

Giving a Lift to Peace

By Noga Guedj – “232”: Eshkol Council Newsletter

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They wait for them at the Erez crossing, get into the car and drive. The volunteers of “Road to Recovery” drive Palestinian cancer patients from Gaza to hospitals in Israel. “We mustn’t forget that we are all human beings,” says Vivienne Silver from Be’eri.

Here in our locality, whenever somebody mentions Gaza, they’re usually talking about qassam rockets, mortars, escalation and respite. It’s easy to forget that over the border there are also human beings, sometimes people who are sick.

“**Road to Recovery**” is an organization of volunteers who drive Palestinians requiring treatment – mostly children – from crossings between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to hospitals in Israel. The organization is apolitical and is motivated solely by humanitarian interests. “Humaneness before politics” is their motto.

The organization was established by Yuval Roth, who was born in Kibbutz Hatserim, whose brother was kidnapped and murdered by Hamas 18 years ago. All the activities in the organization are performed voluntarily, without any monetary reward.



Vivienne Silver

Victims of the situation

I catch **Vivienne Silver** from Be’eri at a hospital in Jerusalem, just after she has given a lift to a patient from Gaza.

What made you volunteer in the organization?

“I retired recently, and was looking for a way to contribute to society. It was important for me to do something significant. A month ago, the head of the organization, Yuval, came to Be’eri to look for volunteers and donations, and since then I have been volunteering.”

How does it work?

“Once a week, I receive a list of patients requiring transport with details of the hospital they have to go to, and then I register for whichever time is suitable for me to go. The

day before the trip, Amalia, the co-ordinator for the southern region, tells me who will be waiting for me, and the next day I meet them at the crossing.”

What’s it like meeting with the Palestinians?

“It’s not always possible to engage in conversation, because I only know a little Arabic and if they don’t know how to speak Hebrew or English then it’s difficult to converse. But last trip, for example, the escort of the patient was a lad who knew Hebrew well and we were able to speak. We spoke about the situation, I asked him about Hamas and Fatah, and he told me that the situation in Gaza was very difficult, especially over the last few months.”

Helping patients from Gaza is not self-evident

“There is very little that citizens from both sides can do, so it is important to do what little we can. On the two sides of the border citizens are suffering; we are all victims of what is happening in the region. The citizens are not to blame for the situation or for the decisions of the governments. In my eyes, it is important to do whatever is possible in order to bring people closer and to show the other side that we are also human beings, just like them.”

Gratitude

Amalia Wiesel is responsible for transporting patients from the Gaza crossing. Amalia says that the “Road to Recovery” organization works in conjunction with an organization in Gaza which looks after cancer patients, and which is responsible for preparing the list of patients who have been authorized to undergo treatment in Israel.

“The people whom we give lifts to are cancer patients for whom the hospitals in Gaza do not have the appropriate equipment or means,” says Amalia. “The Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) authorizes their entry into Israel and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah finances the treatment. They obviously cannot go out of the Gaza Strip in their own vehicles, and in any case most of them don’t have their own cars. The only option for them to get to the hospitals is by taxi, and this is extremely expensive for them.”

What is the response of the passengers?

“There is a lot of gratitude. Some of them bring sweets and small gifts, and they really appreciate what we are doing. Very often ties are formed because we drive many of them more than once. I have been active in the organization for three years, and am friends with many children from Gaza.”

Our relationship with Gaza is not simple. How does one get over the enmity?

“We don’t presume to solve the conflict, but when we drive together in the same car, there is no enmity. There are only worried parents who wish to give their children the best chance of recovery, and there are good people from our side who drive them for this purpose. I particularly appreciate the volunteers who live near Gaza, who live in a difficult situation under the constant threat of rockets, and who still volunteer for this purpose.”

How many people do you drive?

“This week, for example, we drove 60 patients. Unfortunately, we didn’t manage to drive them all because there weren’t sufficient volunteers.”

Who can volunteer?

“Everyone. It’s important to say that each volunteer drives whenever it’s convenient – some people drive once a week and others only drive once a month. There’s no need to commit yourself far in advance – only for the following week. We also remunerate drivers for transport costs.”

For details regarding volunteering, please contact **Amalia** 050-7707874 (evenings), or email roadtorecovery10@gmail.com. You can read about the organization at our [website](#) or on [Facebook](#).