

### Please Touch

When the curtain goes up in the Na LaGa'at (Please Touch) theater, guests are ushered into a different reality. One is given the opportunity to glimpse the hopes, dreams and daily challenges of those living in darkness and silence as conveyed in a unique on stage performance.

Zippora dreams of going to the cinema with a big pot of pop-corn and being able to see all that is on the screen. Shoshana dreams of sitting with people she can see and hearing what they say. At Na LaGa'at, they can escape the loneliness of their inner world for awhile.



It all started in 2002 when Adina Tal and Eran Gur founded the Na LaGa'at theater company to create a stage for the deaf-blind. While some actors have traces of sight or hearing, others are either totally deaf or blind. However, the majority suffer from an inherited genetic disorder called Usher Syndrome which initially results in acute deafness leading to a loss of vision.

Following the amazing success of the first performance, "Light is Heard in Zig Zag", the Na LaGa'at Center was opened in Jaffa in 2007. A first of its kind, the center aims to provide an outlet for communication and employment for this special population. Since it's opening, 80,000 guests from Israel and

abroad have visited. Besides the theater, special features include Café Kapish, a cafe serviced by deaf servers where orders are made in sign language and BlackOut, a restaurant where one is served a meal in the intimacy of darkness by blind servers.

Rehearsals for the latest performance, "Not By Bread Alone" lasted two years. Actors respond to the cues of drums they cannot hear, beat by hands they cannot see. Instead, sensing the vibrations, they manage with some assistance to move around the stage. Throughout the performance, actors make bread and eat it together with the audience at the end. As they bake, the actors share their small joys, memories, and dreams reminding us that we do not live by bread alone. No one goes away untouched by the experience.



Born in Iran, Nurani lives in a retirement home for the elderly in Gedara. He has memories from the time he could see and he enjoys dancing very much. Genia loves children and regrets that she will never see her nephew's face. ICEJ AID is honored to support Genia, Nurani and others by providing training for employment and acting, enabling them to find their place in the community.



Joelle Cohen Finklestein conveyed their appreciation with these words, "The entire Na LaGa'at family would like to thank the ICEJ and the Christian community for its enduring support of our project. We aim to provide a space where disabled and non-disabled individuals from different cultures, faiths and social backgrounds meet and interact in mutual respect. We are very touched by your generosity and see you as true partners. Come visit us!"

## Therapeutic Horseback Riding



The look on their faces says it all. The children at the Israel National Therapeutic Riding Association (INTRA) love spending time on horses. INTRA provides therapeutic riding for Jewish and Arab children with various mental and physical disabilities. Many have Rett's Syndrome, a type of autism that primarily affects girls. Through riding therapy, INTRA has seen many of these kids come alive as they interact with the horses and learn to use new muscle groups otherwise left unexercised. Time after time the positive and calming affects of these treatments are evident to staff and the families.

Early intervention is critical, beginning as early as 2 years old. The younger the children begin interaction with the horse, the better chance they have of developing and regaining the use of muscles. The results are amazing. Anita Shkedi, the director of INTRA, shared with ICEJ AID staff about children normally unable to use their legs who have been able to signal the horse to move forward with the use of their feet. Children who may never receive love from their own family learn to hug the horse and show love for it. Even a child who does not speak finds a way to express joy at being on the back of such a magnificent animal.

Others assisted include youth at risk and trauma victims. The teens come to the stables to learn how to take care of the horses and receive school credit. Important educational aspects of the program include learning responsibility and understanding how their contribution is essential for the wellbeing of the animal.

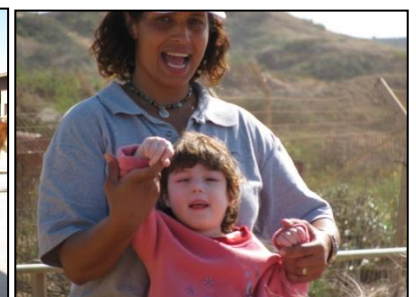
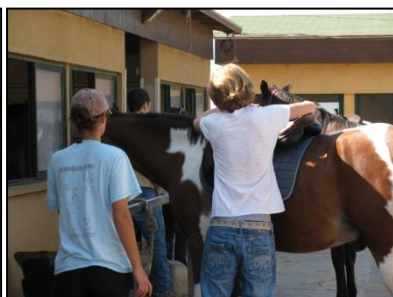


IDF Soldiers and victims of terror diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) also find help in the INTRA family. The emotional and psychological suffering from trauma endured in a terror attack or from army service leaves those with PTSD wondering how to overcome and go on with life. The unique ability of the horse to sense the emotions of the individuals and respond to them is a key in treatment. Interacting with the horses has a calming effect on riders who have to be relaxed in order to relax the horse.



Unfortunately despite the obvious benefits, many families cannot afford the lessons. While some scholarships are available, budget is limited. One such family's mother died in the 2006 Hadera suicide bombing, leaving behind 8 year old twins and a teenage daughter. The opportunity to develop a relationship with the horse gave these children confidence and motivated them to initiate new ideas of their own. Their experience at INTRA has given these children the opportunity to work through the pain from their family tragedy.

Due to the generosity of Christian giving worldwide, ICEJ AID provided training for instructors who will help those in distress. Anita Shkedi thanked us for our involvement and stressed how life changing it is for all who come to the center. As we said goodbye she told us, *"Thank you so much for your visit. It is important to us. We really feel that you are with us and support us. I look forward to seeing you with us here again soon."*



**Please prayerfully consider partnering with us.**

Click [here](http://www.icej.org/donate.php) to go to <http://www.icej.org/donate.php> and designate your gift to ICEJ AID.

For more information contact us at: [icejaid@icej.org](mailto:icejaid@icej.org)