



Michal's Story

Michal is a teacher at a WIZO day care center in Sderot. Here is her story:

Michal Ohayon grew up in Sderot until the age of 13, left the city to go to boarding school but eventually returned as an adult to the only place she considers home.



“Sderot is a calm, quiet place... except for the rockets you know. The pace is slower, people are nicer, I love it there. And in the last few years it's been developing. There's no place else I wanted to live.”

Michal is an early childhood teacher at one of the three WIZO day care centers in Sderot. She cares for the 2- to 3- year olds. All three centers are completely secure from missiles – the entire building is reinforced as a bomb shelter.

“I was always terrified of what could happen when the children are out playing in the yard – that fear is always in the back of your mind when you live in Sderot. It's not easy for the kids, it's not easy for us.”

But the fear of missiles, although very real and terrifying, is a fear that the residents of Sderot, merely one mile from Gaza, have somehow learned to live with. Nothing prepared them for that Saturday morning, where the first images tearing through social media channels were those of masked terrorists with RPGs on the back of a white pickup truck driving through the streets of Sderot. The chilling sight was Israel's first indication that something horrific was unfolding.

In those early morning hours, Michal did what she always does when there's an attack: she fled immediately to her children's house in Tel Aviv.

“I was trembling with fear, but I got in the car and drove as fast as I could.”

Michal has been living in a hotel in Eilat since October. The entire city of Sderot, with nearly 30,000 residents, has been evacuated.

“I have no work, no home, no community. I have nothing. Our community has been scattered to different hotels, different cities. We left without any of our things – no clothes, no personal belongings. This isn't a life. We're all just holding our breath, waiting for life to resume.”



The residents of Sderot, like everyone who used to live in the south of Israel, have mixed feelings about returning home. Some families with young children can no longer imagine a safe, secure childhood for them within such close proximity to Gaza. Others, like Michal, are fiercely determined to return and rebuild – physically and emotionally.

“I’m ready to go back home. I will not let them win.”

But she admits that in order to go back, she and her coworkers at the WIZO day care center, and of course, the children and their families, will need significant support.

“What we need is ongoing emotional support – counseling, therapy, professionals who will accompany us in processing what happened and how we move forward. We’re all still traumatized. The anxiety, the fear – it’s all still there.”

And they need many other resources as well to help rebuild their broken lives.

Michal remains hopeful that the future of Sderot, and the future of Israel, will be peaceful and quiet. She knows it’s a long road, but she’s ready and willing to take those first steps back.

Back to Sderot.