



# Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies

## *Network & Birthright Clinical Learning and Volunteer Experience in Israel - Post Program Report*

### **Program Overview**

In February 2025, [The Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies](#) launched a unique international clinical learning experience focused on trauma and crisis response. This exclusive trip targeted mental health clinicians under the age of 50 working in Network member agencies and was sponsored by The Network and [Birthright Israel Onward](#).

The experience offered a seven-day training and volunteer program in Israel. Clinicians engaged in hands-on learning with [NATAL](#), a Network Israeli member agency with expertise in trauma treatment, and volunteered with organizations serving communities on the ground, all while deepening their understanding of therapeutic approaches in trauma and crisis situations.

### **Program Components**

Funded and operated by Birthright Israel Onward, the experience followed the structure of [Birthright's volunteer programs](#), and was planned collaboratively with Network staff to ensure that participants would volunteer in organizations focused on supporting communities impacted by trauma, crisis, or war. Birthright Israel Onward also worked with [Yahel](#) to ensure that the volunteer opportunities had an educational component that allowed participants to better understand the impact of the organization. The Network worked side by side with NATAL to create a full-day trauma training, facilitated by NATAL clinicians to provide participants with background, strategies and interventions to support clients and communities in North America.

During the seven-day experience, participants engaged in the following activities:

- Agricultural work at [Ruca's Farm](#), a rehabilitative organic farm for the treatment of Israeli veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Participants assisted with the farm work while learning about the therapeutic work of clinicians and other health professionals to support veterans diagnosed with PTSD.
- Full-day training at the offices of NATAL in Tel Aviv, engaging in an interactive day of learning from experts in the field of trauma.
- Gardening work in Hatserim for displaced residents of Kibbutz Be'eri with [Venatata Association](#). Birthright and Venatata aim to bring 2,600 volunteers by April 2025 to create gardens for the new, temporary homes of members of Kibbutz Be'eri.
- Packaging at Hamal Ba'it Patuach, a project that supports soldiers, evacuees, returning hostages, and others experiencing trauma and stress since Oct 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Volunteering with [Yahel](#) in a low-income neighborhood, Ramat Eliahu, in Rishon Letzion. Participants assisted with a community garden in the Ethiopian absorption center, learned



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from a community social worker about her work in the community before and after Oct. 7<sup>th</sup>, and listened to an Ethiopian immigrant about her journey to Israel along with her adjustment to her new community life.

- Geopolitical briefing with a local historian.
- Tour of Hostage Square in Tel Aviv.
- Tour of the site of the Nova Music Festival at Kibbutz Re'im and a group processing session following the visit.
- A group Shabbat Dinner

## Participating Agencies

The trip included 21 professionals from 16 Network member agencies throughout the USA and Canada; participants were also accompanied by a Network staff member, Vice President of Operations, Innovation and Research (a licensed clinician). Trip participants included:

- [Alexander Jewish Family Service](#)
- [CJE SeniorLife](#)
- [Jewish Community Services, Baltimore](#)
- [JF&CS, Atlanta](#)
- [Jewish Family & Child Services, Toronto](#)
- [JCFS Chicago](#)
- [Jewish Family & Career Services, Louisville](#)
- [Jewish Family & Children's Service, Minneapolis](#)
- [Jewish Family Service, Memphis](#)
- [Jewish Family Service of Metro Detroit](#)
- [Jewish Family Services of Northeastern NY](#)
- [Jewish Family Services of Greater Hartford](#)
- [Jewish Family Services of Washtenaw County](#)
- [JIAS Toronto](#)
- [Westchester Jewish Community Services](#)
- [Jewish Child and Family Service, Winnipeg](#)

## Program Evaluation and Learnings

Immediately following the trip, participants were provided with a program evaluation from Birthright and an additional program evaluation from The Network. Participants were reminded that Birthright was the operator of the trip and that The Network was the collaborator on the content, and were asked, as much as possible, to differentiate the two in their responses to the program evaluation.

While The Network has not yet received Birthright's evaluation results, The Network's program evaluation has received an 86% response rate and has analyzed the feedback for future programming and for additional follow up offerings for the cohort of participants and The Network as a whole.



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## **Expectations for the trip:**

35% of respondents said that the trip met their expectations while 65% noted it somewhat met their expectations. Specific feedback included:

- Participants stated that the NATAL facilitators were engaging and that the planned training was able to combine both theoretical and practical in an accessible and easily digestible format. Participants also felt that the training provided them with some practical tools and strategies in working with trauma, such as BATHE, BASIC PH models. However, some felt that the training was foundational and wanted to delve deeper into additional practical interventions and modalities.
- Participants wanted the trip to include additional clinical aspects and more structure space for processing, for volunteering to be more clinically oriented, and to have more opportunities to meet clients and Israeli clinicians to hear about their experiences. This was not always possible with the structure of Birthright's volunteer program.

## **Most impactful aspects:**

- 77% of participants chose the volunteering opportunities as one of the most impactful aspects of their experience. They consistently noted that they found it valuable to learn about the different organizations, creative interventions in their communities, and the impact they make on clients experiencing trauma and war.
- 77% of participants also stated that the networking aspect of the trip was very valuable. The group connected really well together and their passion for their work in their communities was present at all times.
- The cultural immersion aspect of the trip was also highly rated (65%). Participants enjoyed the opportunities to learn about the collective and individual impacts and stated that by being immersed in the community, they got a better sense on what is happening on the ground

*"... Everyone on the trip was wonderful and so committed to their work and their roles in their organizations. I loved everyone's compassion and professionalism. It was wonderful spending time as a whole group, especially during Shabbat..."*

*"... My recent trip was truly a life-changing experience. I met some amazing people and learned valuable lessons that I can bring back to my team...."*

*"... It was so helpful to get ideas from organizations providing similar services in Israel that I could bring back. I was able to not only learn about them but to see and experience them. I got a lot of ideas to take back and I felt like it made a difference for the community in Israel to feel support from people outside..."*

*"... I found the NATAL training reassuring. They covered information that I know my team knows and I know; however, we feel unprepared to address trauma. It was reassuring to learn how NATAL uses this clinical knowledge to address trauma in really practical ways. I plan to bring back BATHE and the coloring exercise -- and hope to use both of these with my team and with my clients...."*

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

In the weeks following the trip, Network staff analyzed feedback and scheduled additional meetings with the trip's cohort and with NATAL to ensure the next steps are



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inclusive of the feedback given and of the cohort and Network's needs. Initial next steps have begun including:

- Analysis of program evaluation, as described above
- Reflections NETTalk facilitated by Network staff and several trip participants to introduce the Network to this experience and reflections that came out of it.
- A "reunion" meeting of the cohort, together with VP, Operation, Innovation and Research and SVP, Clinical Impact, to reflect and clinically process the experience, and discuss initial first steps.
- Follow up meeting with NATAL to discuss the feedback about the training and discuss follow-up trainings and offerings for the cohort and/or other clinical professionals from The Network.
- A reflection during Yom Hazikaron ceremony at PowerNET 2025.