

SINCE 1976

maoz israel
REPORT

Ari and Shira
Sorko-Ram,
Kobi and Shani
Ferguson
and their five
children



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IStandwithIsrael

Stories to Warm the Soul

Shortly after I Stand with Israel was established in 2002, a man contacted us saying he wanted to support a widow in Israel. He had seen verses like the one in James that defined pure religion as **living unstained by the world – and caring for orphans and widows**. From Job to Isaiah to Timothy, the verses about the significance of caring for this vulnerable sect of society are loud and clear. And so, he wanted to care for a widow in Israel. We found him two candidates. **He decided to support both.**

Through the years we'd had occasional donations

come in specifically to help the poor. But when **IStandwithIsrael.com** was born, suddenly thousands of dollars were flowing in monthly with the request to give to those in need in Israel. We knew Jewish believers had a difficult time getting help from local charities **because of the stigma of their belief**. ISWI would aim to change this because we knew a **strong believing community would be a testimony** of God's goodness. Since then ISWI has distributed over **seven million dollars** to hundreds of Israeli families and individuals in need.

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What Makes **IStandwithIsrael** so Unique?

There are **two things** that make ISWI unique: **The first is our physical presence in Israel.** The thing about the poor is – they're poor – so they don't have a way to advertise their poverty to reach the people who would like to help them. Living and working in Israel since the 1970's, we have personal connections with congregations and believing communities across the country – we could find them!

The second is our desire to build and not just mend. We want to give not only to

help people out of bad situations – but also help propel people into *good* situations. We can help **fill a financial hole** from an unexpected tragedy or circumstance, but what if we can **also build a ladder** for someone to excel beyond what they could manage on their own? And this has been our guiding principle since the beginning!

Some of the names are changed and faces not shown to avoid persecution. But here are just some of the real life stories **the magnificent supporters of ISWI are responsible for this year:**

“Now lone soldiers have a dedicated space for them with dedicated people waiting and ready to love, care for and nurture Israel's defenders.”

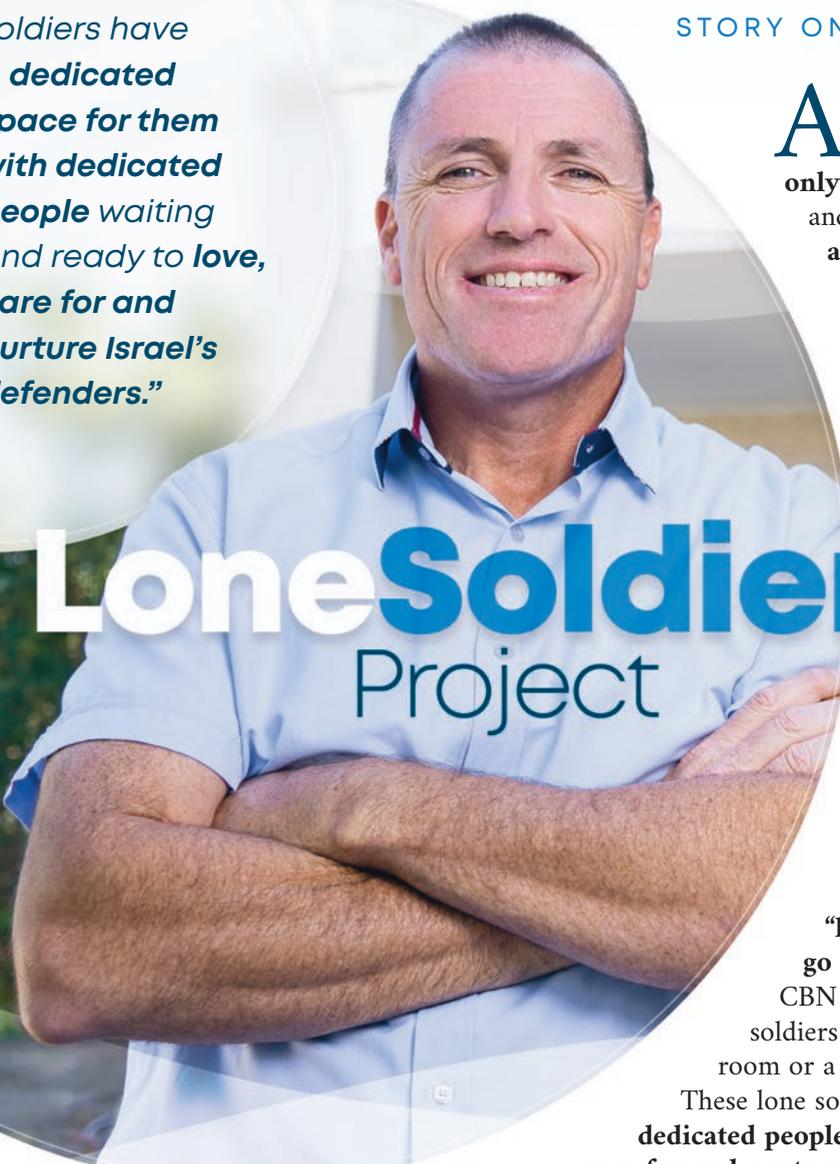
STORY ONE

As a parent, one of the scariest parts of raising believing children in Israel is knowing you have **only 18 years** to instill in them a deep love for God and a strong backbone – **because it will be the army's job to break them down to their core and turn them into soldiers.**

One of the strongest Israeli believers I've ever known told me while he was in the army, “My goal was to come out at the end of my army service and still be able to say, ‘I believe in God.’” **He wasn't wavering in his faith;** all he felt he could accomplish while in the army was simply to hold on to what he knew was true while dealing with the pressure and temptations of **being with unbelieving 18-20 year-olds day in and day out with no way of escape.** This struggle creates an incredible sense of loneliness.

The greatest gift you can give a soldier who desires to follow in God's ways is a sense of belonging and a place of spiritual and physical rest. That place is usually at home with their families where soldiers go on weekends. However, **“lone soldiers” have no families in Israel to go home to.** Partnering with Dan Carlson from CBN Israel, ISWI helped prepare such a place for lone soldiers to come and rest. This place isn't just a dorm room or a place to grab a hot meal and bed for the night.

These lone soldiers have a dedicated space for them with **dedicated people in this facility waiting and ready to love, care for and nurture Israel's defenders.**



Lone Soldier
Project

STORY TWO

*"I am writing this letter to thank you from the depths of my heart for the generosity you have shown me through the scholarship that I have received. I believe that more than having helped me at this point of life, your help is an important part of me walking in the way that our heavenly Father has prepared for me in order to help build up His kingdom on earth. **Your support has been life-changing.** I hope you will continue to bless many other students in the same way, **knowing that this has a great impact on us here in Israel!**"*



Sarah

An occupational therapist is someone who comes up with creative ways to help people who have various **disabilities or limitations** (such as illness or imprisonment) to **live life better**. Although many of us might enjoy someone coming alongside us to give us tips on how to choose a hobby or manage our daily/weekly rhythm of life better, **there are those who need an occupational therapist to be able to mentally or physically function at all.**

Challenged by her own medical issues, this is **what Sarah wanted to become.** However, **because of her medical issues, she could not study full-time and**

physically work to provide for such a complex education. ISWI approved a scholarship for her to attend a university in Haifa. She graduated after four years with honors earning her **bachelor's degree.** The university was so **impressed** with her commitment and capabilities, they offered to allow her to **skip** the master's studies and **go straight to earning her PhD.** It was the **first time** this had ever been offered to a student of occupational therapy! We are so proud of her for being such a good steward of the scholarship that was given her and **the honor she has given the Lord** in showing professors and classmates alike a life of excellence in Yeshua.

STORY THREE

In Hebrew we call the first five years of life the “soft age” because kids this age are so malleable. One seemingly uneventful encounter at this stage of life can dramatically change the course of a person’s life. **If one encounter can do this, think what a year’s worth of encounters at daycare or kindergarten can do.** This is why activists prey on this age group to instill their values. This is why providing a spiritually and emotionally safe place for ages 0-5 is so crucial. This is why Little Hearts exists.

Little Hearts is the only believing kindergarten in Jerusalem, and one of the few available to believers anywhere in the country. Parents who don’t even live in the city will brave the insane downtown Jerusalem traffic twice a day to offer their children this opportunity.

But the beauty of this little haven doesn’t just extend to the children. **Nadeen, a teacher at Little**

Hearts comes from a Muslim family. When she made the brave decision to abandon Islam and follow Yeshua, her family disowned her. In Arab culture, when a family disowns you, often everything you knew is no longer available to you. As a woman, there are almost no other alternative opportunities in life except to marry – and it is very difficult to marry without any family credibility behind you.

Because of this year’s **ISWI supporters,** Little Hearts was not only able to care for dozens of young children at subsidized rates families could afford, it was also able to **offer Nadeen a full-time job and a family made up of Jews and Arabs who love and work together to glorify God.**

*“Thank you so much for **believing in our preschool** and wanting to be a part of our work here! **We appreciate it so much** and without it could not continue to provide a safe haven for the children of this community!”*

LittleHearts

Kindergarten



STORY FOUR



Julia

Julia made Aliyah with her husband, David, five years ago. The first years, as is customary, were dedicated to learning Hebrew and finding work.

However, soon Julia **pushed to move past her minimum wage job and pursued a degree** in photography communications. Julia's school program was rigorous, and she was not able to work full-time while studying at the Hadassah Academic College in Jerusalem – but David's job would cover their basic living expenses.

Julia and David **had always been hard-working and self-sustaining** in Russia, but the **cost of living in Israel was much higher** than in Russia. And here they were, in a new country, needing to lay the groundwork for a future livelihood with no family to help them get on their feet.

Julia was so close to completing her four years of studies. The future was bright and they would soon be able to build their lives and not just survive. Then she learned that **in order to complete her degree, the graduate project required her to buy expensive photography**

equipment.

She would, of course, need this equipment for her trade, but the upfront purchase of so much equipment was like a ball and chain in her heart.

The good news is, when David and Julia gave up living close to family for God's call to return to the Promised Land, **they discovered just how many spiritual brothers and sisters they had all over the world.** Julia was able to purchase all the necessary equipment, complete her studies **and is already working in her field!**

*"Thanks to ISWI we were able to 'breathe' again! I think that ISWI and the people around the world who donate monies in order to help Messianic believers in Israel **are doing an amazing thing.** They give a sense of support to their sisters and brothers in faith, for those who have nowhere else to turn."*

IStandwithIsrael - Stories to Warm the Soul

STORY FIVE

Vsevolod



Our kids were small when we immigrated to Israel, so as a family we quickly embraced all aspects of Israeli life. **We knew if we dove in deep, in one generation our family line would know nothing other than life in Israel.** We got our kids into daycare and found jobs, but we weren't sure how to find other Jewish believers in Yeshua like us.

Then one day **I opened my Bible and a piece of paper fell out with a number on it.** I remembered the man who gave it to us when we were back in Kiev. He had given it to us when we told him we were moving to Israel. I called the number and reached a **family of believers who happened to live in our town!** They invited us over for dinner and helped us find the congregation that **would become our spiritual home to this day – 19 years later.**

Soon after arriving in Israel we wanted to touch, feel and see our homeland in detail. We began to travel all over the country visiting modern places

as well as ancient ruins. **I fell in love with what I saw and wanted to learn more about each place.** I was mesmerized by the civilizations that had left footprints on this land – and was in awe of **living the fulfillment of prophecy that foretold our return to this land.**

When our friends and family came for a visit, I was eager to share everything I had learned about my beautiful country with them. They all commented that **my love for the land was contagious and that I should pursue being a tour guide.** Back in the Soviet Union, my wife and I had been trained for very simple jobs, so I never dreamed of our professions being anything more than just basic factory machinery workers.

Over the years, each time we had different friends visit, they would say the same thing. Each time I gave them all the reasons it could never happen: tour guides require higher than average Hebrew skills; my boss wouldn't allow me to take the time off and even if he did I wouldn't be able to study without a salary. And clearly, the course was just too expensive...

When our friends and leaders in the congregation began to encourage us to give it a try, I determined that **if God could take care of the things I couldn't control, I would take the steps I could.**

They told us about how ISWI helps believers in Israel and **just like that, all the reasons that I had convinced myself would make this dream impossible were gone!** My boss agreed to give me the days off for my education and my ISWI application to cover the study expenses was approved!

I have now completed the first year of studies and have overcome every challenge Hebrew has thrown my way. I've learned so much of the cultures and traditions of Jews and other peoples who have passed through here. **I have one year left and I can't wait to share my knowledge and love for this land with the world.**

*"As I look back, I see how **God used different people, including you,** to make sure I did not forget my dream and learned to trust in His goodness. I think that the same can be said by many believers who have received the timely help from your organization.*

From our entire family, we thank you for your help in this difficult time. May the Lord bless all those who have helped make my dream come true. May God return to you a hundred-fold."

STORIES SIX & SEVEN

Growing up in Brazil, my mother was into black magic. When I was eight, her Satanist friends felt I wasn't respectful toward their idols and hid explosives in a mixture of incense to blow up in my face. When the smoke cleared, not a hair on my head was singed. **I knew it was God who had protected me.** So, when I heard the Gospel for the first time 10 years later, **I believed immediately.**

I spent 3 years in Bible school and then met my husband Moshe. Together we had five beautiful children and in 2001 made Aliyah to Israel.

Life in Israel was much more difficult than we ever dreamed. The language was hard, so I could only find minimum wage jobs. The kids were young when we arrived and often got sick. But it was **when our nine-year-old son Marcus was diagnosed with epilepsy that life began to unravel.**

We were **overwhelmed with the amount of care Marcus required** on top of all the medical bills that came with it. **Moshe couldn't handle**

it and began disappearing and I began hearing about him owing monies. Before I knew it, we owed 100,000 shekels (\$28,000) for things I knew nothing about. After 28 years of marriage, I found out **Moshe had taken up with another woman.** My

*"It is important for me to emphasize the importance of IStandwithIsrael. **Life in Israel is very hard** because of the high cost of living and many other reasons. **This organization gives hope** and help to people who don't have anyone else to turn to. **I pray that God will bless you doubly as you have blessed me.** Without you I could not have been released from the difficult financial situation I was in. **Now I can start living my life anew!**"*



children didn't want him in the house anymore.

He left, and when he left he stole my checkbook. He wrote huge checks in my name so now on top of my son's medical bills and Moshe's debts, I had to cover those checks. The legal battle that followed our separation was expensive and exhausting but in the end, the judge ruled somewhat in my favor and ordered me to pay only 23,000 shekels (\$6,500) of the total debt.

Still, I am a 56-year-old immigrant and single mother with three children still at home. I was so discouraged thinking I would be paying his debts for the rest of my life.

My congregation tried to help me as I paid on his debts for two years. They even applied to ISWI for me. May God bless the day I received word that ISWI would cover the rest of the debt! Now, I have peace of mind and body. I can sleep at night and I have hope again!

I am a language teacher by profession. I taught in a **Jewish elementary school in the Ukraine**. While at work one day, I learned that as a Jew I could make Aliyah to Israel. This excited me as I felt Israel would be a better place to raise my children. I came to Israel on a boat. It was raining a bit when we arrived. As **I stepped off the boat and put my hand on the earth I looked up and saw a rainbow and doves flew over my head. It was a very emotional arrival and I wept right there. I knew I was home.**

As I got situated in the Land, I came across **believers who welcomed me with open arms** into their community. Here and there I would meet believers who told me they were praying for me. I said that was fine, but I didn't understand why they would do that. I did not know much about God then, but most people in the former Soviet Union are not offended by the idea that Yeshua is divine so their belief didn't bother me.

One day they invited me to their Shabbat service. It was very strange to me. I understood there was a God, but didn't understand what that had to do with my personal life. **Then the Holy Spirit began to work in my heart – and everything changed.**

When I first arrived in Israel, I took **house cleaning jobs** like many immigrants do. I eventually **worked my way up to a shopkeeper**. In 2009, I met Pastor Yossi Ovadia and began attending his congregation where I have now been for 10 years. Soon after I arrived, he asked me if I would like to change jobs and work as an administrator for the congregation. Half of the congregants were new immigrants and didn't speak Hebrew. I was elated. Not only would I work in a godly environment, I would be able to **help people just like me** and receive a salary that was enough for me to live and cover my debts from the early years of my arrival.

About the time I had finally paid off everything I owed, I heard of a **government housing lottery**. I was getting older and my kids were grown so I wanted a place where I could live securely for the rest of my life. As Israel has more than doubled its population in the last 30 years,

the **housing situation in Israel** is desperate. A small apartment in Israel starts at \$250,000, so most people rent.

To try to improve the situation, the government has stepped in and requires that contractors who build apartment buildings sell a certain number at a **deeply-discounted price**. Applications are handed in and a lottery is held. The winners have a window of time to get a down payment and paperwork in or the opportunity goes to someone else. I couldn't believe it when they called me to tell me I had won the option to buy!

I knew I could cover the mortgage, but I didn't have the down payment they were asking for, nor did I know of a good lawyer who could help me through the process without taking advantage of me. **I am so grateful to ISWI who gave me both the money and a lawyer to get me through this. I now have a home in my homeland!**



Oxana

STORY EIGHT

My family immigrated from Brazil when I was a teenager. I served in the army and immediately afterward married the man of my dreams. Together we have a son and we both work at **Israel College of the Bible** in Netanya. I have a **passion for administration**, but I knew there was much I needed to learn to improve the level of my abilities. I found an **online program** where I could study from home at my own pace. The challenge was our young son. As a toddler, this was an **important time** for me to **be involved in his life**. However, in order to pay for this program, I would have to get an additional job. **I'm so thankful to ISWI for covering the cost of the course so I can learn to be excellent at work and still be excellent at home with my family.**

Rivka



STORY NINE

Ethiopian Congregation

“His a pastor of **one of the most vulnerable sects of Israeli society**. Of all the Jews who have immigrated from nations across the world, Ethiopians have had the **most difficult time adapting to modern Israeli culture**. This disconnect wasn't intentional. Israel wanted Ethiopian Jews to come. However, **transitioning thousands of people from a third-world country to modern culture overnight** is no easy task. And really, there's no handbook on how to do this correctly since no other nation on earth holds to such a **vast vision of restoring members of its people group** exiled thousands of years before.

The only group within Israel that opposed Ethiopian immigration were ultra-orthodox Jews – simply because a large number of the Ethiopians had been exposed to the Gospel prior to arriving in Israel. But the law of the Land stood behind the Jewishness of these Ethiopians. And, **unlike most immigrants who have to find a way**



Enjoying the ride to Shabbat service in the new van.

to Israel on their own, Israel put enormous efforts into getting planes to Africa and even ran a diving resort in Sudan as a front for undercover Israeli agents who smuggled Ethiopian Jews to Israel by boat.

Still Ethiopian immigrants struggled with their identity. **Long-standing social structures, traditions and cultural closeness dissolved** as people were allocated to different housing options across the country. A small but significant enough number of Israelis refused to hire or rent their apartments to these new immigrants, **afraid they did not understand the basics of modern society.**

The good news is, today, decades after their arrival, Israeli-Ethiopians have **integrated into almost every part of society – from lawyers to teachers to Knesset Members to doctors to beauty queens** – Ethiopians have enriched Israeli society. The bad news is, an unnecessarily large number of them **still struggle financially, socially and especially domestically.**

Strangely, in a culture like Israel's where men are very involved with their families, **many Ethiopian children grow up without fathers.** This affects a generation still trying to define its place. And this

is why Pastor H's role is so important. Seventy percent of his congregants are single mothers. No government can solve the issues of the heart, but God can, and so Pastor H looks to Him to heal, restore and empower his congregants **so they will thrive in the land God promised them.**

The weekend services are a time where Pastor H can speak life into their hearts and encourage them. And still one of the greatest challenges he has is getting his congregants to come to the Shabbat services. No, not because they won't get out of bed, but because on Shabbat there is **no public transportation** and so no affordable way to get there. Sometimes it's the **practical roadblocks that get in the way of spiritual breakthroughs.** This is why **we are told to "Prepare the way"** and "make a smooth path."

With ISWI's help Pastor H was able to purchase a van in order to pick up anyone who wants to come. They now go house to house and even to shelters to pick up the ones who understand God is the only way they will experience **not only eternal life – but God's amazing plan for their life here as well.**

"Our congregation is working hard to restore families. Most of them have abuse problems and come from shelters. We are helping them to stand on their feet with the message of the Gospel. I appreciate your support to buy this van. May the Lord bless you as you have blessed us in this practical way."



YOUR GENEROSITY WILL BRING YOU

Joy

ACTS 20:35



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