

Dateline Sderot – OneFamily Fund and the gift of quilts from Temple Israel
By Carl Raskin

On February 18, 2010, Temple Israel members Martin and Jane Gordon, and Lorna and Carl Raskin visited the Israeli town of Sderot, which is on the border with the Gaza Strip. There, Jane and Martin took the opportunity to deliver quilts made by Temple members to the “Open House” day care centre. The Gordons live part of the year in Israel. For us, this was our first visit to Israel.

Jane and Martin are active with the organization “OneFamily Fund” both in Israel and in Canada. The organization exists to strengthen victims and the families of terror victims, and to prevent the effects of terrorism from wreaking even more havoc during the months and years following the attack. The Gordons brought us to Sderot to see first-hand the impact on the residents of the incessant Kassam rocket from neighbouring Gaza.

When we entered Sderot, we first noticed that there are thick concrete shelters all throughout the town. The Gordons explained that these are used by the town’s residents for protection, whenever they hear the siren that indicates a Kassam rocket has been launched from the Gaza town of Beit Hanoun. When the siren sounds, residents have about 15 seconds to find shelter.



A Shelter in Sderot

Our first stop was the Sderot police station, where a permanent exhibit of spent Kassam rocket shells is maintained. More than 7,000 Kassam rockets have been fired on Sderot from Gaza since the late 1990s. It is a little publicized fact that more than 270 rockets have been fired at Sderot since the Israeli Defense Force completed Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, the most recent attack being last week.



Kassam Rockets on Display at the Sderot Police Station

At the police station, we were introduced to Pini Rabinovitch, a case worker who works with OneFamily Fund. Pini introduced us to Lior, a former taxi driver in Sderot. On the way to pick up a fare, Lior had the radio on in his cab and the windows closed, and did not immediately hear the siren. When Lior did get out of his cab, a missile landed beside him and he was hit by shrapnel that destroyed an eye and part of his face. His body was repaired through surgery, but neither his life nor his livelihood. Since he is now blind in one eye, Lior has lost his commercial driver's license and can no longer work as a taxi driver to support his wife and three young children. As well, because of the incessant missile attacks, the economy of Sderot is in shambles, with very high unemployment so Lior is having difficulty supporting his family on the government assistance he receives. He simply cannot compete with able-bodied workers for what little employment there is. Also, he cannot leave Sderot because no one would want to buy his apartment.

The highlight of our visit to Sderot was the visit to "Open House", a day care facility, where the quilts made by Temple Israel members were delivered on the advice of Pini. There, we were met by Miriam, a dynamic survivor of a rocket attack, who runs the

facility. Miriam was injured by a rocket and spent considerable time in a wheel chair. When she was able to walk again, she vowed to spend the rest of her life assisting others.

Open House has been completely refurbished with the assistance of WIZO. The original building was unusable, due to the lack of adequate shelter in the advent of a rocket attack. We were shown the new bomb shelters where the children at the day care centre take refuge. We were informed that children as young as one year of age know the meaning of the warning siren. Imagine if children or grandchildren had to be cared for and educated in what is essentially a bomb shelter.



Martin and Jane Gordon, Lorna Raskin and day care centre director
Miriam receiving Temple Israel quilts

During our stay in Sderot, we were also taken to a playground, used by area children. It is a most unusual playground; the play structures were specially built to also serve as bomb shelters. When the warning siren sounds, the children head into one of the structures. Can you imagine your children or grandchildren in Ottawa being taught how to protect themselves from bombs while playing in a playground?



Bomb Shelter Play Structure

The lives of the people of Sderot are forever affected by the bombing that they must endure. Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli incursion into Gaza, has only slowed down the attacks. We saw firsthand what these attacks do to the lives and the community of Sderot. This town, while the most affected, was only one of the Israeli communities hit by missiles over the years.

Fewer people are now dying from terrorist attacks but the needs of the existing victims continue. OneFamily Fund is committed to helping these victims over the long term. Please help OneFamily Fund in its mission by donating online at www.onefamilyfund.org.