



Safe Haven Overnight Camp – Pesach 2017

Thanks to your support, 50 of Orr Shalom's most vulnerable and at-risk children and teens between the ages of 8-17 were able to spend their Pesach vacation in a safe, structured, enriching, and fun environment. During the school holidays the majority of children living in Orr Shalom's therapeutic Family Group Homes are able to return to their biological parents for a short period. Unfortunately, not all the children can return home, either because they are orphans with no family, or come from situations so violent, abusive or dysfunctional that they cannot return home even for a brief period. There are some children who are able to return home, but only for a day or two at a time. For these children Orr Shalom's Safe Haven overnight camps are their only solution and provide the children with a safe, fun, challenging vacation experience.

Learning and Growing in a New Location: Safe Haven moves to Kfar Silver

This Passover, we moved our location from Nitzana to Kfar Silver, a village near Ashkelon. This is the first ever Safe Haven Camp to take place in Kfar Silver; we plan to use this location for our future Safe Haven Camps. Most children arrived – with accompaniment - by bus or train to the Ashkelon Station which is near Kfar Silver; children from Eilat and Beer Sheva arrived by minibus. This was an improvement from last year's session, as all the children had to be bussed to Nitzana. The conditions in Kfar Silver are a definite improvement over those in Nitzana. The children's



bedrooms in Kfar Silver are spacious and have recently been fully renovated. Kfar Silver is aesthetically beautiful, boasting large, green, open areas, which the children took full advantage of, using the areas to hang out and play sports.

Proximity to Ashkelon, a city with many entertainment and cultural attractions, expanded our options and facilitation of day trips. Having the option of shopping, going bowling, attending a movie, or even just walking on the promenade above the ocean added to the feeling of a leisurely vacation. Proximity to shopping centers was a welcome change for staff and children alike, as needs were able to be met immediately and easily. Access to medical centers and doctor's offices added to the sense of security for both children and staff.

The first days were devoted to getting to know Kfar Silver, the new location. Many of the children have anxiety, sometimes extreme anxiety, surrounding new people, places, and experiences. The children at Orr Shalom have undergone a tremendous amount of change in their short lifetimes, and they require, and thrive, on stability and the familiar. To combat



this anxiety in a playful manner, the counselors organized a scavenger hunt wherein the children received an initial clue, with which they had to find the next station. Arriving at the station, they had to take a picture of it and send it to their counselor to receive the next clue, and onwards, until the children felt they had a basic knowledge of the village.

Coping with Changes and Challenges for at-Risk Children

The children who attend Orr Shalom's Safe Haven Camp are the most vulnerable and at-risk, and this session we faced, and overcame, several challenges, both emotional and logistical. Logistically, the children's bedrooms are located further away from the main gathering area than they were in Nitzana, which was something the staff dealt with by allowing for more time to get to and from activities.

Emotionally, some of the children had a difficult time adapting to a new and unfamiliar place. Many children were especially challenged by the fact that Safe Haven breaks for one day in the middle, for the night of the Pesach Seder. While we are well aware that the children who attend Safe Haven cannot go home – or to host families – for any extended period of time, we do feel that one night, that of the Seder, represents a precious opportunity for repairing relationships. To that end, the children do go to family members or host families for the day and night of the Seder. The day that the children return, however, is a heavy day. Many children have a difficult time re-adjusting and need some time to process the previous day's experiences. As the days passed, they acclimated to the new space, and grew to love the large and open sports field, and especially loved the agricultural farm and petting zoo located in the village.

This session, twelve new children were introduced to Safe Haven. Having never attended a Safe Haven Camp before, there was an adjustment period where they had to adapt to the routine and rules of the Camp. Five new counselors joined us this session after intense training.

Staff: Staff consisted of 13 counselors, the Camp Director, and 5 National Service girls (young women who choose to do national service rather than enlist in the IDF). The children at Safe Haven require 24/7 around the clock attention and care, and sometimes act violently (physically and/or verbally) or provocatively towards the staff. The staff expends an enormous amount of energy every single day, which can be quite draining. Through their training they have a greater understanding that the children's negative energy is not directed at them personally; they are trained to be able to see through children's behavior to try and identify the root cause of their distress. They balance the line between encouraging the children to participate, and being sensitive and attentive to their physical and mental states.





Staff have nightly debriefing meetings, where they are able to individually process the day and collectively prepare themselves for the new day ahead. Our staff this session was exceptional, providing and maintaining the highest level of care and compassion for the children.

Children and Staff: Interactions and Personal Stories

The following personal stories illustrate the complexities of the children's lives and experiences at Safe Haven: As you will read below, the vacation was filled with fun, pleasurable activities and outings, which for our children is no easy feat. All our trips are carefully planned to obtain the maximum supervision whilst giving the kids opportunities to build friendships and enjoy, and yet many children had a difficult time adjusting and letting go. These stories also illustrate how our counselors are trained to be able to help the children cope with their ongoing inner turmoils.

- L. is a nine year old boy, on the small side. His mother is a drug addict, and he has no connection to his father. He lives in our Beer Sheva Family Group Home and is incredibly artistically gifted, with a violent temper. He would often get into fist fights with another boy – even going so far as to throw rocks at him. A counselor was constantly by his side, taking him aside for one-on-one conversations since L. responds better to private conversations. Nearly every day, L. had to be taken aside and explained the rules again and again. The staff were incredibly patient, calmly explaining the rules of Safe Haven, which include no violence, even when L. was in a rage and cursing. Often, L. was able to overcome his temper, and was allowed to continue with the scheduled activity. Other times, however, L. had to face the consequences of his actions, and was unable to take part in activities and trips. At the end of the week, L. said that “It was good, but it was also really hard.” We hope that by the time he returns in the summer the professional staff will have enabled him to learn new tools to keep his violent temper under control.
- F., a 15-year old girl in 9th grade, has been with Orr Shalom for two years. She is in contact with her mother, but for various reasons she refuses to visit her mother for vacations. Travelling far away from her Orr Shalom home causes F. intense anxiety, to such an extent that for the past two year, rather than travel from her home to the Safe Haven Camp, she intentionally cut herself in order to be admitted to a psychiatric ward. This Pesach, F. was able to attend Safe Haven Camp for the first time. Despite her dreadful anxiety at the beginning, she took part in all the activities. All the counselors were aware of her situation, and she was held throughout the camp and throughout all the activities. It was very special to see her successfully battle her anxiety, with the help of one counselor who took it on herself to help F. enjoy new experiences.
- K. is 15 years old, and an orphan – after her father's tragic death, her mother committed suicide. She has no other family in the world, and is always worried that people have forgotten about her, or overlooked her; she has a very deep need to be seen. One evening, K. locked herself in her bedroom and refused to answer the door. Fearing the worst, as K. has a history of self-harm, the staff used the master key to open her door whilst another counselor climbed



through a window. A counselor stayed by her side all night long, and throughout the remaining days of camp, ensuring that K. felt held. This was a very extreme case, and now that she has returned to Orr Shalom's Home, she is undergoing intensive treatment for her anxiety.

- Y., another 15 year old girl, lives in an Eilat Family Group Home. She is very anxious, and has been professionally diagnosed with depression. She craves attention, and seeks this out from boys, so staff members kept an eye on her to ensure there would be no trouble. One night, she took her medication and immediately had a fit, claiming that the pill got stuck in her throat and that she was choking and couldn't breathe. A counselor stayed with her all night long, doing breathing exercises with her, assuring her that she could breathe and that everything was ok.

Even through turmoil, compassion shines through...

The children at Safe Haven are the most vulnerable of Orr Shalom's children. Most of the time, they do not want to talk with each other about their personal backgrounds, feelings, crises, or anxieties. They all know that they're there for a reason, and they all have social workers, therapists, and psychiatrists to talk to. They don't want to dwell on their own, or others', demons.

U. is 16 years old, but is very small and skinny, a fact that bothers him to no end. He is charming, quiet and introverted with an artist's soul, and also very funny and talented, with a beautiful singing voice. This was Uriel's second time at Safe Haven. U. was an active member in his group, and together with the older teens helped build and organize the Egypt and Israel Escape Room activities. This year, U. moved from being a little brother to serving as a big brother. We were so happy to see him move up and begin to find his place as a mentor despite his introversion, sharing his humor and talents with his little brother.

T., a 15 year old boy, suffers from nervous tics, sometimes leaping up in the air and then touching the floor afterwards. One night, having done this and feeling unbearably self-conscious and sick about this tic, he apologized to the group of teenagers sitting with him. We know that often when children feel wounded, they look for an opportunity to wound others, so that they can make others feel the same pain they feel. However, the group of teenagers sitting with T. did not take this easy opportunity to make fun of him. They didn't gang up on him. Instead they all listened to his pain, and each one, one after another, each shared something that they themselves are personally self-conscious about.



A True Camp Experience While there were four trips outside Kfar Silver, many activities took place in the village. It is important to note that many of these activities were built and implemented with the help of the older teens, who took on a true leadership role this Pesach.

Leaving Egypt Escape Rooms The older children helped the counselors organize this activity, building two escape rooms; "Leaving Egypt," and "Arriving in Israel." The children who entered the Egypt room had to complete their missions (physical challenges and quizzes on the Exodus story) as quickly as possible to arrive in the Israel room.



Chocolate Workshop The children made chocolate from scratch, built a chocolate fondue waterfall, prepared pralines and chocolate coated candies, and – most importantly – ate a lot of chocolate!

"Café Dilemma" Throughout the week small groups of children sat with a counselor for 15-30 minute sessions discussing various pertinent topics such as friendships, self-confidence, freedom (in the context of Passover – what does it mean to really be free?), and responsibility.

Big Brother/Big Sister Program Teens are provided with an opportunity to develop valuable leadership skills, serving as mentors, many for the first time in their lives; while the younger children are paired with a very relatable role model, someone who has been in their shoes and has surpassed hardships similar to their own. Big sisters led a chocolate ball making workshop with their little sisters, while the big brothers led a sporting competition with their little brothers, including soccer, basketball, and even a long-jump challenge!



Mimouna: The traditional end-of-Passover celebration was held in the dining hall. Some of the teens acted out a play explaining the origins of Mimouna. Traditional Moroccan music played on the loudspeaker throughout the event. A famous chef, Moran Buaran - former personal chef to the President - volunteered to come and cook the food for the party! She brought with her several chef friends and the children ate a smorgasbord of delicious foods. We also brought a popcorn machine and a cotton candy machine, so all the children were enormously happy!



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Trips Outside the Camp



Nitzanim Grove We took a trip to the Nitzanim grove, where the children were treated to an Improv Theater company that led an interactive experience. The actors were able to really connect with the children. Afterwards, the children split into three groups, choosing to either participate in a creative writing circle, Zumba, or soccer. They then made pizzas together in an outdoor pizza ovens. At the end of the day, tired and full of pizza, they went for a leisurely walk in the sand dunes adjacent to the grove before returning to Kfar Silver.

Nahal Halilim Located near the Jerusalem hills, the children arrived early in the morning and were led on a hike along green and flowering paths, exploring ancient caves along the way. At the end of the hike, the children went to Ein Hemed, a national park full of green grasses and water pools, where we made a barbeque and ate picnic style on the grass.



Escape Room & Bowling: The older children went to an escape room in Ashkelon, while the younger children went to bowling alley where they enjoyed a two-hour game – campers against counselors! – as well as arcade games.

***From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for supporting Orr Shalom.
Together we are helping to save the most at risk children in Israel.***