

Lifegate in February 2026

We are pleased to have had a calm and peaceful February at our facility. The situation surrounding Iran continues to keep our countries on edge, but we know that whatever happens, we can rest assured in God's hands.

“Learning” is not just about colors or numbers (early childhood education)

Teaching life skills and social behavior through play is effective and meaningful. Our children discover the world and practice everyday situations in a safe and supportive environment. They actively participate and develop self-confidence. Through role-playing, our children practice shopping and handling money. Our educators set up a small shop; one child becomes the shopkeeper, another the customer. They talk to each other, choose an item, and pay for it. Afterward, everyone participates in a game where something is shared. Later, we will repeat this "learning game" in a local shop.



„Learning for life through
play”

Lifegate Early Intervention
Program

Successful integration through our special needs school

Integrating children with special needs into the mainstream education system is a goal we at Lifegate have been pursuing for several years, even if comparisons with mainstream schools aren't always positive. Mainstream schools typically have 35-40 children, one teacher, and predominantly frontal, verbal instruction. Children rely heavily on rote learning, there's little group work, and almost no time to give individual attention to children who are slower or have learning difficulties. At Lifegate, we have up to 15 children in a support class, two staff members (a teacher and a therapist), support from other therapists, individual attention for each child, and learning and time plans tailored to each child's needs.

Since 2019, we have been working with a local university to enroll our children in mainstream schools, at least on a day-to-day basis, giving them a real opportunity. Fourth-year students (special education) accompany our children to mainstream schools one day a week. This initiative has led to some Lifegate children securing places in mainstream schools, thanks to the patience of everyone involved, excellent collaboration, and a belief in the potential of each individual child.

This year we are delighted that little Farah, who has Down syndrome, was able to secure a full school place through our program. She is now attending first grade at the Evangelical Lutheran school in Beit Sahour. She went to school with joy and enthusiasm from the first day, quickly learned to integrate, already has some friends and she engages in and enjoys the lessons.

Farah's cheerful smile shows us that inclusive education is so much more than just an open classroom. Farah received recognition, developed self-confidence, made friends, and has hope for the future.



A student is working with Farah in the regular school class.

Our severely and multiply disabled children

In 2020, we opened this new branch at Lifegate for children with severe multiple disabilities. We are delighted with the children's positive progress. The parents (primarily the mothers) are very grateful for the excellent care provided at Lifegate, which gives them respite during the morning hours, and are increasingly willing to engage with our team for their children. Mothers regularly accompany their children to our activities and enjoy exchanging experiences at parent meetings.

It is often the mothers who need our encouragement and support because, in addition to caring for their child with a disability, they also look after their other children, manage the household, and often hold down a job that contributes to the family income. At Lifegate, we give mothers time and attention, encouragement and trust. This fosters a sense of joy and confidence that they can then share at home. In an initial meeting with all the mothers, we were able to encourage them to talk to each other and become open to contributing.

Each mother volunteered to lead an activity with all the children and our team in the support group to improve communication and build positive relationships. All mothers are invited twice a year to a special mothers' program within this branch of our work, which our team designs together with them. We aim to foster community and exchange among the women. Furthermore, each child is regularly discussed by our team and therapists, progress is noted, and further support measures are initiated. Mothers are invited to these meetings. Weekly programs for mothers, a gymnastics group, themed groups, outings, and open discussions offer women numerous opportunities to have positive experiences in a safe environment, and these opportunities are well-received.

We invite the fathers to a Father's Breakfast. Here, "love" truly goes through the stomach, but luckily Lifegate has a good kitchen and bakery!



Mothers and children work together

First harvest in Lifegate Garden and news from our workshops

We are delighted to have harvested the first spring onions and leafy greens from our plot of land in Lifegate Garden. All the hard work and effort has paid off, and the Lifegate kitchen is now beginning to use its own produce. Another plot of land has been plowed, and a hose irrigation system is being installed, so we can have vegetables, herbs, and fruit available year-round. The land belonging to our guesthouse is now being properly utilized, and young people are learning how to cultivate and care for it alongside our gardener.



...during the lettuce harvest at Lifegate Garden...

The other new training programs also started in a positive atmosphere, and we are grateful for the interest shown by the young people who want to learn these trades. Our hair and beauty salon opened its doors, and olive oil soap production has also begun at Lifegate. The bakery is enjoying a growing customer base, and the mosaic workshop is already creating small works of art with young people, some of whom have severe disabilities.



Lifegate Beauty
Haircut and manicure



For the first time in a long while, we were able to welcome individual guests and even a tour group to Lifegate, who spent time with us, had lunch with us, and even pitched in. It's wonderful when people come by and show interest in the people and the work. Our world, which has become so narrow and limited, is expanding and becoming more vibrant.



German visitors are helping out in the olive wood workshop.

To our great delight, the "Carry Your Light to Bethlehem" campaign, with Abbot Nicolaus Schnabel from the Benedictine Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem, presented us with a donation again this year from this wonderful traditional initiative. Thank you!



We are sewing the bed linen for Beit Noah, the Benedictine guesthouse in Tabgha on the Sea of Galilee.





Mosaic workshop with foreign guests



A welding machine ordered many months ago has finally arrived.



... and we'll test it right away, we're packaging the delicious "Zatar" (thyme) spice.

From the work with Joni and Friends (JAF)

A JAF container with over 200 wheelchairs, walking aids, and supplies has arrived safely at the Israeli port of Ashdod, and we are currently finalizing all the necessary paperwork with the authorities before transporting the equipment to Lifegate. From there, we will be able to provide these aids to many people in need in various locations. Another wheelchair distribution in Egypt is planned for April, as well as an international conference for staff from across the Middle East in Dubai in May. The tense situation in our region may necessitate the postponement of these events. We are in regular Zoom meetings with our colleagues in Turkey and Armenia. Work with people with disabilities is growing in these countries, and we encourage and support our partners, helping them expand and establish JAF's work with and for people with disabilities.



JAF Center in California

"The last day of February"

. . .another Saturday (Shabbat), another festival (Purim—the biblical Book of Esther), which deals with the annihilation of the Jewish people in the Persian Empire. The parallels to October 7, 2023, are not far-fetched.

According to Israeli and American statements, the goal now is to bring down a regime that has for decades "proclaimed the death of Israel and the death of America" and is constantly working towards this goal—a regime that wants to build an atomic bomb and presumably already possesses enough enriched uranium to do so—and to destroy its arsenal. Iran has been building up Israel's enemies—Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Hamas—for years and has used these groups for its indirect war against the Jewish state. After the initial attacks by Israel and the US a few months ago, the Iranian opposition ventured back into the streets, with the result that in recent months, an estimated 25,000 (unarmed) demonstrators have simply been killed by the Iranian Quds Force (Jerusalem Brigades), many in the most gruesome ways.

Will the freedom-loving segment of the Iranian people emerge stronger from this war than the extremely radical and armed Islamists? Will the other previously oppressed ethnic groups (e.g., the Kurds) in Iran now fight for their freedoms (and a state), while Turkey, which has been remarkably calm

until now, simply stands by? Only time will tell; a conflagration has already begun, and the entire world will first feel the effects in oil and gas prices.

We have been facing the prospect of this war for a month now, and we have always held onto the hope that a peaceful solution could still be found. This allowed us to at least prepare ourselves mentally to some extent.

We are monitoring the situation daily and taking the authorities' instructions seriously, implementing them accordingly. Having worked with early childhood education and school settings during the COVID-19 pandemic, our teams are experienced in Zoom-based instruction and can immediately access our existing programs should physical presence at the Lifegate Center become too dangerous. Thankfully, we are likely the only facility in the Palestinian territories with two actual shelters, as we prepared for such scenarios during the building's construction, drawing on our experiences during the Iraq War. These shelters provide protection and security for 300 to 400 people.

We sincerely ask all our friends and supporters to continue praying for us and to remain by our side during these times. We have been blessed and protected by God all these years and are certain that God holds His hand over us and that Lifegate will continue to be a place of hope, love, and peace every day. We would also like to ask you to continue supporting our work financially. It remains very difficult to generate local income, which in the past covered almost 50% of our budget. Many parents have been unable to contribute to their children's expenses for quite some time. We are finding creative ways to help ourselves, which has not become any easier in these challenging times.

Your prayers help ensure that life and work may be successful every day!

Thanks!

With kind and hopeful greetings

Yours sincerely, Burghard Schunkert and the Lifegate Team