

Teens of Sderot Seek Boston Summer

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Sderot in southern Israel has been hit by more than 1,300 Kassam missiles since Israel pulled its civilians and soldiers out of Gaza in 2005. Even though there have been only seven casualties, there is no neighborhood, street, road, family, or child in the small, working class town in southern Israel which has not experienced a missile landing somewhere nearby.

"The greatest tragedy in this town lies with the children," said Masha Rifkin, a Massachusetts student attending Cornell University. The Russian-Jewish immigrant is spending a semester in Tel Aviv and works with Russian immigrant teenagers of Sderot twice a week. They are traumatized by the constant "tzeva adom" or "color red" alert, after which they have a scant 15 seconds to race into a bomb shelter, Rifkin said. Living like this has taken its toll on them.

"These people feel abandoned, not only by the government — which has turned a very cold shoulder to them — but especially the Russians here feel like the black sheep of Israel."

While working with the Russian teens to stage a play about their lives under a constant barrage of missiles (Sderot averages 3.2 hits a day), Rifkin wishes to assist them in coping with the aftereffects of shock, anxiety and stress. She is determined to fly the Russian teens to the Boston area to spend a month here in the summer performing their play before American audiences to highlight what they must live with each day. In the meantime, the teens will receive a vital respite from living under terrorism, and enjoy a summer free from the fear of being hit by a missile.

The project, "Children of Sderot," was initiated by Rifkin's mother, Inna, and the effort has gathered steam. Greater Boston's Russian-Jewish community is enlisting help to raise funds to bring 20 Sderot children to summer camps in Brighton, MA, and Lake Sunapee, NH. The Russian School of Mathematics of Newton, headed by Inna



Noam Bedein/SderotMedia.com

Masha Rifkin (seated 5th from left), siblings and parents of Russian teens of Sderot watching kids to rehearse the play.



Eugene Finkel/finkel.tribute.co.il

Sderot — ghost town.

Rifkin, and the Shaloh House of Brighton pledged to fund the cost of the overnight camps.

"When I learned about my daughter's involvement with these children, and knowing how important it is for Masha to go there twice a week, I couldn't be more proud and more scared for my daughter," said Mrs. Rifkin. "Then I realized that the Greater Boston Jewish community has to know what's going on in Sderot, that we have to bring these kids to America and show the play in Boston and possibly in other big Russian-Jewish communities in New York, Chicago, and maybe Los Angeles."

Rabbi Dan Rodkin of the

Shaloh House of Brighton has committed to bring 10 of the Russian-Jewish teens to the Shaloh House summer camp.

Organizers of the project estimate that they must quickly raise \$36,000 to cover the traveling expenses for 20 children.

The Russian Jewish Community Foundation of Waltham has created a special fund to accept tax-deductible contributions to bring the Russian teens to the Boston area.

"We want to give these children, even for just a little while, what they don't have at home: happiness, safety, and care," Inna Rifkin said.

Members of the Russian-speaking Jewish community north of Boston are helping to organize a fundraiser. Maria and Dmitry Gofstein of Marblehead, who recently traveled to Sderot and witnessed the devastation caused by the missiles, made a documentary about the town and its children. The film is scheduled to be shown at the JCC in Marblehead.

On May 12, at 6 p.m., the Gofsteins will hold a fundraising concert and auction of fine art, ceramics, jewelry and other items donated by local artists (donations of items are still being accepted) at their home, 22 Ida Road. All proceeds will go to the fund.

"Israel needs us here, the people of Israel are looking up to America — its only ally in this world. It is very important for them to know that we care, and we must help," said Maria Gofstein. "Being Jewish and leading a comfortable life here on the North Shore, I feel a personal responsibility to find a way to help our brothers and sisters in Israel."

She contacted the Jewish Federation of the North Shore and the Robert I. Lappin Foundation about this project, and said her request was met positively.

"I am very optimistic, in one way or another, there will be help," Gofstein said.

Those interested in helping bring 20 children from Israel to spend a safe summer in the Boston area, can make a tax-deductible contribution to: RJCF Children of Sderot Fund, and mail their check to: Russian Jewish Community Foundation, 800 South Street, Suite 600, Waltham, MA 02453.

Tickets to the concert cost \$100, and should be mailed to the Gofsteins' home, 22 Ida Road, Marblehead, MA 01945.

To donate an auction item or for further questions, call 781-631-0331.

Published in the Jewish Journal Boston North on 04.06.07