

# JDC STANDS IN SOLIDARITY WITH FRENCH JEWRY – STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN A TIME OF CRISIS

FEBRUARY 2015

American Jewish  
Joint Distribution  
Committee



## JDC & THE JEWS OF FRANCE: 80 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

JDC has assisted Jews in France since the first wave of refugees fled Nazi Germany in 1933. In the aftermath of the Second World War, restoring fractured Jewish communities became a JDC priority. Through cash relief, children homes, vocational training and emigration assistance, JDC helped rebuild shattered lives. In France, JDC established the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work to rebuild community capacity, funded 61 children's homes in conjunction with OSE<sup>1</sup>, and helped establish the FSJU<sup>2</sup>, a central Jewish community agency in France. By the end of the 1980s JDC no longer supported direct services in France, however, it continued to strengthen leadership, promote knowledge-sharing, build best practices for community development and develop enriching networking platforms for young adults through pan-European initiatives.

## FRENCH JEWRY'S EMERGING NEEDS

The French Jewish community is vibrant, self-sustaining and multi-faceted. Home to some 550,000 Jews, it is by far the largest Jewish community in Europe. Yet, screams of "*death to the Jews*" in the streets of Paris, and routine bullying, intimidation and violence<sup>3</sup> have altered life for French Jewry. This new reality is compounded by the broader political and economic climate in France – a failing economy characterized by sky-high unemployment rates for young adults and stagnant wages, disenfranchised youth and struggling young families, and escalating Jihadist radicalism. Today, the French Jewish community is rallying its resources to address the community's emerging needs to:

- Bolster security
- Develop and offer widely available psychosocial relief
- Put in place contingency plans and crisis networks
- Assist vulnerable and needy members of the community
- Pursue routine communal activities for the Jews who remain in France
- Assist community members who choose to move to safer neighborhoods or emigrate

## JDC IN FRANCE TODAY – STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

Since the murder of three Jewish children and a rabbi by an Islamist militant in Toulouse in 2012, and even more so since the most recent hostage taking and massacre at *HyperCasher* grocery store in January 2015, the French government and the Jewish community have invested significant resources in fortifying security

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<sup>1</sup> OSE which stands for Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants (translated as Organization to Save the Children) is the leading community welfare agency for needy Jews in France.

<sup>2</sup> FSJU stands for the Fonds Social Juif Unifié. It is the main umbrella Jewish fundraising body in France.

<sup>3</sup> French Jewish institutions such as the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France, Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive, and the French Ministry of Interior, report that anti-Semitic acts have more than doubled in 2014. While the Jews consists of less than 1% of the general population, it is estimated that 51% of all racist attacks have been anti-Semitic.

measures. Issues of security and of immigration to Israel are both high on the community's agenda, and are being handled by the local community with the assistance of other international organizations such as JAFI.

JDC, however, is well positioned to assist the community through a range of mid- to long-range initiatives that can boost the community's resilience. Drawing on its rich experience with communities in trauma and transition around the world and in Israel, JDC is poised to galvanize global Jewish solidarity and support French Jews. With knowledge garnered over the last century, and an established network of resources, JDC will leverage local expertise and guide the community in formulating tailored contingency strategies and long-term plans that build community resilience.

Senior JDC professionals have been dispatched to consult with the local community to ensure resilience measures are being executed and expanded. Based on needs identified by the local leadership, JDC proposes a threefold strategy of collaboration with the French community to ensure the well-being of its members:

- Respond to immediate needs with psychosocial support
- Prepare for emerging challenges through student aid, leadership training, and coexistence projects
- Support strategic planning for the community's future

JDC in Israel is also launching an initiative to support the absorption of disadvantaged immigrants from France who are struggling to integrate into Israeli society. The following section outlines these key initiatives:

## I - IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

### A. MEETING PSYCHO-SOCIAL NEEDS

**Local Partners:** OSE, Paris Jewish Schools, Jewish social and education services

French Jewry is a robust and resilient community that is experiencing a trauma for which it has not yet developed sufficient expertise. Terrorist attacks, widespread anti-Semitic hostility, and the migration of French Jews have had a dire impact on the community. In the aftermath of violence, when the need for psychological counseling is essential to victims and their extended networks, JDC is ready to intervene.

The local community reports that although psycho-social assistance exists, there is a lack of services for Jewish victims dealing specifically with the distress associated with anti-Semitic acts. JDC has extensive expertise in meeting the psycho-social needs of communities in crisis, in Israel and around the world. By collaborating with local experts, JDC can play a key role in building local resilience capacity by introducing its global know-how.

Working with experts such as the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC), JDC proposes to share expertise, knowledge and skills with social and educational service professionals, local intervention teams, volunteers and community leaders to help them respond effectively and in a timely manner. Additionally, JDC will help create crisis teams that are able to mitigate trauma related to anti-Semitism. This is particularly relevant for vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly and people with disabilities who are most at risk.

## II - ENSURING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

### A. SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR JEWISH STUDENTS AT-RISK

**Local Partners:** FSJU, Samekh, Latalmid

Now more than ever, Jewish children need a safe environment. This is particularly true for youngsters who live in high-risk neighborhoods rife with anti-Semitic intimidation and violence, and those attending public schools who are victims of bullying and attacks. The Jewish community is determined to help needy children access the safety of Jewish schools by providing financial assistance, tuition scholarships and hot lunches for the most financially vulnerable. JDC is committed to supporting local efforts and ensuring that Jewish youth who live in a community that is forced to divert its local resources to meet the pressing security and psycho-social needs, have access to affordable Jewish educational support and a safe environment.

### **B. TRAINING FRENCH JEWISH LEADERS IN COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

**Local Partners:** FSJU

Despite national and international outrage over recent attacks, the French Jewish community anticipates that anti-Semitic violence will persist and potentially intensify. Consequently, it is critical that leadership be equipped to cope with this ongoing uncertainty. In this context, JDC aims to boost resilience capacity and help the community thrive. Working with experts such as those from the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC), JDC can train community leaders to handle crises that arise. A strong local community is best positioned to manage an emergency, and JDC will bring proven and invaluable expertise to the French Jewish community to ensure that they have the capacity and resources to act and react appropriately.

### **C. PROMOTING COEXISTENCE TO ENSURE SAFETY**

**Local Partners:** UEJF (Student union of Jewish students in France); OSE; Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah (FMS), foster home associations and youth movements

A current priority of the French Jewish community is to reduce tensions in France and promote inter-cultural dialogue as a way to increase the community's safety. JDC, with its extensive experience working directly and indirectly around the globe to increase peaceful interaction between Jews and non-Jews on the local level, forging strong ties, and heightening awareness of anti-Semitic rhetoric and activity, is ready to collaborate on current and future initiatives.

In partnership with the union of French Jewish students and local organizations, JDC can advance the development of pedagogical tools, foster inter-cultural and inter-faith cooperation, and expand local initiatives that bridge gaps and normalize relations. Projects, some of which are already in operation, include creating platforms for Holocaust survivors to share their testimonies, encouraging homes and institutions for youth from various cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds to visit holocaust memorial sites, and organizing events for educational personnel and youth from different communities to meet and establish dialogue.

## **III - COMMUNITY PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

### **A. PLANNING FOR SAFER HOMES AND RELOCATION OF COMMUNITIES AT RISK**

**Local Partners:** FSJU

Despite a growing emigration, the local community reports that the majority of French Jews wish to remain in France. Yet, for vulnerable populations such as youth at risk, the elderly, people with disabilities, and financially vulnerable French Jews who live in high risk and unsafe neighborhoods, this can be challenging. Low-income neighborhoods in France are notorious for their high levels of poverty, high numbers of migrants from North Africa, soaring radical Islam and political extremism, and endemic crime.

The French Jewish community will not abandon its most vulnerable members, and is currently in the initial stages of devising an initiative entitled REBONDS<sup>4</sup> that will help families-at-risk gain normalcy and safety. To help these families relocate to safer neighborhoods, the community recognizes that it must help them acquire the tools to break out of poverty and marginalization. Community organizations are prepared to act as guarantors to facilitate access to proper housing, provide temporary financial support, assist families with vocational counseling and connect them to the Jewish community and its network of support.

To assist this local effort, JDC will, in the short term, provide a community development consultant that will map needs, monitor trends, evaluate community resources, and help create a research-based demographic review and feasibility plan. In the long term, JDC will keep abreast of developments and remain available to assist when a more tangible implementation and funding plan is clarified.

### B. STRATEGIC MAPPING AND PLANNING

**Local Partners:** FMS, ICCD

High levels of uncertainty about the future have propelled French Jewish leaders into an urgent state of planning. JDC proposes to bolster the community's research capacity by providing robust data and projections that will enable superior trend-monitoring, clarity regarding the investment of community resources, and strategic long-term planning. Guided by the JDC supported International Center for Community Development (ICCD), the local leadership will acquire critical information on the evolving and pressing needs of the community, while benefiting from high-level training opportunities. Focus groups and other educational and research based frameworks, will allow the local community, in partnership with JDC, to be more planful and strategic in its long-term community development.

## IV - PROGRAM FOR STRUGGLING FRENCH IMMIGRANTS IN ISRAEL

### A. EASING THE TRANSITION FOR DISADVANTAGED FRENCH IMMIGRANTS

**Local Partners in Israel:** Government ministries, Centers for Young Adults, local municipalities and agencies

While the majority of French Jews prefer to remain in France, a growing number are choosing to move to Israel. At the end of 2014, a record 7,000 French Jews had made Aliyah, and that number is expected to grow significantly in 2015. As with all other waves of immigration, it is essential to ease the absorption of the most vulnerable immigrants. JDC is developing a unique and holistic solution for vulnerable French immigrants through its Centers for Young Adults (CYA). JDC's 45 CYAs across the country empower thousands of young adults annually by providing a range of counseling and orientation services. More specifically, this new initiative, geared at easing the immigration process of French Jews who are struggling to integrate, will offer, with the help of both native and French-Israeli volunteers, guidance on higher education and vocational training, job readiness skills and job placement services, information on rights and benefits, and social involvement and volunteer projects.

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<sup>4</sup> REBONDS (translated as 'Rebound' in English) is a community initiative that will support families who suffer from poverty and anti-Semitism and help them relocate from high-risk and unsafe neighborhoods.



## SUMMARY OUTLINE

FEBRUARY 2015

PROGRAM	IMPACT HORIZON
<b>I- IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE</b>	
A. Meeting psycho-social needs	Immediate
<b>II- ENSURING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE</b>	
A. Scholarships and financial assistance for Jewish students at Risk	Immediate to mid-term (1-9 months)
B. Training French leaders in community preparedness and crisis management	Immediate to long-term (1-12 months)
C. Promoting coexistence to ensure safety	Mid to Long term (6-12months)
<b>III- COMMUNITY PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE</b>	
A. Planning for safer homes and relocation of communities at risk	Mid to Long term (3-12months) Long-term (1-5 years)
B. Strategic mapping and planning	Long term (12 months)
<b>IV – PROGRAM FOR STRUGGLING FRENCH IMMIGRANTS IN ISRAEL</b>	
A. Easing the transition for disadvantaged French immigrants	Immediate to long-term (3-36 months)

