

Donors 'tour' potential sites for federation aid



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Using PowerPoint technology, the Jewish Federation of Monmouth County propelled nearly 50 donors and potential donors through more than 10 countries and close to 20 cities, focusing a spotlight on Jews in need throughout the world.

The global "tour," held Jan. 23 and 30 at the federation's Holmdel headquarters, was a central element in the organization's 2013 international allocations process.

A related program, held on Jan. 27, featured a performance by the youth choir from Bet Elazraki, Children's Home in Netanya.

The three sessions were intended to inform the federation's allocations committee and members of the Jewish community about current and potential recipients for charitable dollars.

Tony Kestler, chair of the overseas allocations committee, said the programs were aimed at "anyone who is passionate about social injustice and the human condition."

Dov Ben-Shimon, executive director of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), opened the Jan. 23 session with a story about an elderly Jewish woman living in a Moscow slum.

"She has not left her tiny walk-up apartment for eight years," said Ben-Shimon. "A virtual prisoner of her age, infirmity, and lack of funds, she relies entirely on a JDC volunteer caregiver who periodically brings her fresh water, groceries, and medicine. There isn't even a working toilet in the apartment."

According to Ben-Shimon, this woman's situation, while austere, is far from unique and emblematic of the gender imbalance in the population. He explained, "Of the 27 million Russians killed in World War II, 25 million were men. Later, when emigration restrictions were relaxed for some Jews to relocate to Israel, the majority of those who left were healthy, younger single men."

Ben-Shimon also spoke of Israeli communities whose populations are under physical and emotional stress. He reported that in Sderot, the target of frequent rocket attacks from Gaza, more than three-fourths of all children suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.



Dov Ben-Shimon of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee makes the case for funds to help needy Jews around the world.

Jim Lodge, senior development officer for World ORT, the other featured speaker at the Jan. 23 leg of the federation tour, discussed his organization's efforts in Buenos Aires, Kiev, and Kiryat Yam, a seaside Israeli town not far from Haifa.

In Argentina's capital, said Lodge, about one-third of the people live in poverty. Shanty towns are not uncommon, and Jews have not been immune: "At least 25 percent of the Jews" there are poor, he said.

Lodge added that ORT is fighting back by stressing education. The organization has established a school that emphasizes science and whose curriculum also features courses in Hebrew, religion, and Israel.

In Kiryat Yam, once known mainly for its crushing poverty and high crime rate, ORT's work has helped create a climate of social improvement in a community with a significant percentage of people from Ethiopian backgrounds, said Lodge.

"There is new pride evident in the community," he said, "as well as increases in housing values."

Other stops on the federation "tour" included Paris, Budapest, Odessa, Vilnius, Tehran, Tashkent, Gondar, and Caracas. In Israel, the focus was on Jerusalem, Arad, Tzefat, the Hof Ashkelon region, and the Yemin Orde youth village.

The Jan. 30 presentations featured: Sara Goldberg from the Jewish Agency for Israel; Maya Tadmor-Anderman from Natal, a crisis hotline; and Susan Silverman of Friends of Yemin Orde, a boarding school and youth village that houses some 500 disadvantaged and orphan youngsters.

In addition, digital presentations focused on Shutaf, a summer program for special-needs children in Israel, and Crossroads, a program for at-risk English-speaking youth in Jerusalem.

This is the first year that the Monmouth federation has opened its allocations process to a broader range of presenters and audience members.

The new format went over well, according to Sheri Tarrab, the federation's president-elect, who called the turnout "impressive."

Keith Krivitzky, executive director of the federation, described the event as "a very good initial effort to educate our community about the circumstances and state of our extended Jewish family around the world."

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