

# Health as peacebuilding: Northampton-based Healing Across the Divides funds, advises Palestinian and Israeli communities on health



A truck carrying humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip crosses the Rafah border gate in Rafah, Egypt, Sunday, Oct. 22. AP

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By **MADDIE FABIAN**

Staff Writer

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**NORTHAMPTON** — Tova Reznicek, an Israeli-American living in Israel, has spent the last three weeks worried that a rocket will fall on her neighbors, friends, colleagues and herself.

Her street has already been bombed, and on a morning call with the Gazette one day last week, she said it had been around 10 hours since a rocket had last fallen.

“We’re kind of waiting for that to happen,” she said, adding, “I’m jittery.... We all here know that for any of us to live peacefully and safely, our neighbors need to live peacefully and safely.”

Reznicek is the communications director for Healing Across the Divides (HATD), a Northampton-based organization that works to improve the health of both Israelis and Palestinians through grant funding and technical assistance to local community groups in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.

The organization works with around 10 grantees at a time, which are awarded three-year grants to provide health services

Over its nearly 20 years of existence, HATD has measurably improved the health of over 250,000 people, according to Norbert Goldfield, the Northampton resident who is the founder and executive director of the organization.

“Our dream is to improve [the groups’] effectiveness, and hopefully some of the leaders of these groups, who are amazing, will be tomorrow’s political leaders,” said Goldfield.

“I wish I was one of the 10 or 15 people who could help make peace from the top down, but I’m not, so what I do is work from the bottom up,” he said. “What I know is communities, and what I know is health is a very interesting and important way to do peacebuilding.”

He added that “health is political without ever using the word politics.”

Goldfield and one staff member are based in Northampton, and they handle HATD’s administrative work. Meanwhile, the organization has three staff members based in Israel and Palestine who work with the grantees.

Since the Hamas attack in southern Israel on Oct. 7, Israeli airstrikes have killed over 8,000 Palestinians, the Gaza Health Ministry said Sunday night. More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed, mostly civilians during the initial Hamas rampage.

Immediately as the conflict began, said the HATD team, grantees got to work on emergency aid and resiliency work.

That work is focused on things like mental health issues, prenatal care, nutrition, and basic emergency services.

In West Jerusalem, the organization is funding a largely Jewish group that works with Palestinian women usually focused on reproductive rights.

The group’s typical work has taken a backseat as they work to provide emergency services. Goldfield referenced an Associated Press article that reported 50,000

pregnant women in Gaza do not have access to essential health care services, while around 5,500 are due to give birth in the next month.

“What’s going to happen to those babies? What’s going to happen to those mothers?” Goldfield posed the question. “Where are we living that we can’t get the appropriate services to people?”

Another group, in the West Bank, that the organization funded in the past works to get insulin to Type 1 diabetics; Goldfield said the group sent an emergency appeal, and Healing Across the Divides is now trying to help financially.

“There is a lot of unity inside of organizations between Jews and Arabs, and they don’t reflect it on the media because it doesn’t serve a political narrative,” Veronica Vigdorichik, a program specialist for HATD based in Israel, said. “But on the ground, most everyone is helping each other.”

In a region steeped in over 75 years of complicated history, Reznicek said the international community has a role to play.

The United States in particular, she said, has provided “decades and decades of unconditional aid... that has not been coupled with a parallel diplomatic track to actually help us work things out.”

As a result, she said it “has essentially quashed left voices on both sides and empowered extremists to the detriment of us all.”

“We’re all people, and we can’t do this without one another,” said Reznicek. “We really need the international community to stop tipping the scales towards extremists, which is exactly what is happening all around us right now.”

Vigdorichik added, “We can solve this... But the energy between the two sides is so heated that it’s hard for us to stop it... Somebody needs to be a responsible adult when maybe two parties are not in the possibility to be there.”

For the part of HATD, health continues to act as a “peacebuilding tool,” as Goldfield puts it.

The board is made up of Arab-Americans, Jewish-Americans and other Americans in the Northampton area and across the U.S, and individual donations make up most of the funding.

Right now, in addition to continuing work with grantees, the organization is leading an emergency campaign raising funds for emergency services like the initiatives it already supports.

*Reporting from the Associated Press was used in this article. Maddie Fabian can be reached at [mfabian@gazettenet.com](mailto:mfabian@gazettenet.com)*