

## **A Hands-On Project with the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC)**

### **Goals:**

- 1) Program Participants (PP's) will understand both the severity and expansiveness of poverty and nutritional insecurity in Israel today.
- 2) PP's will explore the different challenges that various sectors of the Israeli population encounter in relation to their socioeconomic status (including the working poor, single-parent families, the disabled, the elderly and refugees in Israel)
- 3) PP's will realize how privileged they are while becoming empowered to help those less fortunate.

### **Objectives:**

- 1) PP's will have learned the facts about poverty and nutritional insecurity in Israel
- 2) PP's will be able to express their thoughts on poverty & nutritional insecurity in Israel
- 3) PP's will be enthusiastic about their role in helping the needy in Israel's society.

### **Materials:**

- Around 12 copies of the 'Fact Sheet about Poverty in Israel' (for the learning session)
- As many copies of the 'character cards' as PP's (for actual shopping in the supermarket)
- A sufficient number of boxes to package the items purchased in the supermarket.
- As many copies of this program as people involved in running it (PL, GL's, facilitators)

### **People Needed:**

- **One Program Leader (PL)** in charge of introducing, facilitating and closing program. (\*The PL is ultimately responsible for the running of the program, so this person should remain on the top of his/her game from the start of the program to its closure.)
- At least **6 Group Leaders (GL's)** to lead the learning session on poverty in Israel (\* After the introduction, each GL should gather PP's into groups of no more than 10 for the learning session.)
- At least **two facilitators** to help ensure that transitions between locations go smoothly.

\* It is recommended that all people involved in the running of this program read through a copy of the program *before* it is actually run, so as to ensure the program runs as smoothly and effectively as possible.

### **Space Needed:**

- One large room is ideal (w/ enough space for all groups to disperse for learning session)
- Numerous small rooms can also work
- If numerous rooms are used- facilitators should remain focused to help ensure that PP's move from rooms and into buses efficiently.

### **Time Table:**

- 00:00-00:10 Introduction to program and to Keren B'Kavod.
- 00:10-00:15 GL's gather groups of no more than 10 PP's (though this number can be altered according to the number of overall PP's)
- 00:15-00:30 Learning session about poverty and nutritional insecurity in Israel.  
-GL's should refer to the Poverty in Israel Fact Sheet found in appendices

- 00:30-00:35 All PP's and GL's come together for explanation of next part of program.  
- GL's should now pass out 'character cards' to all PP's.
- 00:35-00:45 Led by PL and GL, everyone involved in program should load onto buses.
- 00:45-01:05\* Transportation from original location to supermarket.  
\*Time for transportation will differ according to where the supermarket is.
- 01:05-01:50 PP's shop for their respective people, based on their character cards.
- 01:50-02:10\* Transportation to new location for packaging the bought items.  
\*Time for transportation will differ according to where packaging occurs.
- 02:10-02:30 Packaging of items and debriefing of experiences in the store.  
- GL's should facilitate the conversation about what PP's have experienced and learned.

**Detailed Procedure:**

- 00:00-00:10 Introduction to project and Keren B'Kavod.**  
- PL will introduce the program by referring to the 'Project Introduction' (copy found in appendices)  
- After intro: GL's should gather groups of PP's for learning session
- 00:10-00:15 GL's gather groups of no more than 10 PP's** (though this number can be altered according to the number of overall PP's)
- 00:15-00:30 Learning session about poverty and nutritional insecurity in Israel.**  
- GL's should refer to the Poverty in Israel Fact Sheet found in appendices  
- GL's should allow PP's to read facts out loud, so as to involve the group.
- 00:30-00:35 All PP's & GL's come together for explanation of next part of project.**  
- GL's should now pass out 'character cards' to all PP's.
- 00:35-00:45 Led by PL and GL, everyone involved in program should load onto buses.**
- 00:45-01:05\* Transportation from original location to supermarket.**  
\*Time for transportation will differ according to where the supermarket is.
- 01:05-01:50 PP's shop for their respective people, based on their character cards.**
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- 02:10-02:30 Packaging of items and debriefing of experiences in the store.**  
- GL's should facilitate the conversation about what PP's have experienced and learned.

**Appendices:**

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|---|------------|
| <i>1) Project Introduction (Introduced by Program Leader)</i> | <i>p.3</i> |
| <i>2) Fact Sheet about Poverty in Israel</i>                  | <i>p.4</i> |
| <i>3) Character Cards</i>                                     | <i>p.6</i> |

## **Appendices:**

### **1) Project Introduction**

*- PL should read the following introduction to the entire group, so as to familiarize them with Keren B'Kavod and the issues of poverty and nutritional insecurity in Israel.*

**Keren B'Kavod** is the Reform Movement's response to the growing difficulty of many Israelis to provide themselves with basic life necessities. Keren B'Kavod, which means literally the "Dignity Fund", works with Reform congregations throughout Israel to help those who suffer from poverty to live with dignity.

After a brief learning session about poverty and nutritional insecurity in Israel, your group will be going to an Israeli supermarket. You will each be given 100 NIS (New Israel Shekels) with which you must try to buy all of the essential non-perishable items that a poor family in Israel needs.\* Each of you will also get in your packet a "character card" which describes in detail a fictional but typical poor person in Israel. These cards should help you think more empathetically about those served by Keren B'Kavod for whom you are shopping. (Please remember you are not literally shopping for that particular person.) You will also be provided with a shopping list that includes Hebrew transliterations. You will discover along the way that you will have to make compromises. Will you buy treats for the children? Will you buy lower quality brands? You will have 45 minutes to shop. We encourage you to ask your fellow Israeli shoppers to help you.

After shopping, you will go to another location to pack boxes with the items that you have purchased. Please use this time to debrief your experience in the store and discuss what you have learned.

Later you will drop off your boxes at one of our other partner organizations, who will then distribute them to needy Israeli families."

(\*The 100 NIS you each receive comes directly from the donation that your group made in advance to participate in this program. All of the money you donated is used solely for the purpose of your food purchases at this time.)

## 2) Fact Sheet about Poverty in Israel

### Did you know?

**25% of Israel's population lives in poverty - that's 1,600,000 people of whom 80,000 are children.**

#### A number of facts about the 'working poor' in Israel:

- In 43% of the households with at least one 'breadwinner' there is poverty
- Among the working population, the majority earn approximately \$716 per household each month, on average
- A quarter of the family budget is spent on housing
- A household with a very limited income spends on average \$350 for groceries per month
- Various non-profit organizations in Israel provide about half of the needy families with a half or more of their monthly food supply
- The Feeding Enterprise provides about 150,000 students, in 60 cities and towns in Israel, with one hot meal a day
- The cost per student for each hot meal is \$2.25
- It is vital to note that this is the only hot meal about 20,000 students get during the day, and that they always await this meal

#### A number of facts about poverty among **single parent households** in Israel:

- There are 110,000 single parent families in Israel, which is about 7% of all the families in Israel
- 90% of all the single parent families are headed by women
- More than 35,000 single parent families in Israel, with about 100,000 children, live below the poverty line
- The employment rate among single mothers is 3% greater than among married mothers
- In about 43% of the single parent households, the parent has some academic education
- A family of two people which makes less than \$750 a month is considered living under the poverty line
- 55% of single parent families live under the poverty line before receiving social security benefits
- 25% of single parent families live under the poverty line even after receiving social security benefits

\*In the case of Jenny Baruchi against the National Insurance Institute of Israel (with the help of the Israel Religious Action Center) the Supreme Court ruled that single mothers can register for academic studies without losing their social security benefits. Jenny Baruchi is a single mother of two, who against all odds, overcame her endless debts and graduated from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

A number of facts about **unemployment and poverty among individuals with disabilities** in Israel:

- Israel has one of the highest poverty rates in the Western world. The percent of Israelis with disabilities who live under the poverty line is also one of the highest in the Western world.
- Most poor do not believe their financial status will ever improve
- 76% of people receiving aid from the State, prefer to be working rather than being supported by an outside agent
- The average monthly income of those who receive assistance from the government is \$716 (including salaries and State assistance). In the rest of the population, the average monthly income per household, before taxes, is \$3086.
- Even for those living in the lowest stratum, monthly expenses amount to about \$1144, while their monthly income is approximately \$390
- Due to financial distress, every fifth needy individual is forced to send one or more of their children out of the house to be supported by social services
- Every third needy individual reported that they have experienced hunger
- A quarter of the needy individuals reported that they have considered ending their own lives

A number of facts about **refugees** in Israel:

- It is estimated that there are about 17,000 African refugees from Sudan, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Ivory Coast in Israel today
- Israel took part in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, but the government has not passed any legislation on asylum.
- Approximately 1200 refugees and asylum seekers enter Israel each month
- Over 270 refugees have been returned to Egypt
- The refugees come into Israel across the Egyptian border in Sinai. The groups that help the refugees are all made of volunteers and are non-profit organizations. At times, the IDF or the police leave the refugees on the street to the mercy of the local residents and the volunteers. There is currently no government policy for non-Jewish refugees. The contributions of the volunteers and humanitarian aid organizations are all these refugees have.

A number of facts about **poverty among Senior Citizens** in Israel:

- In Israel, there are 700,000 people over the age of 65
- Every fourth senior citizen lives under the poverty line
- About 210,000 senior citizens are considered needy; they rely on various governmental payments to support themselves. Many live in despicable conditions, unable to afford medicine, pay for dental care and medical supplies, and are forced to eat in soup-kitchens or receive food from various organizations. On some days, they simply go hungry.
- The basic single “senior citizen stipend” is \$297 and \$446 for a couple. The health insurance payments are deducted from this stipend; \$41 for a single senior citizen, and \$60 for a couple
- The “Heating Grant” is a family grant given once a year in October, for the sum of \$58. In 2007, 38,000 senior citizens received the grant.
- 26% of those who receive the senior citizen stipend also receive some additional social security benefits, which total \$513 for a single senior citizen, and \$763 for a couple.
- 63% of those who receive the senior citizen stipend are women.

## The Working Poor:

I am 11 years old and I live in Jerusalem. I have an 8 year old sister and a 5 year old brother. My father has two jobs; he and my mother work until late at night. I don't always get to eat dinner and sometimes I go to bed hungry, but I don't tell my parents I'm hungry anymore, because it makes them sad.

My brother and sister and I eat at school and sometimes on Shabbat we eat at my grandmother's house. Sometimes being hungry makes it difficult for me to focus when I do my homework. I keep imagining a big sandwich with cheese and tomatoes but then I drink some tea and go to bed. During the winter for instance, we don't buy cheese and don't get groceries every week, because we have to pay for the heating of the house and the coats. My siblings and I know that there are a lot of bills to pay and we don't ask for special things like strawberry yogurts for the weekend, because it's just unnecessary, and you can mix cottage cheese with sugar and that tastes good too. Sometimes, my mom and dad surprise us with candy and that's really fun, to taste the real sweetness.

And I can always look forward to the meal at school.

### Did you know?

- In 43% of the households with at least one 'breadwinner' there is poverty
- Among the working population, the majority earn approximately \$716 per household each month, on average
- A quarter of the family budget is spent on housing
- A household with a very limited income spends on average \$350 for groceries per month
- Various non-profit organizations in Israel provide about half of the needy families with a half or more of their monthly food supply
- The Feeding Enterprise provides about 150,000 students, in 60 cities and towns in Israel, with one hot meal a day
- The cost per student for each hot meal is \$2.25
- It is vital to note that this is the only hot meal about 20,000 students get during the day, and that they always await this meal

## Single Parent Families:

I am a single mother and I work almost full time (75%) as a teacher. I am 42 years old and I have a 12 year old daughter.

We live in a rented apartment which I try my best to keep nice, furnishing and decorating it with things people give me or that I find outside. My salary does not cover even the basic necessities. I receive help from various organizations which give me food, heating devices, clothing and pay for cultural events. My daughter wanted to start learning ballet, like all of her friends, but I had to tell her she was too young. She already knows she can't ask me to buy her candy when we go for a walk. All of her clothes are hand-me-downs from my friends' children. I can never take her out to see a show, and we can never go out to a simple restaurant, so I can get her a hamburger and some fries, and maybe some ice-cream. I give private lessons twice a week, which helps me pay the bills every month. I can't work more than this; I am both a mother and a teacher.

I pray to be able to financially support my daughter.

### Did you know?

- There are 110,000 single parent families in Israel, which is about 7% of all the families in Israel
- 90% of all the single parent families are headed by women
- More than 35,000 single parent families in Israel, with about 100,000 children, live below the poverty line
- The employment rate among single mothers is 3% greater than among married mothers
- In about 43% of the single parent households, the parent has some academic education
- A family of two people which makes less than \$750 a month is considered living under the poverty line
- 55% of single parent families live under the poverty line before receiving social security benefits
- 25% of single parent families live under the poverty line even after receiving social security benefits
- In the case of Jenny Baruchi against the National Insurance Institute of Israel (with the help of the Israel Religious Action Center) the Supreme Court ruled that single mothers can register for academic studies without losing their social security benefits. Jenny Baruchi is a single mother of two, who against all odds, overcame her endless debts and graduated from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem with a degree in Literature and Theater Studies

## Unemployment & People with Disabilities:

I am a 53 year old father of five, and I am married to a wonderful woman who is employed. I have some trouble opening up to strangers but due to my difficult situation I can no longer afford to be embarrassed. I've been unemployed for three years now and my wife's paycheck is not enough for us to afford the most basic necessities. Most of the time, the only food we have in the house has been given to us by various organizations that help out poor people. My wife makes \$625 per month and I receive another \$300 from the state. Our expenses are basic- rent, bills, medicine, education and food. Most of our money goes to rent and bills, and we only have a couple hundred shekels left for food. I have a minor disability, and probably because of my age, I haven't been able to find even temporary work. I want to be able to earn an honest living. I dream that my kids won't be hungry, that they will learn and grow, but I can't even send them to school with a sandwich everyday. I am tired of standing in lines in soup-kitchens to take some food home for my children, and of looking through the trash for clothing for my family. It makes me sad that my children have become used to this difficulty and no longer ask me for anything. I pray for a miracle, I want to live with some dignity.

### Did you know?

- Israel has one of the highest poverty rates in the Western world. The percent of Israelis with disabilities who live under the poverty line is also one of the highest in the Western world.
- Most poor do not believe their financial status will ever improve
- 76% of people receiving aid from the State, prefer to be working rather than being supported by an outside agent
- The average monthly income of those who receive assistance from the government is \$716 (including salaries and State assistance). In the rest of the population, the average monthly income per household, before taxes, is \$3086.
- Even for those living in the lowest stratum, monthly expenses amount to about \$1144, while their monthly income is approximately \$390
- Due to financial distress, every fifth needy individual is forced to send one or more of their children out of the house to be supported by social services
- Every third needy individual reported that they have experienced hunger
- A quarter of the needy individuals reported that they have considered ending their own lives

## Refugees:

I am a 28 year old refugee from Sudan and I arrived in Israel a month ago. Only a few people from my village survived the massacre I was able to escape. Almost all the people in my village were murdered. I could literally smell the death near me. I played dead and lied on the ground without moving for hours, and then I got up and ran without looking back. I just ran away. I've experienced severe hunger and faced unbelievable hardships on my way to Israel through the desert. When I crossed the border to Israel and heard the language of the Jews, I knew they wouldn't harm me. I felt safe, and then I collapsed and lost consciousness. They took me to the hospital and treated me, and then I was put in a detainment camp with other refugees. I was glad to see that other people were able to escape the horror and survive.

Here in Israel, I have a work permit but I need to learn Hebrew to find a job.

Meanwhile I don't understand much and I often don't know where to go and what to do. I am alive, but I am often hungry and cold. I live with hundreds of other men, women and children in the same big room. Some good people have been bringing us food and cleaning supplies. I am alive and there are people who help me live my life with some dignity. Neither the rifle, nor the hunger will wear me out. The first miracle was that I was able to escape, the second miracle was getting to Israel, and the third miracle is the good people.

### Did you know?

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## Senior Citizens:

I am 87 years old and I live in a State subsidized housing and rely solely on the governmental retirement payments. My husband passed away a year ago and both of my children live in another city. My children come to visit me sometimes but not too often. It's difficult for them as traveling is expensive and the distance is a burden. I have six grandchildren whom I only see on holidays and birthdays. They know their grandmother only brings small and modest gifts. I don't want to be a burden on my children who struggle to support their own families as well. I try to invent stories to avoid having to visit them during the holidays and tell them I'm spending my time with my friends from the local senior citizens club. This is of-course a lie. There is a senior citizens club, but I don't have any friends left and certainly no one makes arrangements for us for the holidays. In the winter, I don't buy medicine, so I can afford my electricity bill. I wait for the summer when I won't have to heat the house and the shower water (once in a couple of days, to save electricity). I get my food from some good people who deliver it to me at home. I feel ashamed, but I don't have any other choice. Otherwise, I would stay hungry, without a shower or heating. I don't have much.

I am no longer afraid of dying; I am mostly scared of the loneliness.

### Did you know?

- In Israel, there are 700,000 people over the age of 65
- Every fourth senior citizen lives under the poverty line
- About 210,000 senior citizens are considered needy; they rely on various governmental payments to support themselves. Many live in despicable conditions, unable to afford medicine, pay for dental care and medical supplies, and are forced to eat in soup-kitchens or receive food from various organizations. On some days, they simply go hungry.
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