



Dear Friends and Supporters,

A Week of Strength, Light, and Community: Reflections from 'We Are One Strong Light' Retreat

It's with a heart full of gratitude and emotion that I write to you today, reflecting on the profoundly impactful four-day retreat, "We Are One Strong Light", inspired by the famous Hanukkah song Kulanu Or Eitan. **This past week, we had the honor of hosting over 250 brave widows and orphans, most of whom tragically lost a loved one in the past two months.**

Our young attendees, aged between 6 and 19, found solace and strength in our OTZMA Camps. Within their age groups, **we provided them with a safe environment of support and camaraderie**, helping them to process their grief while engaging in strengthening and empowering activities.

Their mothers participated in various workshops, **fostering connections and shared understanding**. These sessions were not just about coping but also about **building a community** that understands the depth of their loss.

A particularly touching aspect of our retreat was **"Gan Eitan", a special kindergarten we set up for 25 babies and toddlers within our compound**. Among our youngest was Be'eri, a four-month-old whose father was tragically taken just two months after her birth. Her presence was a poignant reminder of the far-reaching impact of loss and the resilience of the human spirit.

Our gathering was more than a retreat; it was a manifestation of a community that knows how to bear pain, shed tears, love, and celebrate life in unison.

The impact of our retreat was profoundly articulated in a message from Revital, widow of the heroic police officer Arthur Markovici z"l. Her words resonate with the essence of our mission:

"We don't have enough words to describe and thank you for the wonderful days at Otzma camp. The camp instilled strength in us. The attention to detail, the sensitivity, and the feeling of security helped us rediscover emotions that had been dormant. Yuval Shelley felt genuine, unjudged, and could laugh heartily. Thank you for being the light and love, echoing Martin Luther King's words:

'Only light can drive out darkness; only love can drive out hate.' – The Markovici Family

This retreat marked the first of many encounters with these families, forging a lifelong bond. **We extend our deepest gratitude to you**, our supporters, for making this possible. A special thanks to the **Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago**, whose generous support played a crucial role in this camp's success.

Your support is the cornerstone of our mission, enabling us to provide these essential services. Together, we are a beacon of hope and resilience.

With heartfelt thanks,

Shlomi Nahumson, CEO
IDF Widows and Orphans Organization