

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) CRISIS

Snapshot: Children and Youth at Risk in Israel

26 April 2020*

* The Report presents the current situation as deduced from the data currently available to us, and will be updated from time to time. We welcome any further information that may be available to others.

The challenge: social distancing and quarantine guidelines during the coronavirus crisis increase the exposure of at-risk children and youth to risk situations. For some, home is a threatening and violent place involving verbal violence or physical and sexual abuse. Quarantine increases levels of domestic distress and we have seen increased reports of anxiety and depression, cases of violence, increasing use of narcotic drugs and alcohol, escapes from home, dangerous sexual behaviors and prostitution – sometimes as means for survival.

Programs and responses that are available during normal times have been significantly reduced during the current crisis – support normally received in schools, as well as afternoon and alternative treatment programs – which are currently inoperative. **During the current crisis school counselors have dealt with thousands of requests involving emotional distress, anxiety and family issues.**



Snapshot: Needs and Responses | Roundtable Subcommittee



- Reduced community-based support – many therapy and service centers have closed, and their staff, including social workers and counselors, sent home on unpaid leave. In addition, the fact that public transport has been significantly reduced makes it difficult to attend activities.
- Reduced ability to identify and locate children and youth at risk following the closing of schools and social distancing between the children and their teachers and counselors. There is a pressing need to develop methods and guidelines for identifying needs remotely.
- Youth at risk on the streets – while growing numbers of youths are finding themselves on the streets, workers normally dedicated to identifying and aiding them have been sent home on unpaid leave.
- Legal proceedings – trials are deferred, there are limitations on the ability to conduct investigations without parents' awareness, and options for alternative proceedings such as rehabilitation have been largely reduced.
- **Lack of a central mechanism for integrating overall emergency needs including food, information on at risk situations, eligibilities and provision of online communication infrastructures.**



- Suitable solutions for protecting and maintaining health – isolation, preventing infection, and protection from domestic harm – through all types of measures including foster homes, boarding schools, incarceration, and more.



- Provision of essential needs – food, cooked meals, hygienic and disinfecting products – at home and in open-and-active institutions.



- Transition to online communication – including therapeutic relationships, mental health, legal matters when appropriate, online learning and extracurricular activities. All this requires suitable infrastructures, equipment and the development of specific operational guidelines.



- Control and supervision mechanism – for effectively communicating guidelines and implementing them in all programs, including provision of information and support for law enforcement, in various languages and while ensuring cultural sensitivity.

Snapshot: Responses promoted by the Roundtable Subcommittee



- Enabling the return of social workers to work by defining them as essential emergency workers. In a circular published on April 20th, the Director General of the Ministry of Health instructed that community service programs return to operation through online channels.
- The distribution of food, basic needs and communication equipment is managed in collaboration between welfare and social services and other authorities including the Home Front Command and philanthropic organizations.
- Surveys were held to examine the necessity of programs that were reduced or closed, and action was taken to restore essential operations.

Further Actions and Needs**

- Youth on the streets: locating youth on the streets and in abandoned buildings and providing emergency aid and personal support; transferring to shelters when needed; and the continued operation of centers for supporting youths engaging in prostitution.
- Emotional support for children and youth: personal conversations, group sessions on digital platforms and in critical conditions also face to face meetings, while ensuring that means of protection are used. In recent weeks over 4,400 personal conversations were held and 3,000 group sessions.
- Support in online studies: remote assistance with studies, including additional private tutoring for students at risk living in poverty or lacking family support.
- Assistance and support for parents to children and youth at risk living in poverty: development of solutions through conversations and digital means.
- On-line support: distress calls are placed via a dedicated website, which has seen a 40% increase in the number of calls.
- Boarding schools and youth villages continue to operate in full, with some children staying at the village continuously, without leaving for school or foster homes. They need emotional support, extracurricular activities, infrastructure, equipment and support in their online studies. Others have returned to their families and require daily support and supervision to monitor their situation.

** Courtesy of [National Council for the Child](#) ,[ELEM- Youth in Distress](#) ,[SOS children's Villages Snir](#) ,[Nevet](#) ,[Darna](#) ,[Gesher \(Bridge\) to Youth](#) ,[Children Playing Chess – C.PC \(NPO\)](#) ,[Yeladim – Fair Chance for Children](#) ,[Children's Home – Emunah](#) – [Ahuzat Sara](#) ,[Igy – Israel Gay Youth](#) ,[The Tel Aviv-Jaffa Organization for Promoting Education](#)

- Food distribution: organizations that distributed sandwiches at schools where many of the children live in poverty, have begun to provide food directly to children's homes in collaboration with dozens of local authorities and with the schools in which they operated.
- Extracurricular educational activities: the transition of these operations to online forums was met with many technical difficulties, in the absence of suitable infrastructure or home equipment. This fact has resulted in the reduction or complete closure of many educational and rehabilitative activities, without viable alternatives being offered.
- Gay Youth: during home quarantine many of these youths suffer increased distress and anxiety, expressed in a noted rise in the number of calls to the hotline. The fact that Igy's support was converted to an online system required investment of extensive resources for methodical development, personal and group psycho-social support, enrichment activities, development of online content in Hebrew and in Arabic, and much more.



Urgently needed: Further funding and donations to cover the growing needs resulting from the increasing distress among children and youth at risk. Food, extracurricular activities, emotional support, online learning equipment, and more. Individual tutoring and support for parents are provided by volunteers and are well beyond the scope of work which the organizations are currently able to absorb. In some organizations, workers were sent home on unpaid leave and support to youths is provided mostly on a voluntary basis. Returning professional teams to full working capacity is of utmost importance and urgency.



Looking to the future:

The Coronavirus crisis exposes the system's failures in addressing the needs of children and youth at risk and may therefore be seen as an opportunity to amend such failures by creating an infrastructure and developing knowledge and sound-based policy. Social organizations must act to promote a comprehensive policy paper that presents their professional position relying on many years of experience in caring for children and youth at risk in many areas, including:

- The establishment of a national by-sectoral forum for caring for children and youth at risk;
- Creating a resilience mechanism for social organizations operating in this area;
- Knowledge development and professionalization towards enabling remote identification of risk situations;
- Development of remote therapeutic solutions: increasing the accessibility of physical infrastructures, training, and the development of therapeutic knowledge;
- One stop shop for identifying basic needs and referring to the relevant authorities for immediate solutions.

Initial Philanthropic Responses

- A new digital development for identifying children at risk – a campaign applying to children and youth at risk to call the Child Victim Assistance Center operated by the National Council for the Child.
- Many foundations and donors are increasing their support to organizations operating in this area and enhancing the flexibility of the available uses of their funds so as to allow each organization to allocate resources to address the immediate needs of the children and youth in its care while adjusting the care provided to social distancing rules.

**Courtesy of The clinic for the rights of Holocaust survivors and the Elderly, JDC Israel, Click Association – Hod Hasharon, Life's Door Non-Profit Organization, Leket Israel, Aviv for Holocaust Survivors, Eran – Emotional First Aid, Upper Galilee Hospice, S.A.H.I – Special Chessed Unit, Tovanot B'hinuch