Creating community connections
wise counsel. But we lost a true statesman in Kenneth Rubens last October. Kenneth was President, Chairman and trustee in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Principled, highly intelligent, diplomatic and a true gentleman, Kenneth led World Jewish Relief into the uncertainties of responding to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the expansion of our work to assist a massive and impoverished Jewish community.

We proudly state that all our work is guided by ‘Jewish values’. In discussion with a group of Rabbis and Jewish educators, we recently sought to capture the essence of these values. This group concluded that tzedakah and hesed underpin our work, but it is the “action” of applying the values that makes us stand out. I celebrate our focus on “doing” not talking – our courage inspired as much by those we help as those who help us to help.

Within the last year, we have been busy with so much action. Helping almost 43,000 people is testament to this! But we want to do even more, which is why we’re encouraging community members to join our volunteer Disaster Response Team, to assist our humanitarian response at times of major international disaster. If you are interested or know someone who might be, further details are on our website.

Thank you for all of your support.

paul@worldjewishrelief.org
Against all odds: Liudmila’s story

IN 1960, LIUDMILA FOUGHT OFF COMPETITION FROM ACROSS UKRAINE TO BECOME NATIONAL CHESS CHAMPION. IN THE SAME YEAR, SHE WAS PART OF THE NATIONAL TEAM THAT BECAME CHAMPIONS OF THE USSR. AS A JEW AND A WOMAN, REPRESENTING HER COUNTRY AT CHESS WAS UNUSUAL TO BEGIN WITH, BUT LIUDMILA BATTLED ADDITIONAL ADVERSITY TO REACH THE TOP OF HER GAME.

From birth, Liudmila’s eyesight had been extremely poor and there was no fix for the problem. She memorised all the chess moves from books held close to her eyes and moved the pieces around by feel. Despite these hurdles, Liudmila outclassed her opponents.

Some 55 years later, Liudmila’s eyesight had deteriorated drastically as cataracts developed, clouding the lenses of both her eyes. All too suddenly, everything, including chess, became a terrible struggle.

Liudmila is 72 and lives in Kyiv, Ukraine. She never married and lived with her parents her whole life. Now, there is no-one to care for her. Liudmila lives on the fifth floor of an old Soviet tower block with no lift. It takes her 25 minutes to climb the stairs; she feels like a prisoner in her home.

Living alone and fearing blindness, the simplest tasks were starting to become almost impossible. Unable to leave her home, learning chess moves and playing games were some of the only ways to while away the hours, but even this had become a huge strain. Liudmila was certain she could never afford the expensive surgery to remove the cataracts. She felt she was in checkmate.

Then Liudmila turned to World Jewish Relief.

Thanks to the generosity of supporters, Liudmila underwent two operations to remove the cataracts earlier this year. She says she can see the world in “its contours and vivid colours” once again.

“When I found out how much the surgery cost I thought I would spend the rest of my life in the darkness…I am back to an active life. I move safely around the house and outside. I can take books from the library and cook and my evenings are not so long and lonely.”

For many people like Liudmila a simple surgery, a pair of glasses, or medication is transformative. It returns their independence, allowing them to continue to live in dignity, safety and comfort.

In 2016/17 World Jewish Relief provided:

- Cataract surgery or glasses for 1,740 people
- Equipment for 136 people to manage diabetes which can lead to eyesight problems
- Medication for 724 people
The unforgotten Jews of Oni

BY OLI KNIGHT,
HOME REPAIRS PROGRAMME MANAGER

I HAD WAITED WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION TO VISIT ONI, A TOWN SITUATED 830M ABOVE SEA LEVEL, HIGH UP IN THE RACHA MOUNTAINS IN NORTHERN GEORGIA AND INACCESSIBLE FOR MUCH OF THE YEAR. INTRIGUINGLY IT IS ALSO A TOWN STEEPED IN JEWISH HISTORY, WITH THE EARLIEST JEWISH SETTLERS ARRIVING 2,600 YEARS AGO.

As we wound our way around the steep roads, following the Rioni river upstream, I could understand why even when there’s just a little snowfall, Oni becomes a very isolated place.

When we arrived I was taken to the oldest part of the town where, taking centre stage, stood a beautiful synagogue, designed by a Polish architect and built by Greek Jews from Thessaloniki in the 1880s. I was sad to learn of the decline of the community in Oni which had once been home to the third largest population of Jews in Georgia, falling to 3,500 in the early 1990s and today, only a handful. The few elderly Jews I met and spoke to fondly recall a town bustling with Jewish life, the festivals and the noise of children playing around the synagogue.

The decline of the Jewish community is predominantly a result of post-Soviet Union aliyah to Israel. Those unable or simply reluctant to leave their homes and the life they know have lost their community. The harsh conditions - both physically and economically - make every day a struggle.

World Jewish Relief has been providing the Jews of Oni with support each winter for over five years, ensuring they can keep their homes warm. But the main agenda of my trip was to consider the feasibility of introducing our Home Repairs project to the town. Homes in Oni not only have to bear the brunt of the harsh winter but many remain damaged from an earthquake in 1991 that killed 270 people and destroyed 46,000 homes in the region. That’s 26 years of unsuitable, unsafe housing.
I visited four homes during my visit, but two struck me most.

I first visited Tamar. She is 94 years old, deaf and almost blind and has lived in the same house since 1938! She has a home care worker and a neighbour who cares for her, without whom she would not be alive. As soon as it gets cold (the majority of the year) she has to move to a tiny, smoky room with a log burner at the back of her house, where she spends almost all her time. She had no inside toilet, nor running water.

The second lady I met, Maro, was 84. Her home reminded me of a tree-house, as we had to scale a wooden ladder to get to the first floor. This is how a lady who is hard of hearing and struggles with mobility enters her home. The house was wooden, the floor was in terrible condition and accessibility was a major worry. Her main concern however were the rats; she showed me the holes in the mattresses where they had eaten away or nested. The house also had no bathroom or toilet inside.

Thanks to donations from supporters, we were able to totally renovate both homes. Tamar’s home was properly insulated, repairs were made to the floor and walls and double glazed windows were fitted. The whole top floor of Maro’s house was dismantled and renovated, making sure it is now safe, accessible, warm and hygienic. Amazingly, both now have hot running water and indoor toilets for the first time! In Oni we made a total of five home repairs this year and 322 across the rest of Eastern Europe. Without our intervention and your generosity these people could never have dreamed of having these repairs made.

Returning to the bustling city of Kutaisi - the second largest city in Georgia - I was struck by the thought that although Oni is a small, hard to reach, almost forgotten community, our work there proves the strength of a global Jewish family and the remarkable difference we can all make.
A Jewish future in Eastern Europe

Reflections from Rabbi Harvey Belovski, Golders Green Synagogue

I last went to Ukraine 12 years ago. I recall being disheartened to see that the levels of poverty, destitution and religious life fell far below my expectations.

Golders Green Synagogue has been twinned with Zaporizhia, a city in Eastern Ukraine, for more than 25 years, supporting the synagogue and Rabbi Ehrentreu to develop the Jewish Community.

I have just returned from a visit to this industrial city on the banks of the Dnieper River. But this time I was joined by seven members of my synagogue and World Jewish Relief. They were to show us the range of challenges facing Jews in the city as well as what is being done to improve the lives of the most vulnerable.

As we drove into Zaporizhia I was struck by the feeling that not much had changed. Despite more than a decade having passed, the buildings, roads and living conditions have remained the same, if not deteriorated further: all of which makes the achievements of the Jewish community even more remarkable.

Amidst wider degeneration, the ability of the community to provide services like the shul, the Jewish Community Centre and welfare support services, including to a large number of ‘internally displaced persons’ – internal refugees fleeing the conflict in the east of the country – is astonishing.

In a run-down Soviet-era apartment block we met Valentina. She lives in desperately poor and squalid conditions but she benefits from an extraordinary range of services which ensure she has money to buy food and fuel and is able to go to the Jewish Community Centre several times a week to participate in classes. It’s only thanks to the significant support provided by World Jewish Relief that people like Valentina’s lives are transformed.

However, simply giving large amounts of money and resources indefinitely is unsustainable. Another astonishing change has been the shift from passive giving to empowerment: moving people away from being needy recipients to taking responsibility and giving back.

At the synagogue, Rabbi Ehrentreu has empowered and enabled people to take an active role in synagogue life and take responsibility for the future of the community. Empowerment is also evident at the ‘Edison Space’ co-working hub, established and supported with the help of World Jewish Relief. As well as employment services, it offers loans to entrepreneurs so they are able to expand their businesses and create opportunities for others in the community. It will enable the next generation to become self-sufficient.

As citizens of the world, we have a responsibility towards members of the Jewish community who are in desperate need, wherever they are. The community in Zaporizhia is testament to the difference our support can make to the world’s poorest Jewish communities. With the strong emphasis on empowerment these Jewish communities in Eastern Europe might just stand up on their own in the future.

If you or your community would like to join a future trip to Eastern Europe, please contact Rebecca Singer on rebecca@worldjewishrelief.org or 0208 736 1250.
Rabbi Belovski and members of Golders Green Synagogue stand with Rabbi Ehrentreu (right) in the synagogue in Zaporizhia.
Balie Chatpa runs the Acorns charity shop in Coventry. Balie has just taken on Syrian refugee Ahmad as a volunteer in the shop for two days a week and she’s been astonished by his commitment and work ethic. He helps her to iron and organise all of the clothes as well as greeting customers with his newfound English language skills.

My colleagues and I arrive in the shop on a freezing November day to be greeted with such warmth and gratitude by Ahmad that it’s hard to stop myself from making an impulse purchase to support the shop’s ethos, although I’m glad of my colleague’s gentle dissuasion when I eagerly pick up a VHS version of Back to the Future 3.

Ahmad has been supported by our Sustainable Training and Employment Programme for Syrian refugees, helping participants speak better English, find employment and ultimately integrate into British society. It’s inspired by our organisation’s history, helping Jewish refugees who came to this country before, during and after the Holocaust. I cannot avoid seeing historical echoes in today’s refugee crisis and it makes me incredibly proud to work for a charity helping people who have fled unimaginable war and persecution.

Ahmad used to part-own a clothes shop in Homs, Syria. He showed us a photo of himself sitting proud and upright behind the shop counter. But then he told us of how he recently tried to view that shop on Google Earth and it had been shelled, replaced by rubble. It’s clear to me that empowering Ahmad to volunteer and meet people in the community is building his confidence and independence. Ahmad said, “I feel respected and valued here, but even if I do my best I can’t give back what’s been given to me.”

Throughout the day, we hear many heartbreaking tales of devastation. Ahmad arrived with his wife and three children. Having fled Syria, they briefly lived in Lebanon, where his fourth child died at just four days old because Ahmad couldn’t afford to pay the hospital bill.

While I struggle to comprehend the emotional trauma that his family must have faced, what I can do is tell people about the change World Jewish Relief’s programme is making. In partnership with Coventry Council, we have built a programme that the UK Jewish community should be proud of, that aims to help 680 refugees by 2020.

The programme combines ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) training, volunteering – which allows people to practise their English-and the support needed for people to find and maintain employment. I find navigating the UK’s bureaucracy tricky, so I can barely imagine what it must be like for people who don’t speak the language, have lost all of their qualifications or have never encountered a CV, let alone written one.

Our tailored, one-to-one support helps refugees to negotiate their way through that complex maze and hopefully arrive at the ultimate prize: finding employment and being able to put food on their families’ tables, like we’ve already done for 43 refugees. I hope that one day Ahmad will once again have his own clothes shop.

“WE HAVE TO KEEP TELLING HIM TO STOP – WE’RE TIRED, WE NEED A TEA BREAK! BUT HE JUST KEEPS ON GOING. HE’S AMAZING AND WORKS SO HARD.”
Balie and Ahmad together in Acorns charity shop
A roof over their heads; a family reunited

Mireille Flores, Humanitarian Programmes Manager
Almost immediately after the earthquake, World Jewish Relief began talks to partner with CADENA, a local Jewish humanitarian organisation backed by the Jewish community of Mexico. I travelled to Mexico to carry out a general assessment of the situation and begin implementing the project.

The sadness and pain was visible everywhere I went. Rubble lining the streets was a constant, raw reminder of the suffering of those killed and those who suddenly found themselves homeless.

In Oaxaca, where I visited a number of families, there wasn’t a conversation in which people didn’t mention the word ‘fear’. Fear of sleeping in their cracked houses, fear of the aftershocks felt every few hours and fear of not being able to recover what they had lost.

To respond to people’s needs, our project provided complete shelter kits to the most vulnerable families. The project has provided 100 households with emergency shelter kits - large tents that can withstand the wet season - and other essential items like camping beds, blankets, pillows, gas cooking facilities, kitchen utensils and a sanitary kit.

It is estimated that people will be using these kits for at least six months until they receive assistance to rebuild their homes or start rebuilding themselves.

Meeting Fausta’s family I learned how tragedy had already befallen them earlier this year when her daughter lost her battle with cancer. Her grandchildren had moved in to her house and were grappling to come to terms with her passing when, on 19 September, the family was struck by the earthquake.

“The kids were sleeping and I screamed at them to get out of the house. We all ran and huddled together waiting for the tremor to pass. The next day we could see the damage, there were cracks everywhere and the house had broken to pieces.”

With nowhere safe to sleep Fausta had to split up the children and send them away to friends and relatives but thanks to the incredible generosity of the Jewish community in the UK, we were able to quickly support Fausta’s family with one of the shelter kits.

When we delivered the kit an overwhelmed Fausta thanked us with tears in her eyes. The children ran into the tent to claim a bed (and begin a pillow fight!).

For people who have suffered like Fausta and her family our support is vital and transformative, and in the coming months we will continue working with CADENA to design a project that helps rebuild communities and people’s lives.

In September, within two weeks of each other, two major earthquakes hit Mexico. The first struck off the country’s southwest coast. Chiapas and Oaxaca states, two of the most vulnerable and poor in Mexico, were hit particularly hard. This 8.1 magnitude quake was the strongest to hit Mexico in a century. It left over 90 people dead and thousands of houses and hundreds of schools were damaged or completely destroyed. The second earthquake took the lives of another 361 people.
Last year we...

- Supported 42,899 people in 19 countries
- Spending a total of £6.2m on programmes and participants

In Eastern Europe we...

- Repaired 327 homes in 12 locations
- Provided 2,600 people with medication, eye surgery or glasses
- Provided 6,293 people with food and hot meals
- Helped 2,820 people find sustainable employment

And elsewhere around the world we...

- Supported 1,375 households in Kenya, distributing water and food vouchers
- Enabled 1,155 farmers in Rwanda and
- 1,937 in Nepal to generate a greater household income
- Established a women’s support centre on the Turkey-Syria border providing social and psychological support to 1,762 refugees
- Created an employment scheme supporting 120 Syrian refugees in Bradford and Coventry
- Delivered food and essential items to 7,400 people affected by the conflict in Ukraine
60 SECONDS WITH...

PAULINE LEVIS, DINE IN HELP OUT HOST

What is Dine In Help Out?
In May I held my first Dine In Help Out. It’s essentially hosting friends for a meal in aid of World Jewish Relief, a charity close to my heart.

What event did you host?
I laid on a buffet dinner for 18 friends, each of whom contributed a similar amount to what they would have paid for a meal in a restaurant. I made a mainly fish based spread, followed by homemade apple cake and cherry clafouti. World Jewish Relief provided useful materials about their work, which even offered help with recipes.

How did it go?!
The evening was great fun and proved very successful - I was able to send a cheque for £500!

What advice would you give to anyone interested?
I thoroughly enjoyed doing my bit and look forward to hosting a similar event in May 2018. I would strongly encourage others to do likewise!

Our sincere thanks to Pauline for her efforts. Dine In Help Out will be held across the country throughout May 2018. For more information contact Sam Martin at samantha@worldjewishrelief.org or on 020 8736 1250

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CHALLENGES FOR EVERYONE

We’ve secured spaces on marathons, half marathons, bike rides, swims and fun family challenges.

Personal trainers Simon and Karina of Freerange Fitness will be supporting all our participants. “Find out what your real limits are - it’s a great personal challenge and an amazing way to raise money for World Jewish Relief.”

Run
The Big Half starting at Tower Bridge and finishing in Greenwich on 4 March 2018

Obstacle
Join the Wolf Run on 8 April 2018 and embrace the mud!

Cycle
Prudential Ride London 100 will take place in July/August 2018 - book your space before they go!

To hear more about the event that’s for you, contact Sam Martin on 020 8736 1250 or at Samantha@worldjewishrelief.org

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OUR THANKS TO...

World Jewish Relief would like to thank the following supporters and their families for generous gifts left in their Will:

Lewis Cutner
Joanna Seldon

Gifts in Wills are critical to World Jewish Relief. We couldn’t achieve what we do without the invaluable support of those who want to leave a lasting legacy. We wish your families a long life.

For more information about leaving a gift to World Jewish Relief in your will please contact Richard Budden, Head of Individual Giving & Legacies on 020 8736 1250 / richardb@worldjewishrelief.org.

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DONATE TO CELEBRATE

Mark a special occasion by supporting World Jewish Relief!

Birthday, anniversary, Bar or Bat Mitzvah, or wedding, you could use your next celebration to give hope for a better future to those in need.

1. If you know someone who is celebrating you can donate to World Jewish Relief in their honour. We will send them a Mazel Tov card to let them know you have donated.

2. If you have a special occasion coming up you can ask well-wishers to donate to World Jewish Relief in your name. We will keep you updated on who has donated and the total you raise.

For more information contact Richard Budden on 020 8736 1250 or richardb@worldjewishrelief.org.

Jewish Legacy
Eat, drink and raise money!

Bring friends and family together to enjoy great food and company, whilst supporting World Jewish Relief.

For more information or to sign up, please contact Sam Martin on 020 8736 1250/samantha@worldjewishrelief.org

worldjewishrelief.org/dineinhelpout

TASTE OF UKRAINE @ JW3
in aid of World Jewish Relief

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ZEST AND WORLD JEWISH RELIEF

FEBRUARY 2018

Enjoy delicious Ukrainian dishes created by Zest whilst helping vulnerable Jewish communities in Ukraine!

Check out our ground-breaking 4D Virtual Reality experience demonstrating how one woman, Sophia, copes with the bitter Ukrainian winter.

For every £1 we receive, 79p is spent on our life-changing projects supporting older Jewish people and those escaping poverty, primarily in Eastern Europe. We invest the other 21p to manage our income and to help raise the next pound.

To make a donation please visit worldjewishrelief.org

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