

Email from Cindy Greenberg, CEO of Repair the World, to the Foundation and other funders following Repair's Israel Summit.

April 10, 2025

Friends,

I recently returned from our JSA Israel Service Seminar and the Service Matters: Israel Summit which we organized with your support, and in partnership with Yahel. I am so grateful for your investment in this work and would like to share some reflections on what I learned and where I see opportunities to strengthen and expand our work moving forward.

Service is a powerful way to connect American Jews and Israelis. Our delegation of Repair the World staff, board members, and Jewish Service Alliance (JSA) leadership (representing AEPi, One Table, Mem Global, JCC Association, Hillel, JDC Entwine, Tikkun Hayam, Honeymoon Israel, One Table, and OLAM) served with our hearts and hands this week. With my own hands, I painted a mural at a center for at-risk families, drilled together furniture for a senior center, packaged huge Passover baskets for families in need, used a hoe to clear weeds from a therapeutic farm for veterans with PTSD, and more. All of this service was done alongside incredibly inspiring Israeli changemakers who cracked open our hearts and taught us the meaning of resilience. I can think of no more powerful way to strengthen the ties between American Jews and Israelis than through service and learning. Service shifts the conversation from “What is your position on Israel?” to “What are you doing to make a difference?” It invites volunteers to live their values and actively shape the Jewish future. It transforms the narrative from “Jews vs Arabs” to “Jews and Arabs making change together.” Service in Israel resonates deeply, even for Jews who struggle with their relationship to Israel. And it builds lifelong friendships.

Volunteers can make a meaningful contribution to strengthening Israel. Whether it’s addressing pressing issues created by or exacerbated by the war, there’s so much work to be done. At [Service Matters: Israel Summit](#), experts shared what is needed around recovery in the North, in the South, in the Arab sector, in agriculture, and more. The needs are daunting.

Partnership is critical. Our JSA seminar included one-time volunteering at around a dozen small grassroots non-profit organizations. While each service experience was a “one-off” for us, they are all long-term, trusted partners of Yahel. Yahel tracks these organizations’ evolving needs over time and directs volunteers to meet those needs. It also enriched our experiences by allowing us to meet with changemakers and leaders who deeply value the lasting impact of volunteers’ long-term commitment to their work. On the subject of partnership, Yahel is the ideal collaborator to Repair the World. Our shared values, deep trust, and their exceptional professionalism and impact leave me truly in awe.

Service can build resilience. While Jewish service in the US often focuses on deepening Jewish connections for volunteers, meeting pressing needs, and building bridges with our neighbors, in Israel, service is viewed primarily as a tool for resilience. In the incredible surge in volunteering following 10/7, we heard countless stories of Israelis stepping up to make things better, especially when the government couldn't). At SAHI, Avraham Hayon shared the incredible wisdom that "the best thing you can do for someone who needs help is to give them the opportunity to help someone else." He shared a story about a 12-year-old returned hostage who initiated a volunteer project, with her mom saying it's the only thing truly helping her. We also heard from a Nova survivor who shared how much more resilient he became once he took responsibility for another survivor fleeing Hamas. The best way to help someone is to give them the opportunity to help others.

The learning that accompanies service matters. We engaged in meaningful text study on issues that directly tied to our service like resilience, making sense of suffering, exile, and humility. We also explored the context of our service - issues like poverty, immigration, the Bedouin community, and hunger- where quality learning enhanced the experience. I highlight this because I believe Repair the World can contribute significantly to the broader movement of international volunteers in Israel, where service often lacks integration with meaningful learning.

Israeli changemakers can inspire us and teach us. We met extraordinary Israelis committed to building a better future for their country. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously stated, "What we need more than anything else is not textbooks but text people." Israeli changemakers are exactly who our young Jews in America should meet - Israelis who share a deep commitment to service, social change, and caring for others. The Israeli service field is rich with innovation, and there's so much we can learn from one another. Our service in Israel should always be alongside Israelis, and we should also bring them to the US to shape our Jewish service movement. There are powerful connections to be made in this moment when we so desperately need each other.

We can build a movement, but we need to think bigger than any one organization. At the first [Service Matters: Israel Summit](#), we convened over 140 leaders working with international volunteers in Israel. If we transition from individual players and organizations to a unified field, we can strengthen our efforts and build a movement. Our goal should be to send tens of thousands of American Jewish volunteers to serve in Israel. To make the biggest impact, we must collaborate both on recruitment/marketing and on operationalizing the service in Israel. The "field" needs investment and stronger infrastructure. Yahel's regional hub model has been highly effective, matching organizations with volunteers for service projects in several geographic areas. This model

coordinates volunteering efforts across various organizations, enabling organizations and tour operators who are not experts in service to deliver high-quality service experiences. It ensures service projects are grounded in partnership and listening, while alleviating the burden on small non-profits to manage volunteers. This model should be expanded, including adding a hub in Jerusalem, and there should be more convenings for the broader field to align, share best practices, and support one another.

As for the eternal dilemma - long-term vs. short-term volunteering, Israel would benefit greatly from more long-term and skilled volunteers. Many of the substantive issues Israel faces require long-term volunteers, especially in historically disadvantaged communities, where deep, sustained responsible work is necessary through long-term commitment, like through the Yahel fellowship. Skilled volunteers can also make a significant impact in areas like construction, trauma care, etc.

We should be sending Jewish professionals to serve in Israel. For many of our JSA seminar participants, it was their first time back since 10/7, and for some, it had been a decade or more. I hadn't anticipated how meaningful it would be for them to have a structured framework to return. Many thanked me for giving them the opportunity to come, and some shared they had been hesitant or scared to visit, but having this seminar as a framework made them commit. They loved being together in Israel and contributing, and I know they will carry that renewed commitment to Israel back into their work. What would it take to ensure all Jewish educators and engagement professionals across the Jewish ecosystem have a meaningful post-10/7 Israel service experience?

The JSA partners, aka the Jewish engagement field, are eager for more collaboration, not just around service. It was such a joy to spend the week serving with our JSA partners, deepening connections, and discussing everything from pluralism to fundraising to engaging participants with Israel to measuring impact. The work of the JSA will be strengthened by having invested in these relationships. There's also a strong interest in connecting our teams more broadly. I came to understand that the JSA is the deepest and broadest coalition of Jewish engagement organizations working on a range of issues, not just service, and there is appetite for more collaboration, especially among senior staff who are not CEOs.

Let's ignite a powerful movement of American Jewish volunteers serving in Israel.

There is an incredible surge of energy, an expanding array of opportunities to meet pressing needs, and with greater coordination and investment, we can strengthen Israel while building profound, enduring connections between American Jews and Israelis. Our next steps include:

- Convening a new task force after Passover in partnership with the Israel Educational Travel Alliance (IETA), Yahel, and Birthright. The goal of this taskforce is to map opportunities and roadblocks together and to chart our collective course moving forward in order to expand and deepen the field.
- Continuing to deepen and expand our growing partnerships with Yahel, Birthright, RootOne, and Honeymoon Israel. This will include continued training of educators and tour companies, creating additional opportunities to build capacity in the field, develop Israel relevant curriculum, engaging alumni in service once they are back in the US, and more.
- Engaging JSA seminar participants on the incredible ideas they shared at our final session - ideas like collaboration around recruitment, infusing more service into existing Israel programs, and aligning on key principles to guide our service efforts.

Thank you to everyone who helped make this trip a reality, especially my colleagues Celia Livshin, Rabbi Adir Yolkut, and Shana Bloom, Dana Talmi from Yahel, our board members Jonathan Arogeti and Rabbi Deborah Waxman, our JSA seminar participants. I'd also like to thank the funders who have generously invested in the JSA and our Israel service strategy - **Crown Family Philanthropies; the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation; the Jim Joseph Foundation; Maimonides Fund; One8 Foundation; and Schusterman Family Philanthropies.**

Thanks for taking the time to read my reflections. I welcome your thoughts, reactions, and ideas. I'm grateful to be in this work with you.

Wishing you a very happy Passover.

In partnership,

Cindy

P.S. You can see photos on my LinkedIn page [here](#).