

News from our team

After the summer vacation, our speech therapist Yara Atwan left us to do an extended training course abroad. Nadia Ghnaim and Hala Taqatqa joined us as new employees and are responsible for the cleanliness of the LIFEGATE school. Abir Qumsieh is a new teacher at the special school. She and the other teachers are supported in their work by our occupational therapists Hanna Abu Amsha, Miral Handal, Sara Masou, Mariana Shaheen and our occupational therapist Ameer Ghanem. The collaboration between a special school teacher and a therapist in each of the special school groups had already proved successful in two previous groups, so we are very pleased to be able to expand this program. The different talents in the team and the different training of both professions complement each other and are highly beneficial to the support of many children.

Our young volunteers and interns Johannes Flender, Simon Hildebrand, Naomi Metz, Malte Schmidtkunz and Miriam Schoppel as well as our orthopaedic shoemaker Rudolf Schöning had to return to Germany prematurely in mid-October due to the war. Jonas Weinholz (orthopaedic shoemaker) also left us in October and is waiting in Germany for the end of the war before returning to us.

Reflections

by Burghard Schunkert

**"For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples;
But the Lord will rise upon you
And His glory will appear upon you."
Isaiah 60:2 (NASB)**

A darkness has descended upon us. Weeping and desperate people are on all the television channels. We hear stories whose inhumanity are almost beyond description. Every day there are missile and drone attacks and every day people are killed and injured in war. Jewish people all over the world now fear for their existence, for their lives, just because they are Jewish. - Hatred knows no borders. Does this perhaps have something to do with the Creator of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and his Jewish son Jesus Christ (Genesis 19, verses 5 and 6)?

The God of the Bible chose one of the smallest and most despised peoples to fulfill a mission to the world, to bring salvation and blessing to all peoples, to be salt and light in the world. The God of the Bible had Solomon build a temple in Jerusalem. He had his only son born to a Jewish mother in Bethlehem and, with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, made Jerusalem the place where his plan of salvation for our world was irrevocably sealed, once and for all.

The people who already believe in Jesus today have not taken the place of the people of Israel; they have only come to believe in Jesus before the people of Israel. God's plan with His people (which the adversary once again wants to destroy) will be fulfilled and Israel will end up being what it was always meant to be (Romans 11, verses 25 to 32). In Israel, all nations, including the Palestinians, will then be blessed and healed. Oh, if only this could happen here and now! Reconciled people today can bind wounds, reach out hands, build bridges, live and practise forgiveness. Help us! Christmas does not fail, the light shines in and from our hearts.

"But the Lord will rise upon you (people of Israel) and His glory will appear upon you!"

Yours Burghard Schunkert

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As representation and because of financing of the institution "LIFEGATE REHABILITATION", the association "Tor zum Leben - LIFEGATE Rehabilitation" was founded in the year 1993 in Germany with its board in Würzburg.

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"Tor zum Leben - LIFEGATE Rehabilitation" is a member of the Diakonische Werk of the Protestant churches of Germany and Caritas-Verband for the catholic diocese Würzburg. The dedication of LIFEGATE is based on and supported by personal and long-standing relationships with the Young Men's Christian Association, YMCA, national association in Germany, CVJM.



Photo: LIFEGATE

Occupational therapist Marianna Shaheen assists teaching in a class at the LIFEGATE special school

Dear friends!

We have now been at war since October 7, and we are deeply saddened by the suffering of the many people in the Gaza Strip, Israel and the West Bank. We know Palestinians (relatives of employees) and Israelis who have been killed in the war. We are doing what we can, with the means we have, to respond to the violence, and the hardship it has caused, with goodness and to work towards peace.

As in previous years, more than a dozen of our Palestinian youths took part in a camp with the same number of Israeli youths from the Kfar Tikvah facility during the Feast of Tabernacles. The peaceful coexistence of the Kfar Tikvah - LIFEGATE group during the first six days of October at the Sea of Galilee stands in stark contrast to the barbaric terror of the Hamas militiamen, who abused, kidnapped or slaughtered hundreds of women, men, children and infants from Saturday morning onwards because they were Jewish. The resulting Israeli war against Hamas led to an almost unimaginable number of refugees and people who were injured and killed - especially in the Gaza Strip.

We all hear about the violence, fighting, destruction, untold human suffering and mutual hatred between Israelis and Palestinians from the news. But there are also people who want to overcome evil with good. Our contacts with the people of Kfar Tikvah in Israel did not break off; a few days after the terrorist attack, a staff member from Kfar Tikvah called us to find out how the people of LIFEGATE were faring during this difficult time.

We have been receiving orthopaedic aids at a low price from the Israeli facility Yad Sarah for years. One of the Yad Sarah employees asked if we knew of any Palestinian people with disabilities to whom Yad Sarah could give a suitable hoist. Medical staff from the Israeli Alyn Hospital asked about children from LIFEGATE who are unable to come to their hospital for treatment due to the current closure of the Palestinian territories. An Israeli friend continues to supply LIFEGATE with catheters for our young spina bifida patients. These are just a few examples of people who encourage and support us. We hope for the same peace between the people in the Palestinian territories and in Israel, that the young people of Kfar Tikvah and LIFEGATE were able to experience during their meeting before October 7th.

In mid-November, the Palestinian municipality of Bethlehem canceled all traditional Christmas celebrations, decorations and lights. Instead of Christmas celebrations, mass rallies are to be held "to mourn and honor" the Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip. We, too, are not in the mood for joyful, exuberant celebrations. But the hope in Jesus Christ, the light of the world, redemption through him and the possibility of mutual forgiveness through Him are unique. He alone is our hope in a world that has become darker. We celebrate this in our hearts, not just at Christmas, but every day of our lives.

Two boys who are making great strides in their development: Imad in the group of severely disabled and multiply disabled children and Omar in our kindergarten

In September, two-and-a-half-year-old Imad joined our group of children with multiple disabilities. Imad is growing up with his grandmother as his parents are divorced. Due to damage to his brain, Imad has problems eating and swallowing food. Before Imad came to LIFEGATE, he spent almost all his time lying in bed, on the sofa or on the floor. With us he learned to sit in a wheelchair, so that he now uses one wheelchair at home and one at our facility. Imad is also learning to stand in a standing frame, which he is already able to do for an hour a day. Our speech and occupational therapists are working with Imad to improve his food intake and swallowing. Hydrotherapy and physiotherapy are used to promote his bodily functions and build up his muscles. Imad initially learned to roll on a mattress and reach toys. His eye-hand control is improving and Imad now responds to sounds and speech. Imad has begun a long journey into a new future. Above and beyond the professional support and care, it is the attention and love that children - like Imad - receive at LIFEGATE that in more than one sense "lifts up" these children!

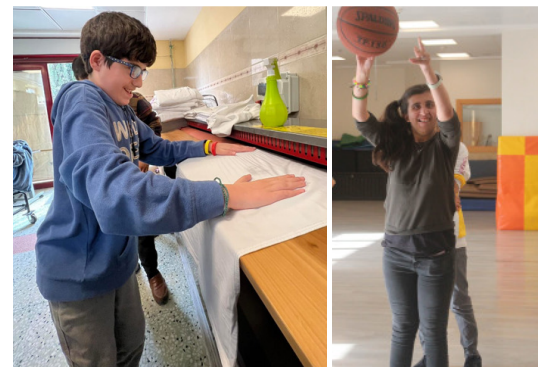
Omar, a five-year-old autistic boy, has been at our special needs kindergarten for a year now. Initially, he took no notice of us and lived entirely in his own world. In the first few weeks, we cautiously made contact with him. Omar only looked at our therapists briefly at first, but the eye contact became longer and more intense every day. Omar then responded to his name, turned his head, began to understand cues and learned some rules when playing. Through being involved in many activities, the boy learned a lot more, including how to move more safely in traffic. Omar enjoys hydrotherapy in the water, which helps him to discover his body, and he can now almost swim on his own. In therapy with another child, both children learn to communicate with each other and share the therapists' attention.



Two-and-a-half-year-old Imad is new to our group of children with severe and multiple disabilities; five-year-old Omar is learning to play with finger paints in kindergarten.

Omar can memorize two expected sequences that we pronounce. He can now recognize and name colors and names fruits, vegetables and objects. Our speech therapists still use illustrated cards to help him communicate, but Omar already speaks short "two-word sentences". He knows the letters, reads short words and is beginning to deal with numbers. Gradually, Omar is moving more and more into "our" world. We are very happy about this wonderful development.

Ramez, a new trainee, and a new sports program for all trainees



Ramez began his training in the laundry; Nadeen enjoys the weekly sports program in which she participates together with our therapists and other trainees.

It has been thirteen years since, Ramez, who was three years old at the time, came to the LIFEGATE special kindergarten. The little boy's diagnosis was severe: cerebral palsy (early childhood brain damage), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and epilepsy. Ramez wanted to live and our Creator gave him a great deal of energy, the strength to face life and a love for people. I remember the many challenges in the development of this boy that our team had to overcome over the years. Sometimes we even wanted to give up, because for a while we couldn't get the parents to work with us. Today, we are glad that we kept seeing the small signs of encouragement and stayed patient with them. The parents are very grateful to us today. Ramez came to the LIFEGATE special school after our kindergarten and, after finishing school this summer, started an apprenticeship in our laundry. Here he is already able to operate the ironing machine and washing machines on his own. A young child with severe limitations has become a happy and independent teenager. Ramez is an example of how patience, love and professional care can improve a person's life and lead to independence.

After the summer vacation, we started having our young people meet once a week for sports activities. Basketball, soccer, table tennis and various group games promote community among the teenagers and young adults and strengthen their physical capabilities. Our physiotherapists lead this program, which is a lot of fun for everyone involved.

Help for people in need as a result of the war

There are many reports in the media about the suffering caused by the fighting of the Israeli armed forces against Hamas, Hezbollah and other terrorist militias. The reports usually focus on the dire situation of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. In addition to the direct terrible suffering in the Gaza Strip and in the south and north of Israel, the war started by the Hamas attack on October 7 has also indirectly led to hardship beyond the combat zones. Many Palestinians have lost their jobs in Israel. As tourism has come to a complete standstill here, the many employees in the tourism industry, which is important for Bethlehem and the surrounding area, are unemployed. Our team alone has more than forty immediate family members who are affected. There are no aid programs from the Palestinian Authority and some families lack the money to buy even the essentials. In southern Israel and in the border region with Lebanon, over 200,000 people have been evacuated from their villages, some of which have been destroyed or are under threat of attack. Many of them were only able to pack one bag each and left everything else behind.

With the help of a German organization, which in turn receives support from the USA, we started a "first emergency aid" project. In this project, with the help of people with disabilities, we are able to bake seventy loaves of bread a day in the LIFEGATE bakery and prepare fifty meals in our kitchen, which we distribute to people in need according to the "meals on wheels" principle. We also distribute food vouchers to people in need and help them buy clothes (second-hand clothes and shopping vouchers). We would also like to provide help through two LIFEGATE team members who came to us from Gaza years ago and are still in contact with Christian families in the Gaza Strip. We hope to start as soon as the fighting has been over long enough for there to be safe transportation routes. All we can do at the moment is "patch up" the wounds and continue to live and practice reconciliation.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the many people who have shown us signs of charity and solidarity in various ways during these difficult times. We have learned more than ever that we have friends behind us who support us through prayer and action. Some of them started campaigns for LIFEGATE at schools, in church congregations, in private circles of friends and thus help us to make up for our loss of local income (in our guest house, in the laundry service for hotels etc.) - thank you very much for this! We sincerely ask you to continue to support us - we want to do everything we can to provide the people entrusted to us with stability (which also includes financial stability).

Your help counts ...!

Thanks to your help we were able to ...

- ...finance the work area with severely and multiply handicapped children (€ 20,000 half-yearly);
- ...offer children and young people good medical and therapeutic care (€ 20,000 per month);
- ...start designing the adventure landscape with the walls to the neighboring property (€ 25,000).

With your help, we'd like to...

- ...to purchase therapy and learning games for early intervention and the special school (€ 10,000);
- ...finance the energy costs for the LIFEGATE building for half a year (€20,000);
- ...to finance support work in the medical and therapeutic field in the first three months of the new year (€ 50,000).

These concerns make up a certain part of our monthly costs, which are in total about 80,000.- €. They are the most urgent of our concerns and we'd be especially grateful for your support.

Thank you very much for your support!