

Lifegate in May 2024

There was little sign of the merry month of May in the country. The war in the south and north of Israel became even more intense, and with it the number of victims, the damage to buildings and infrastructure and the hope of a ceasefire, negotiations and a life in peace in the future. There are still 130 people from Israel who are being held hostage somewhere in Gaza since October 7, and it is feared that most of them will not live. Two Hamas brigades (estimated 20,000 armed fighters) are in Rafiah among the civilian population. Most of Hamas' supply tunnels to the Egyptian side are also in Rafiah, which is right on the Egyptian border. We hope and pray that innocent people can be protected and that the suffering, hardship and despair will come to an end. We are grateful that our Lifegate work can take place in peace every day and that we can offer the children, their parents and our team a place of joy, care, development and hope. Lifegate is a sheltered island in the midst of a storm and we feel God's blessing and protection every day.



Of course, it is not easy to replace the local income, which has been missing for 8 months and has shrunk to 50%. We kindly ask our supporters to bear this in mind. A lot of good things also happened at Lifegate in May. Here is a small insight:

An invitation to the USA.

The American organization Joni and Friends invited all leaders from many countries around the world to an annual conference and meeting at its center in Los Angeles and a visit to Chicago. Lifegate has been the official representative of Joni and Friends for the Middle East and North Africa since 2023. An interesting week with many lectures and contributions, exchange with colleagues from India, China, Serbia, Uganda, Ukraine, Peru, El Salvador, Brazil, Philippines and of course the USA. A meeting with Joni Erikson Tada and her husband was one of the many highlights of this important meeting, where the next year's activities in our region were also discussed. The work of Lifegate is attractive as a model for many of our neighboring countries and fits well with Joni and Friends' concept of providing people with disabilities with assistive devices, empowering and encouraging parents and children with disabilities, and recruiting, training and encouraging pastors and church members to work with people with disabilities. The practical help in both organizations is based on Christian charity and includes the joyful message of the Gospel in the daily work. A team of young therapists in Lifegate is learning to take on responsibility in this area of work and we hope to be able to bring a piece of "Lifegate experience" to Armenia in June.



Joni Erikson Tada and Burghard



The Joni and Friends team from around the world

A trip to a local school

The Talithakumi School in Beit Jala is a German school abroad run by the Berlin Missionary Society. In 1851, Theodor Fliedner and four Kaiserswerth sisters founded a children's home in Jerusalem, which was later joined by the school, which closed its doors in Jerusalem in 1939 and reopened in Beit Jala in 1961. For years, Lifegate has had a friendly and professional relationship with this Christian school, which takes its name from the story in the New Testament where Jesus raises the sleeping daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, from death: "Tali takumi (Hebrew) = Tali get up" Mark 5:4.

The "Hotel Management" training department of this school also invited Lifegate to an introductory day, which our kitchen team (pictured) gladly accepted.



The Lifegate Kitchens "trainee" team in Talithakumi

For years now, every Friday afternoon, Lifegate has been allowed to use this school's gym for our wheelchair basketball team for training purposes free of charge. Sometimes our games with Israeli teams also take place in this gym. We cooperate with the school on environmental projects and the German teachers abroad enjoy a taste of home with the Lifegate sourdough bread every week. The German head teachers have always been very involved in Lifegate's work and inclusion activities with Lifegate children can take place in the kindergarten and school. Last but not least, the geographical location of this school (Palestinian Area C) allows Palestinians and Israelis to meet officially and legally (without special permits). For example, Lifegate was able to hold a training course in music therapy with Israeli and Palestinian therapists on the school's premises years ago. In May, another friend of our work, Director Mathias Wolf, will pass on the management of this school and we thank him for the good encounters, the open doors and hearts, and the solidarity in the Christian faith. We wish him a blessed new chapter in his life and a good start back in Germany.



Wheelchair basketball training at Talithakumi School

A second group of visitors at Lifegate

Even during the Corona years, we were very much among ourselves in Lifegate and it has become quiet throughout the country. Since October 7, 2023, some courageous people have been coming to express their solidarity even in difficult times, others want to get a personal impression of this country at war. We are delighted that our friends from SK Tours in the Nature also included Lifegate in the program for the second "peace trip" (at the participants' own responsibility) and that we were able to present our work to 20 people from the USA. The first SK group came from Germany in April and many friends of Lifegate were there as participants.



Visitors from the USA at Lifegate



At Lifegate Garden, we are also pleased to welcome a few individual guests who enjoy our blooming garden, the peaceful atmosphere and the good service.



individual guests from France and the USA in Lifegate Garden

It's the most beautiful time of the year and a bit of a shame that more people can't take advantage of this oasis. The reopening of Terminal 1 at Ben Gurion Airport will help to ensure that charter flights to Israel are operating again, which may bring more guests to the country. We now want to cultivate a piece of land on the large monastery grounds and plant a vegetable garden with what are now four trainees.



The vegetable garden is to be created here - Our "trainees" cleaning windows and gardening

A visit to the city administration (the Greek Orthodox Church of Beit Jala)

At our request, the municipality of Beit Jala was prepared to invite young people from our training workshop and introduce them to the many different tasks that arise for our small town. It was especially nice that Mayor Quassis personally took time for the Lifegate visitors and spoke about his work and challenges. We took advantage of this wonderful occasion to bring freshly baked Lifegate wholemeal bread to all employees of the city council and hope to win new customers. An ugly, always overcrowded garbage container not far from us on the main road should finally be banned from our area and a garbage truck should empty the Lifegate garbage cans every day instead. If this is implemented, the visit will have been even more worthwhile. Our young people now know how the city administration works and which offices are responsible for the various concerns of the population.



With the mayor Mr. Quassis in the city administration



Visit to the Greek Orthodox Church in Beit Jala

...and at the Institute for Biological Cultivation and Natural History in Bethlehem

Two support groups from Lifegate School learned how to plant native herbs and spices in plant beds with organic fertilizer. Native plants and preserved animals are exhibited in a small museum and provide an insight into the nature that surrounds us. An interesting visit and an incentive to carry out planting activities at school.



Lifegate special school children visit the Bethlehem Natural History Museum

Baking and cooking

After the first project to help impoverished people with food came to an end after three months in March 2024, we succeeded in receiving further support. Since the second week of May, we have been baking 50 wholemeal breads and cooking 25 meals a day to feed people in need. We are very grateful that Lifegate Bakery and Kitchen is able to provide this assistance during these times. This project will also provide people with basic food for three calendar months.





Underground shelter (with storage rooms) makes good progress

Construction work on the rear of our building is progressing well. The shell of the underground rooms has now been completed and the finishing work has begun. We are pleased that the sports field for wheelchair basketball and other sports can soon be built and this project should be completed in the summer. Only the planned elevator has been delayed due to long delivery times, but can then be installed at a later date.



The ceiling of the shelter is concreted

A new service offered by Lifegate

With Dima Awwad, we were able to win over a young, motivated dietician to set up her consultation hours with us. Many of our children, as well as parents and participants in the women's gymnastics groups, are happy to take advantage of this consultation and appointments are already filling up quickly. The equipment for this new service ("Inbody" device), which also generates a small income for Lifegate, was financed by two organizations. We are looking forward to a "slim summer".



From the therapy department or the "best at the end"

Parents who register their children with Lifegate have often experienced a lot of rejection and pity because of their child's disability. Others have seen many doctors with their child, invested time and money and unfortunately have often seen little or no progress. It is not uncommon for parents to expect us to perform miracles in a short space of time. The child should speak, stand, walk, become independent, "we want a "normal" child" - they let us know this either veiled or directly. Sometimes it's painful to have parents criticize when we can't "deliver immediate success" either and a long, rocky road of rehabilitation lies ahead of us. It makes us all the happier when a "miracle" happens and the hard, persistent work, e.g. in physiotherapy, has enabled a child to take a big step forward in their development.



Osaid is 4 years old and has been at Lifegate since September 2023. He receives weekly speech, physio, ergo and hydrotherapy. Daily physiotherapy to build up his muscles combined with Botox treatment to reduce the spasm led to Osaid taking his first free, independent steps in May. He is starting to speak and communicate with other children using language, he is naming some animals and has mastered numbers up to 10. He still needs an orthosis (leg brace for support) on one foot, but we are now working on stability when walking. Osaid is "upright" and so are his parents and us, we are delighted and thank our team!

Not to deprive people of hope in difficult times, but to assess the situation realistically, to be happy about even small developmental steps and to motivate them to cooperate again and again is a gift that we need in many parent-teacher conferences.

We would like to thank all our friends from the bottom of our hearts for all their prayers, their solidarity and support. It is good and important not to be alone in these times. We are confidently entering a new month and send our warmest greetings from Burghard Schunkert and the Lifegate team