

**FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

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## Executive Summary

Agudath Israel of America, founded in 1922, is a national Jewish organization with a broad-based constituency in major communities across the United States, which sponsors a wide range of projects including, but not limited to, social service, community renewal, projects for seniors and youth, advocacy and job training/placement. Agudath Israel has worked in conjunction with several other American-based Jewish groups that have been active in the former Soviet Union, including Operation Open Curtain and Yad Yisroel. These groups together with Agudath Israel have been working as a consortium ("Agudath Israel/Overseas Aid Consortium") to implement the programs described in this report.

The severe economic dislocation affecting the needy population in many areas of the former Soviet Union has created an increased need for sustainable social services which can be addressed, at least partially, by the voluntary sector. One approach to improve the quality of life in these regional areas is by working in cooperation with and strengthening the non-governmental organization ("NGO's") that already exist. By helping the NGO's to develop strong administrative capacities and financial management, the programs they run can thrive and therefore provide increased financial and social stability for the population.

Agudath Israel's Overseas Aid Consortium has aimed to strengthen fledgling NGO's in various NIS locations by using already existing replicable models that the NGO's can develop and maintain successfully. This goal has been accomplished by supplying the NGO's with hands-on assistance, training, expertise and technical assistance for their programs. By motivating and strengthening the NGO's and their projects, successful development, increased stability and service to the community have been achieved, with ongoing movement towards self-sufficiency.

Agudath Israel affiliated NGO's operated three general types of programs:

- 1) micro-enterprises to provide needed services while creating jobs, such as a matzo/cracker factory, tourism enterprise, or a meat slaughtering business;
- 2) day care centers for children whose parents are both working and/or have low incomes; and
- 3) distribution of humanitarian aid i.e. food, medicine, other

health related services.

By helping the NGO's develop and maintain these programs, Agudath Israel has enabled communities to gain stability both financially and socially. Scores of men and women have been trained in the skills necessary to work for the humanitarian services as well as the business enterprises, raising the employability and capabilities of previously unemployed or underemployed Russians and Ukrainians. The projects have created over a hundred jobs. Moreover, the day care centers which have been developed allow mothers to enter the work force which enables families to maintain independence and financial stability. The services provided by these projects has benefitted consumers as well as recipients of humanitarian aid. Overall, the strength, expertise and aid which Agudath Israel/Overseas Aid Consortium has provided and the resulting development of these projects has lead to a continued, ongoing growth of financial and social stability in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev and other Ukrainian cities.

The following pages describe the projects which have been developing and growing in the NIS due to the guidance, work and aid provided by the Agudath Israel/Overseas Aid Consortium through the USAID/World Learning program. The various projects are each explained in terms of 1)the initial objective in undertaking the project, 2)the actual results to date and 3)the overall socioeconomic benefits to the community due to the success of the project.

### 1) Objective:

To develop a gerontology center which would efficiently provide needed services to homebound elderly in Moscow.

### Output:

A team of social workers did research to discover homebound elderly people who were not receiving the help they needed in obtaining food, medicine, mental health care and other services. As it became increasingly known in the community that these social workers were seeking names of incapacitated elderly, people came forward with names of relatives and acquaintances who needed help. Initially, the social workers recruited volunteers whom they then trained, organized and sent to the homes of the elderly in order to run errands for them, shop for food, and provide human contact and social support as well. Eventually, as the number of identified homebound elderly increased, and recognition of their needs became clearer, the organization developed a formal training program which provided classes to potential social workers. The courses are taught by licensed professionals and classes meet in the evenings, utilizing a school building in Moscow. The social workers are then paid by the organization to provide professional services to what has become a total of over 400 homebound elderly being served. These services include providing psychological help, monitoring health needs such as taking blood pressure, feeding and bathing the incapacitated, providing communication and interaction, as well as bringing needed items such as food, medicine, and whatever else they cannot get for themselves from the outside world. For these homebound elderly, the social workers are a lifeline to the world and a liaison to life itself.

Each semester the school trains 15-20 new social workers. To date, over 100 social workers have been trained. In addition, new plans for growth and development are constantly under way. For example, the organization is trying to open classes which could be accredited by a Western University towards a degree in social work. Plus, new ideas and programs for meeting the needs of the elderly are constantly evolving. The care that the social workers provide for the homebound has become increasingly specialized. In addition, a new program has been developed in which functional elderly are organized to help their homebound peers by calling them on the phone to provide peer companionship. Some even pay personal visits.

Ms. Rivka Weiss, an experienced educator, has been developing and organizing the school for social workers since its inception. Dr. Binyomin Shulman, PGD, doctor of psychology, has been overseeing the social service programs and leading their growth

and development to provide increasingly helpful services to the homebound elderly.

**Outcome:**

- Men and women trained in social service skills
- Scores of paying jobs created, including teaching positions as well as new social work opportunities.
- Humanitarian aid and services provided for the needy elderly.

## **2) Objective:**

To create and maintain full-time day care centers which will provide care and education by licensed teachers for children whose parents are both working and/or have low incomes.

## **Output:**

Three new day care centers have been developed in regional areas where they were needed; two are in Moscow and one is in Kiev.

The day care center in the "Center" of Moscow began its services one year ago. It is currently serving a total of 26 children, from the ages of 4 to 6. Three licensed kindergarten teachers, as well as the Director of the center, Ms. Dara Goldschmidt, take care of the children from 8:30AM to 4:30PM. Ms. Goldschmidt was educated in New York at Yeshiva University and has been teaching children in Moscow for several years. The long hours for which the center provides day care provides the mothers of the children with the option of working a full day.

The other, more established, day care center in Moscow has been operating since 1994 in the section of town called "Universitet." The center currently cares for 40 children with an age range of 3 to 7. This year the teachers started an English language class for the children. Three teachers supervise the children in the morning hours and three are with them in the afternoon hours, as well as the center Director, Ms. Leah Preschel, covering a long day from 8:00AM-6:00PM. Mothers with part-time jobs have the option of picking up their children after a half day and full-time working mothers can work a full day while their children are being taught and cared for at the day care center.

In Kiev, the day care center has recently moved to a large and renovated building. This move was necessary because the old location was much smaller and children on the waiting list could not be enrolled for lack of sufficient space. Now, more children can be accepted and accommodated in the new building. Therefore, the current enrollment of 40 children is expected to double in the near future. The age range of the children is 2-6. Five teachers, all of whom are licensed professional educators, teach the children various subjects including music and English, while the older children also have a class in cooking. From 8:00PM to 6:00PM Ms. Bleich, an educator with seven years experience, supervises the teachers. The children's mothers have the option of working at part-time or full-time jobs.

## **Outcome:**

- 1) Jobs created for teachers and child-care directors
- 2) Children receiving education from licensed professionals
- 3) Increased socioeconomic stability for families enabling both parents to work due to affordable, high-quality day care.

### **3) Objective:**

To create and sustain a stable meat producing business where meat that is slaughtered according to kosher regulations and U.S. standards can be locally produced and sold to other businesses and consumers, with some being distributed as humanitarian aid.

### **Output:**

In Kiev the meat factory started two years ago producing 2-3 tons of meat per month. The factory has expanded so that today it produces 7-10 tons of meat per month. New and better machinery as well as an ability to hire more workers have contributed to the increase in efficiency and productivity. Rabbi Brodbecker from Israel is the experienced meat slaughterer in charge of production and training while Mr. Matan Chazan, a businessman, is the administrator responsible for sales and distribution. Production has become increasingly consumer oriented, with packaging and cuts modeled after the western style. Besides local distribution in Kiev, distribution extends to various cities in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. Consumers include restaurants, schools and summer camps as well as humanitarian aid providers such as soup kitchens and meals on wheels (who purchase at lower cost). The extent to which this factory in Kiev has thrived is evident by the fact that in the last few months a profit has been made which can be reinvested in the business. Besides the slaughterer and administrator, other jobs which have been created include secretary, bookkeeper and purchaser.

In Moscow the kosher meat plant produces an average of three tons of meat per month. This meat is distributed to several other cities, including St. Petersburg. The meat administrator is working towards modernizing and commercializing access to the slaughterhouses and pens for expansion of production and distribution. In addition, a training program in the United States last year taught two of the meat slaughterers from Moscow how to do their work according to U.S. standards and regulations so that this knowledge could be brought back to Moscow to further improve the quality and efficiency of meat production.

### **Outcome:**

- 1) Creation of financially stable profit-making local business.
- 2) Creation of jobs within the business.
- 3) Trained workers now more skilled and employable.
- 4) Affordable, locally produced kosher meat available for consumers.
- 5) Meat provided for humanitarian aid distributors.

**4) Objective:**

To develop a publishing business in Kiev which would distribute books and newspapers.

**Output:**

A publishing business has been set up in Kiev which started off distributing textbooks to be used in schools for the Ministry of Education. In addition, the business has printed periodicals and school newspapers. There has recently been a merger with another local publishing company, so that they are now sharing clients and equipment. This joining of resources has increased the potential for publishing projects. A plan for uniting small newspapers which are declining financially and creating one central production for a monthly newspaper is one of the projects under way.

**Outcome:**

- 1) Development of a growing local business.
- 2) Creation of new jobs.
- 3) Constant training of current employees in new skills, increasing abilities and marketability.
- 4) Merger for greater stability of business through combining resources.
- 5) Providing a needed educational/literary service to the community.

**5) Objective:**

To build up a tourism business in Kiev which would operate tours throughout Ukraine.

**Output:**

JPC Tourism is a tourist company that has been gradually built up so that it is now working with tour operators from Israel, Europe and the U.S. in order to arrange travel packages for groups from those countries to tour Ukraine. Many tourists are attracted to Ukraine because it is filled with historical sites connected with Jewish heritage. The company was, until recently, run by Vladimir Zacharovy who is an expert in routes, driving and travel. Now the company is run by Yulia Zevelevy who has special training in tourism and is well known throughout Ukraine for her expertise. The company gives specialized training to all of its employees when they are hired, including drivers, guides, and translators. Besides sharpening several skills, these training programs provide extensive study of the various routes involved in the tours. To date, over 20 drivers have been trained, and some of those have since moved on to other related jobs. In addition, over 30 tour guides have been trained, as well as six translators. The company has just recently changed hands, and is now run by the Jewish Preservation Committee, which was founded by the U.S. Commission in 1995.

**Outcome:**

- 1) Growing local business in Kiev.
- 2) Creation of jobs.
- 3) Trained men and women as drivers, guides and translators.
- 4) Increased tourist activity in Ukraine.

**6) Objective:**

To build up a self sufficient local matzo factory whose production and distribution would meet the needs of the community.

**Output:**

In Kiev the matzo factory has built up its production to 90 tons per year. Besides meeting the needs of Kiev, the factory also provides matzo for Moldova, Belarus and Russia. The factory has created 25 jobs including bakers and dough makers. In the summer the machinery is cleaned and the factory is prepared for the next matzo season. Mr. Leb Ziskind is the business administrator who oversees that the factory production and distribution runs smoothly.

A new matzo factory in St. Petersburg produced 40 tons of matzo this year, which was its first year of production. Also, the plant in Moscow, which opened in a new building this year after being closed last year, produced 25 tons of matzo.

**Outcome:**

- 1) Stable local business.
- 2) Consumers provided with needed service through local business, rather than through more expensive and less efficient importing.
- 3) Jobs created.