable Tides donors include a foundation funded by Susan Pritzker, wife of Hyatt Hotel heir Nick Pritzker, a relative of Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, a Democrat, and, in the past, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The Westchester Peace Action Committee Foundation (WESPAC) received $97,000 from Tides in 2022, nearly half of its funding that year, and reported spending almost $1.5 million on “office expenses,” in an office with just one part-time employee, The Washington Free Beacon found.

WESPAC is the fiscal sponsor of National Students for Justice in Palestine, which victims of the Oct. 7 attack are suing for allegedly being “collaborators and propagandists for Hamas.”

The lawsuit states that “the financial interactions between WESPAC and its anti-Israel clientele is intentionally opaque to largely shield from public view the flow of funds between and among them.”

A group of 16 Republican senators called last week for the IRS to investigate WESPAC and other groups for supporting terrorism. Their letter noted the “heinous support [National Student for Justice in Palestine] chapters across the country have supported for Hamas, a US-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization.”

WESPAC does not disclose its fiscal sponsors, but the Anti-Defamation League reported that “most of WESPAC’s current or former fiscal sponsorships goes to support anti-Israel projects and groups,” such as Within Our Lifetime, which has been a major driver of anti-Israel protests in New York.

NGO Monitor President Gerald Steinberg said that “the hidden funding for the carefully planned ‘spontaneous protests’ needs to be addressed urgently.”

“The leaders of the network manipulated huge IRS loopholes that allow for secret payment of salaries, rent and other major costs for what are supposed to be transparent ‘civil society’ groups,” Steinberg added. “By funneling their money via Tides and other fiscal sponsors, the donors, possibly including foreign entities, remain hidden, in contrast to basic democratic norms.”

CORRECTION: Open Society Foundations contributed $25.8 million to the Tides Foundation in 2020 and 2021 combined; an earlier version of the story wrote the contributions were only in 2021.
Yahya Sinwar, Hamas’ leader in Gaza, is today among the most famous antagonists of Israel and the Jewish people. Yet in 2011, when the Oct. 7 mastermind was released from Israeli prison as one of 1,027 Palestinian prisoners exchanged for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, he was not seen as one of the most dangerous terrorists to release. Emi Palmor, a member of the Israeli negotiating team, told Jewish Insider this week.

While the Shin Bet “stood on its hind legs” to strongly oppose the release of terrorists who murdered Israelis, Sinwar was not one of them, Palmor recounted.

“A lot of people don’t know this, but Sinwar’s nickname is ‘the butcher of Khan Younis’ because he was known for his cruelty to the Palestinians,” she said. “He was in Israeli prison for murdering Palestinians, not Jews. He murdered four Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israel. He killed them himself – he strangled one, he hanged another by his feet… He is a sadist; there is no question.”

According to the law in Israel, victims of a violent or sexual crime have the right to submit their opinion on any request for clemency or a pardon for the perpetrator to the Justice Ministry’s Pardons Department, which Palmor led at the time.

Because Sinwar was not in prison for killing Israelis, “there were no families who said at the time, in 2011, ‘don’t free the man who murdered our father,’ which is the classic Israeli response,” she said.

Palmor, who later became director-general of Israel’s Justice Ministry and is now a member of Meta’s Oversight Board, was the only member of the Shalit negotiations team who was part of the process for all five years.

As a result, Palmor said, “I know Sinwar’s whole file.”

“I wouldn’t say it was easy to release him. We knew, the Shin Bet knew, that he was bad,” she said, but there would not have been an agreement to free Shalit if Sinwar was not part of it.

“Shalit was kidnapped by Sinwar’s brothers in order to free Sinwar,” she said. “The Palestinians gave all kinds of lists [of prisoners], and he was on all of them.”

Palmor pushed back against the argument that Hamas would not have taken hostages in the Oct. 7 attack if not for the Shalit deal.

“We now know that the government could have killed Sinwar and didn’t do it,” she argued.

As for what Israel can learn from the Shalit deal in the ongoing negotiations to release hostages from Gaza, Palmor said that more of the terrorists should be deported. She noted that in the past, deported Palestinian terrorists were accepted by Jordan, Turkey and Ireland, among other countries.

“There is no doubt that [the Oct. 7] attack was planned to damage Israel’s resilience and the confidence of all Jews in the world, not only Israel,” Palmor said. “Sinwar knows what the Holocaust is and what is Jewish and Israeli identity. He knows how antisemitism works… He knows all of our triggers and references.”

As such, Palmor scoffed at those who say that Oct. 7 was revenge for Palestinians who are “humiliated at checkpoints” and want to humiliate Israelis in return.

Instead, she said, “there was something medieval about it, barbaric in a way that is not even from our time – beheading, sexual violence… It’s a pogrom. Sinwar wanted to take the Jews back 76 years, to make us weak again…All of these things were done to bring us back to the mindset of vulnerable, humiliated Jews, which also increases antisemitism.”

The body cameras worn by Hamas and used to document the attack and the subsequent posting of the videos on social media was part of their plan “to hurt the resilience of Jewish people and Israelis, terrorizing them through visuals and not just the murder,” Palmor said.

She referred to reports that Israeli welfare authorities have prepared contingency plans for a scenario in which young, female hostages return pregnant, and said: “That’s a pogrom. You enter the village, burn it down and rape the women. It’s not a war from our time – not that there’s such a thing as a civilized war.”

Palmor is also chairwoman of the...
board of NATAL — the Israeli Trauma and Resiliency Center, whose work with Israelis and Diaspora Jews has become acutely relevant since Oct. 7.

“When we're asked who could develop post-traumatic stress disorder, you first think about all of the 18,000 people living in the Gaza envelope who were at home, who saw people murdered, whose homes were burned down and members of their family and community held hostage,” she said.

However, she added, “We know as a fact that many people who don’t live there but watched intensively experienced trauma.”

For example, parents of participants at the Nova party who were on the phone with their children for hours, listening to the gunfire, and felt helpless have experienced PTSD.

“Online antisemitism is not just unpleasant — it can translate into real-world harm,” she said.

Antisemitism on social media should not only be thought of in terms of a spike in content targeting Jews, Palmor said. She has been the target of anti-Israel campaigns since she joined the Oversight Board as one of its original 20 members in 2020, and that has continued. She also pointed to “an antisemitic campaign since Oct. 7 against Jews and Israelis” working for major tech companies.

“There are many alumni of [elite IDF intelligence unit] 8200 in tech, which is the most natural thing in the world...but it feeds all the conspiracy theories that Jews care only about themselves and have all the power,” she said. “They forget what a tiny percentage we are of the world’s population. They adapted their antisemitism to the world of social media.”
Peace-focused environmental group looks to bring Israelis, Palestinians together to address Gaza’s water shortage

Tareq Abu Hamed, the Palestinian director of the Israeli Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, tells American supporters in D.C. that his group uses ‘science and the environment to bring people together’

By Haley Cohen

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

A Middle East peace-focused environmental group is looking to bring together Israelis, Palestinians and others in the region to address the water and sanitation crisis in the Gaza Strip, which existed before the Hamas terror group launched a war against Israel and has exacerbated dramatically through the past seven months of conflict.

Israel’s war against Hamas has left 2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza with destroyed water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure. As a result, “Gaza needs immediate relief with resilient, adaptable infrastructure networks,” Tareq Abu Hamed, the executive director of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, an Israel-based research center, told some 20 attendees at a roundtable discussion last Wednesday at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C, where he emphasized that initiatives to rebuild infrastructure by the international community cannot wait until the war ends.

The event, called “Cultivating Hope: Fostering Environmental Solutions for Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank” — open to a select group including journalists, Israeli Embassy staff and environmental nonprofit employees — came on the heels of the institute’s nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize earlier this month. Located in Kibbutz Ketura in the Negev desert, the Arava Institute aims to train future leaders of the region in environmental issues so that they can cooperate in solving regional environmental problems. For nearly 30 years, its focus has been on bringing together Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians and others to develop solutions to the region’s environmental challenges. The institute was nominated for the Nobel for its “groundbreaking work in the fields of dialogue and diplomacy, climate engagement, education and research.”

But Abu Hamed, a Palestinian Israeli from east Jerusalem, emphasized in his presentation that since the Oct. 7 terrorist attacks, Arava’s work has been more urgent than ever before. For example, before Oct. 7, UNICEF declared that 96% of Gaza’s freshwater sources are unsuitable for drinking, according to Abu Hamed’s presentation. Since then, he said that the only source of drinking water has come from outside of Gaza with the assistance of international aid organizations. According to Arava, atmospheric drinking water generators and off-grid desalination plants can secure local sources of potable water. To help, the institute is leveraging its networks of Israeli and Palestinian civil society nongovernmental organizations to launch a response to the environmental and humanitarian crisis in Gaza that will bring off-grid water, energy and sanitation solutions to communities impacted by the war. To solve the water crisis, Arava has partnered with Watergen, an Israel-based global company that develops atmospheric water generator systems. Seven Watergen systems were installed in Gaza prior to the war, providing 10 million liters of drinking water.

In addition to Arava and Watergen, the Jumpstarting Hope Coalition consists of Israeli, Palestinian and global organizations: Damour, Gigawatt Global, Comet-ME, Sun Box, Green Cake, De Novo Group, Energy Global, Laguna Innovation and Atheer.

“The most important aspect of this project is that these people work in Gaza on the ground,” said Abu Hamed, who is the first Jerusalem Palestinian to head an Israeli academic institution. “I’m coming to you not from Switzerland or Sweden, but from the region… I live the conflict. I go to the West Bank, Hebron, Jenin and at the same time I go to Tel Aviv, Jaffa and Beersheva.”

“The vast majority of people want peace, but they think the other side doesn’t want peace,” he said. “And that’s because of the lack of communication between the two sides. This is the role of Arava Institute. We use science and the environment to bring people together.” He noted that after Oct. 7, the institute received several inquiries about new Palestinian partnerships. “This shows how much trust plays an important role. Through the discussion of science, you give people the opportunity to see the human in one another.”

The mission to jump-start humanitarian aid in Gaza came nearly instantaneously...
to Arava's students on Oct. 7, according to Abu Hamed. On that tragic day, he recalled asking, "What do we do [about the students]? Do we send them home?"

"The students decided to stay," Abu Hamed said. "I'm talking about Palestinian students. Not Palestinian Israelis but Palestinians from the West Bank. And the Israeli Jewish students. They said, 'We live here together. We are one community. We want to continue the semester.'"

Abu Hamed added that "Jumpstarting Hope" has humanitarian benefits inside of Israel's borders, too.

Four of the institute's Israeli students were called up to army reserve duty in October. "Seeing Palestinians from the West Bank calling their classmates going into Gaza wishing them to come back safe, that was heartwarming," he said. "To see Jewish Israeli students calling their friends in Gaza from previous semesters wishing them to be safe, that was heartwarming. And [it came from] dialogue." ♦

MAY 21, 2024

For a group of Jewish 2nd grade girls, a lesson in advocacy — and a life-changing trip to Washington

The classmates at a Chicago Jewish day school met with Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz and White House spokesperson John Kirby during their trip

By Gabby Deutch

It was a meeting that began like countless others at the White House: "Thank you for inviting us to meet with you today. We are so honored to be here," said Hazel Nisenbaum, the advocacy group's leader. She wore a sky-blue suit and white kitten heels.

What followed made clear that the group's business in Washington was anything but typical.

"We are a group of second grade girls at Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School in Chicago, Ill.,” Hazel continued, before White House Jewish liaison Shelley Greenspan interrupted and asked if she could take notes. Eight-year-old Hazel, all business, agreed. "We may only be 7 and 8 years old, but we know we can make a big difference in the world. We are proud to be Jewish and are proud to be girls." (That's according to a video provided by Kara Goldman, Hazel's mother, who can't stop kvelling.)

In the Friday meeting at the White House, Hazel was tasked with introducing the Jewish Girls Rights Club, whose 11 members were in Washington with their mothers for a high-level advocacy day that even the most seasoned Washington veterans would envy.

Their day began on Capitol Hill, in meetings with Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) and the chief of staff to Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV), and a private tour of the Capitol. Afterward, they went to the White House for a visit that included conversations with Greenspan, White House national security spokesperson John Kirby, White House Gender Policy Council Director Jennifer Klein and Deputy Director Rachel Vogelstein, and Rebecca Lissner, deputy national security advisor to Vice President Kamala Harris. The girls ended the day at the Supreme Court. (They all read I Dissent, a biographical picture book about Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, before the trip.)

"I was so encouraged by how tenacious and precocious these girls were. Yet as young as they all were, I was very impressed by how they had a keen sense of the ancient prejudices that fuel this recent rise in antisemitism that they have grown up with, and the need to stand up for the rights of women and girls," Wasserman Schultz told Jewish Insider on Monday. "My heart was so full after speaking with these young ladies."

Wasserman Schultz was rushing to another meeting after her conversation with the girls on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, but "she made the girls feel like she had all the time in the world to hear from them," Goldman said. "She really had such a gentle way with the girls and also provided such inspirational advice about breaking down barriers and not taking no for an answer."

The girls wore pins — designed by Hazel — imprinted with the words "Jewish Girls Rights" in a pink Word Art font, two Israeli flags and a blue Star of David in the middle. Wasserman Schultz put on the pin after their meeting, as did Kirby.

Hazel started the Girls Rights Club to talk with her friends about issues like pay
For more than four decades, Eli Rosenbaum's job was to track down the bad guys: He was a professional Nazi hunter, the leader of a famed Justice Department unit that pioneered unique methods to uncover evidence of Nazi atrocities and bring Nazis to justice decades past the end of World War II. Before he retired early this year, he led a special DOJ team tasked with identifying Russian war criminals who were violating international law in Ukraine.

“Plans to the right place at the right time” Rosenbaum said. “They hear a lot, and we talk a lot at home, about what’s been going on. They have tremendous pride in Israel. I think they feel a deep connection to Judaism and a deeper connection to Israel.”

After the girls started saying that they wanted to go to the White House to talk to President Joe Biden about these issues, one of the girl’s mothers — who works at AIPAC — called Greenspan, a friend, to ask if she could help set something up. Greenspan arranged a full day for the girls, who left Washington feeling inspired (and tired).

“I was so impressed when the Jewish Girls Rights group reached out and asked for a meeting,” Greenspan told JI. “Listening to them share their perspectives and dreams was an important reminder that no matter how challenging the world can be, fearless young girls are a North Star. Jewish women are powerful agents of change and I know our future is bright with these young girls leading the way.”

The girls care about antisemitism and sexism, but those aren’t the words they use. The way they communicate their ideals is simpler and more straightforward.

“They just think that things should be fair for girls and for Jews,” said Goldman. “They notice that there’s never been a female president, and there’s never been a Jewish president.” What inspires them is strong Jewish female leaders, added Goldman, and that’s what they experienced in Washington.

Each girl had a clipboard with printed-out copies of the scripts for their meetings. An Israeli student mentioned her family members who had to “leave their houses because of Hamas,” according to the prepared script. “We want to visit them and get them presents and I miss them.” Another student said she is proud because Israel is the only Jewish country in the world, and also because it has had a female leader, “and we should have a female president in America,” the script stated.

“We saw strong female Jewish leaders in all three branches,” said Goldman. “I think they saw the possibilities of what their future could hold.”

On Friday night, after the long day of meetings, the girls and their mothers gathered in their hotel room to celebrate Shabbat. They had brought homemade challah with them from Chicago.

MAY 20, 2024

What the top U.S. Nazi hunter thinks of claims that Israel is committing genocide

‘I’ve worked on Nazi cases for all those decades, and I just see a lot through that lens’

By Gabby Deutch

For more than four decades, Eli Rosenbaum’s job was to track down the bad guys: He was a professional Nazi hunter, the leader of a famed Justice Department unit that pioneered unique methods to uncover evidence of Nazi atrocities and bring Nazis to justice decades past the end of World War II. Before he retired early this year, he led a special DOJ team tasked with identifying Russian war criminals who were violating international law in Ukraine.

Rosenbaum thinks there’s another genocide happening today, or at least that the world is on the precipice of one. But it’s not the genocide that’s currently being prosecuted at the International Court of Justice, which is considering whether Israel is committing a genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. No — the only possible genocide Rosenbaum sees is the genocidal intent of Hamas, and he told Jewish Insider he’s shocked to see so many people in halls of power and on college campuses argue that Israel is at fault in its retaliatory war.

“I see a lot through the prism of World War II, which was the last time that the Jews were targeted for annihilation, the last genocide of the Jews,” Rosenbaum said in a wide-ranging interview last week. “It’s Hamas that can stop this war, not Israel, in my view, but there isn’t anything close to sufficient understanding of that out in the world. It’s just an unprecedented threat. It’s — and it pains me to say this — a credible threat of genocide,” Rosenbaum added.
referring to the threat that Hamas still poses to Israel.

Now that he’s out of government and able to speak freely about current events, Rosenbaum wants to use his voice to right what he thinks is a morally wrong view of what’s happening in the Middle East. His experience in prosecuting perpetrators of the world’s worst crime is what guides his thinking on the matter.

“I’ve worked on Nazi cases for all those decades, and I just see a lot through that lens,” he said. On a trip to Israel early this year, he visited a cousin who lives in Holon, a suburb of Tel Aviv. The family’s safe room is a small room under the stairs with reinforced walls. That’s where they hide when red-alert rocket sirens go off in central Israel, warning of a rocket attack from Gaza.

“It was very, very sad, and to me kind of evokes images of the Holocaust of Jews hiding under floorboards and in closets and wherever they could,” said Rosenbaum.

Before leaving government, Rosenbaum traveled to Ukraine twice with Attorney General Merrick Garland. Afterward, he finally made a personal visit to Kyiv to spend time with former colleagues. When that trip ended he and his wife went to Israel, which Rosenbaum called their “war zone tour.”

“I ended up being deeply worried not only about Ukraine but about Israel,” Rosenbaum said. “As dire as the situation reportedly is in Ukraine, at least nobody thinks that Vladimir Putin has the goal of killing every Ukrainian. No way. But Hamas does have the goal of killing all the Jews, at least all the Jews in Israel and who knows whether they go beyond that in terms of aspirations.”

Rosenbaum does not intend to sit on the sidelines and have a quiet retirement, although he and his wife recently enjoyed a national park vacation in Utah — his first in two years. Most of his travel involves speaking gigs, and it was only last month that he began to speak publicly about what’s happening in Israel and Gaza.

“What motivates me is my great dismay and even shock that there is so much misinformation and disinformation out there, both internationally and domestically, and Israel’s situation is so outrageously misrepresented and misunderstood,” said Rosenbaum. He knows that he is saying things that go beyond what American officials have said in the aftermath of the Oct. 7 Hamas terror attacks that killed more than 1,200 people in Israel.

“I am saying some things that no one in the U.S. government is saying, most especially that Israel not only has the right to attempt to destroy Hamas’ ability to govern and especially repeat its genocidal attack on Oct. 7, but actually has an obligation under international law, under the Genocide Convention, to attempt that if it feels it can,” Rosenbaum noted.

Drawing on his World War II expertise, Rosenbaum made a comparison between Israel’s campaign to eliminate Hamas in Gaza and the Allies’ efforts to defeat the Nazis. During that war, the Allies called on Nazi Germany to “surrender unconditionally, come out with your hands up, relinquish your weapons, release your prisoners.”

“That is how World War II ended in Europe on May 8, 1945. We, the Allies, did not say to the Hitler regime, ‘Well, OK, you will have a permanent cease-fire, but you can stay in power and you can have a few battalions of mobile killing units.’ No, it doesn’t work that way,” Rosenbaum said.

He also compared Israel’s campaign against Hamas to the Battle of Mosul in Iraq, a key urban campaign in the U.S.-led fight to defeat the Islamic State, which resulted in the death of at least 9,000 civilians between 2016 and 2017. Gaza’s Health Ministry, which is operated by Hamas, has counted 35,000 deaths in the embattled enclave, although it is not clear how many of those numbers are Hamas combatants.

“Civilian deaths are inevitable when combatants are committing the war crime of hiding behind and underneath civilians, and Hamas is hiding behind both Palestinian and Jewish civilians. Israel is in the horrible situation of having to attack Hamas knowing that there is no way to avoid civilian deaths, either Palestinian deaths or Jewish deaths,” Rosenbaum said. “This is a new paradigm in the history of war, and I would say, a new paradigm that the law of war will have to catch up with in order to deal with it.”

Rosenbaum described himself as a “great admirer” of President Joe Biden, but said he has misgivings about some aspects of U.S. policy and rhetoric about the war in Gaza.

“There are political realities, and I think also there’s a long tradition of hostility to Israel in many parts of the State Department, and that doesn’t change just because you have a different secretary of state,” said Rosenbaum. “I think [Biden] is entitled to gratitude and to respect, but some of the things that various U.S. officials have said I think have been far from optimal.”

Rosenbaum added that he wants “to see more attention paid to the unique life-and-death struggle that Israel faces here.”

As the ICJ considers the genocide charges against Israel, Rosenbaum said it would be “beyond shocking” if he body concludes that Israel has committed genocide. “I think the battle will be fought more in the context of war crimes and crimes against humanity,” Rosenbaum suggested. “I hope that Israel will get credit for having done things that no other government in history has done to protect civilian life, and will somehow generate understanding of the almost literally impossible situation that Hamas has put it into.”
Israel tech sector comes together to support children who lost parents in Oct. 7 attacks, war

Israel Children’s Fund looks to provide for the hundreds of children who lost one or both parents in the massacres, has raised more than $20 million so far

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Lior Krengel worked in high-tech for 16 years, including a six-year stint at the project management software company Monday[dot]com, until the devastation of the Oct. 7 terror attacks forced her to reconsider her life’s focus: helping the country, specifically the children who lost one or both parents in the massacres.

“The attacks were a wake-up call for me that our country needs everyone to be joining and helping and supporting. This is for all of us now to take care of,” Krengel told eJewishPhilanthropy. She spent five months volunteering with evacuees from Kibbutz Kfar Aza, who had been relocated to Kibbutz Shefayim in central Israel.

“Everything is broken for them,” said Krengel, who now serves as the CEO of the nonprofit Atufim B’Ahava (“Wrapped In Love,” but known in English as the Israeli Children’s Fund).

“Some witnessed [one or both of] their parents murdered, others had to hide in a closet for 30 hours. All of them are refugees in their own country, many lost their best friends, other siblings,” she added. “We need to make sure they’re fully supported and as fast as possible. Otherwise, those orphans today are the youth at risk tomorrow.”

More than 6,43 children have lost one or both of their parents in the Oct. 7 terror attacks and the subsequent war in Gaza and fighting along Israel’s northern border, according to a recent study by Israel’s Knesset Research and Information Center. Of these, 251 are the sons and daughters of civilians killed in the massacres, while the rest are the children of fallen members of the country’s security services.

Shortly after the Oct. 7 attacks, Israel’s high-tech sector mobilized to contribute funds and expertise toward creating a system of support for these children as they encounter major milestones and minor moments over the next 25 years.

“[It] started off as an emergency thing,” Krengel said, adding that initial efforts — including the distribution of more than $500,000 during the first weeks of the war — focused on the immediate future.

Now ICF is taking a longer-term view, building governance, infrastructure, partnerships and solid foundations, organizationally and financially, she said.

“I have to make sure that we build it efficiently, that every dollar, every shekel that is given, is needed,” Krengel said. “It’s not replacing government money, [or] another organization’s money. It’s needed, and there are] “a lot of partnerships, a lot of hands that need to be connected and held, so that we are all supporting them efficiently.”

She noted that ICF also brought together the four different funds and organizations aiming to support children who lost both parents on Oct. 7. ICF, however, is the only organization that is specifically dedicated to aiding all children who lost at least one parent — and in many cases, also their homes, siblings and friends. (The Israel Defense Forces’ Widows and Orphans Organization also supports children who lost even one parent, but only if that parent was part of Israel’s security services.)

The Israeli government has committed to supporting the children who lost a parent who were under the age of 21 at the time of the attacks, covering most of their school tuition fees, for instance. However, Krengel noted that this would not cover the financial support that young adult children typically receive from their parents. This is especially true with the 82% of cases ICF is handling, in which the father — often the primary if not the sole source of income — was killed. And children who were over 21 at the time of the massacre would not receive this funding, which ICF is trying to rectify on a “case-by-case” basis.

“There’s no one rule. It’s a very complex system and we’re building it with all the sensitivity in the world,” she said.

Former tech CEO and member of ICF’s founding team Marni Mandell told eJP that philanthropically, ICF has an ambitious goal: to raise the needed funds within an 18-month period, while it’s still top of mind for donors. So far, the nonprofit has already had more than 2,000 donors over six months raising upwards of $20 million, towards an $80 million fund.

One supporter, actor Mark Feuerstein, perhaps best known for his lead role in the procedural TV series “Royal Pains,” became involved after attending a benefit for the ICF at the home of his friend, angel investor and ICF supporter Joseph Varet.

“[After that] I knew I would do what I could for this cause,” Feuerstein told eJP. “These kids are the future of Israel — if we want Israel to remain strong in the face of suicidal jihadists, we will need this next generation.”

“I often worry about imposing on people to give, but in this case I genuinely felt, ‘I am giving people the opportunity to do a mitzvah, to give to a just and noble cause,’” Feuerstein added. “I hope and pray each of these children gets to live a normal life with what’s left of their families, that they have the means to pay for food, shelter and a full education, a normal life to compensate for the abnormal, tragic and traumatic day they were forced to live on Oct. 7.” Feuerstein has, to date, raised more than $25,000 for the ICF.

As of publication, the fund is helping 408 kids (ages 0-25), who require individual
solutions to meet their needs. Krengel said that the approach is to provide for differently-sized “bricks” on the road ahead. Big bricks center on major events or milestones in the lives of Israeli children as they grow to adulthood, such as bar and bat mitzvah commemorations, completing high school and the long process of becoming an IDF soldier; and then, getting a higher education getting married, having children — moments when parents would step in with financial, mental and operational support.

Small bricks, Krengel explained, might include finding someone to take one child to school so the parent can participate in a different after-school activity; or funding hobbies or rituals that children had with their deceased parent.

Whatever path a child chooses, they will also benefit from the fund, Mandell said. “If a child wants to become a hairdresser, we want to support them in their aspirations. If a child wants to become an astrophysicist, we want to support them in their aspirations without defining right and wrong, good and bad” professional choices, Mandell said. “We want to make sure every child has the ability to thrive in the way that they want to.”

“We are not here to give them a new identity, we are here to help them with their own dreams, their own aspirations, their own goals,” Krengel said.

The criteria for support can be confusing, but with a base of tech professionals leading ICF’s efforts, improving clarity is on the agenda. The leadership is creating a tech platform, where needs can be cataloged and assessed; and a chatbot that will walk survivors through questions that will inform them of their benefits, such as scholarships.

“We want to make sure that what we’re doing is what they need us for,” she added.

The fact that many of ICF’s supporters and leadership come from tech has led to valuable connections “beyond money,” said Mandell. For example, teenage children who are interested in tech may be able to access ICF leadership as mentors in that field.

ICF’s leadership reiterates that — by strategy and design — most of the programs they fund are executed by existing organizations that tackle specific types of support for survivor families: summer camps or mentorship programs, for example. With ICF bringing the kids, financial support and resources, and those organizations bringing knowledge and expertise, working together creates an impact.

“We don’t have any reason to rebuild things and to replace those organizations. So we’re building with them,” she said.

Right now, ICF is estimating the need at $200,000 per child, and the organization’s financial model accounts for inflation and other unpredictable variants, Krengel said. With this safety net in place, ICF leaders hope that mothers or other guardians will have the breathing room to focus on the day-to-day needs of their families, and to start healing from their own trauma.

“We don’t want to take independence and autonomy from them; the idea is to support [the caregivers] enough so that they can take their own lives back and control their own journeys,” Krengel said, “so they can move from survival mode to thriving. Then they are on their own, like everyone else.”

The fund also factors in the dignity of grant recipients by giving the money to them to use themselves, instead of paying the bill from the fund, which would label them as “a kid without a father or mother,” Krengel said.

“We all know when we look back to history, when we look back to the Holocaust, we see great stories of heroes and leaders that came out of this [trauma], built amazing lives and did great things for humanity. At the same time, we have too many stories of people that ended up in poverty,” Krengel said. “We are here to ensure that kids who lost one of their parents on Oct. 7 are all taken care of and that no one ends up being forgotten. At the end of the day, we want to make sure that all children have the opportunity to thrive.” ♦