



# ***DELIVERING AID & BRINGING HOPE***

STORIES FROM THE JDC FIELD

**PREPARED FOR THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF OCEAN COUNTY  
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## A Lifeline for Larisa

Born in Lutsk, a small village in northwest Ukraine in 1952, 74-year-old Larisa grew up in the shadow of the Holocaust. Her father's entire family was murdered, and that loss shaped her childhood. Antisemitism was rampant after the war, and as a young girl, Larisa faced cruelty and exclusion from classmates and teachers alike.

Life in Lutsk is still hard, especially amid Ukraine's ongoing crisis. "The sirens are terrifying," Larisa shared. "When they blare at night, I can't sleep." She lives alone in a small fifth-floor apartment, vulnerable and exposed. Her only income is a \$97 monthly pension. "Most of my money goes to pills," she said, gesturing to cabinets lined with prescriptions.

The support of the Jewish Federation of Ocean County enables JDC to provide Larisa with a bank card which she uses to purchase food and medicines. JDC also helps her pay her high utilities bills, keeping her warm during the winter. Larisa finds more than material aid at the local JDC Hesed welfare center. She participates in lectures, holiday celebrations, and Shabbat gatherings. "It's like medicine for my soul," she said of the shared meals and human connection.

***"Without JDC, I don't know how I would survive," she said. "Thank you for remembering us!"***





## Omer's Journey from Heartbreak to Healing



Omer, a young father and teacher in the Gaza envelope, was in constant contact with his students on October 7th. On that dreadful day, he lost both students and colleagues. When his kibbutz school eventually reopened, he tried to return to the classroom, but the weight of what had happened made it nearly impossible.

On his first day back, a flood of memories overwhelmed him and drove him from the room. He could still see the desperate messages his students had sent, pleading for help. Five seats in his classroom remained empty, five young lives taken in their homes. In tears, Omer told the principal that he did not have the strength to continue.

He soon connected with JDC's Back on Track program and began meeting with a counselor, Gili. The program, which combines career coaching with trauma support and addresses the way trauma impacts employment and motivation, helped Omer find his footing. In their regular sessions, Gili helped him rediscover what sustained him, what brought relief, purpose, and even moments of strength. Through these conversations, Omer remembered leading physical training sessions for evacuated youth at a hotel in Eilat.

With Gili's guidance, that experience sparked a new path. He went on to open a therapeutic gym for Gaza border communities, a place where survivors can rebuild physical strength, process crippling trauma, and regain the confidence to live again. Today he continues to teach and help give mental and physical strength to those around him. "This help is life-sustaining. If I didn't have something to aspire to, I don't know what would have happened to me," Omer says. "If I didn't have that anchor, I don't know where I would be today."

## Standing with José and Adriana

José and Adriana have been married for decades. Although not elderly, life's hardships have aged them. Both live with developmental delays that left them isolated as their relatives have slowly pulled away, unsure how to support them. They spent much of adulthood on the margins, without the social or family connections most people rely on.



Support from the Federation enables JDC and the local Jewish community to assist this vulnerable couple, giving them a measure of stability as they enter retirement years. José was forced into early retirement after a workplace accident, leaving his disability pension as their only income for many years. Adriana had never held a formal job and learned at age 60 that she did not qualify for a state pension. Yet with the guidance of Jewish community leaders trained by JDC, she navigated the complex bureaucracy and secured a small pension – easing their burden a bit, even as they continue to live with very limited means. They also receive food assistance from JDC and – just as importantly – a place where they are heard and cared for.



Thanks to the generosity of the Federation, José and Adriana are receiving the support they need to meet their basic needs with dignity, maintain stability, and remain active, valued members of the Jewish community that has become their extended family.



## About JDC

JDC is the leading global Jewish humanitarian organization, working in 70 countries to lift lives and strengthen communities. We rescue Jews in danger, provide aid to vulnerable Jews, create opportunity for all Israelis, cultivate a Jewish future, and lead the Jewish response to global crises. For over 100 years, our work has put the timeless Jewish value of mutual responsibility into action, making JDC essential to the survival of millions of people and the advancement of Jewish life across the globe.

Learn more about JDC's current activities at <http://www.jdc.org/>

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