

## **Nature Heals Eco-Therapy Update:** **Reflecting on 18 Months Providing Vital Mental Health Support to Israelis in Need**

*"The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel may not seem the most obvious source of help right now, but they gave us exactly what we needed."*

Sarit, mother of a Nature Heals' teen participant



Teens from the Druze community of Majdal Shams embarking on a Resilience Journey

### **INTRODUCTION:**

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Thank you for your generous support, which was vital in launching and establishing SPNI's Nature Heals Eco-Therapy program. Since October 7, over 110,000 Israelis have gained respite and relief through this program. Because of you, Israelis from all ages and backgrounds across the country received emergency shelter, emotional relief and vital respite.

*"My son refused to leave the hotel room for three months and stopped communicating with his friends. Your program was the first time he stepped outside the hotel and saw his friends since we left home on October 7. Since he returned, I can see a little of his old self again and also know that he is in touch with his friends again."*

A mother from Kibbutz Tze'elim

Our Nature Heals Eco-Therapy program received recognition in Israel's broadcast and print media and praise from national leaders, regional decision-makers, medical professionals, and those who took part. One special highlight was from Israel's President Isaac Herzog, who presented the President's Award of Excellence to Linoy Tayho, an SPNI National Service Volunteer and Nature Heals guide, for her contribution to Nature Heals.

Linoy and her family at the award ceremony for the President's Award of Excellence



*"People don't know that nature is a medicine. We showed youth that there is still a world outside, a country to fight for and that they should not give up. Even though their homes have been destroyed, we are here to support them and won't let this pain break them."*

Linoy Tayho, SPNI National Service Volunteer and Nature Heal's Guide

Following experts' advice, we envisioned that our eco-therapy programs would be delivered in three phases, according to the public's Nature Heals program and society's changing needs.

These phases are:

- Respite: activities focused on providing immediate, short-term relief
- Resilience – activities supporting long-term recovery by developing mental flexibility and self-belief to overcome challenges and setbacks
- Rehabilitation – therapeutic activities for long-term physical and psychological recovery

As the most intensive phase of the war is ending, it is now the appropriate time to transition to providing respite and relief, focusing on building resilience and supporting the rehabilitation of individuals and communities.

We are deeply grateful for your past support of our Nature Heals eco-therapy program. We hope you will renew your commitment for this program.

## REVIEWING NATURE HEALS' IMPACT: OCTOBER 7 2023 – DECEMBER 2024

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### Emergency Shelter for Israelis Fleeing Rocket Attacks

SPNI provided shelter at no cost to over 220 families in our Mitzpe Ramon, Eilat, HaTzeva and Alon Tabor Field Schools. We provided these families, who had nowhere else to go, with warm beds, meals and a schedule of educational and recreational activities, creating much-needed routine and structure for the children.

*"There are people in this world who live and act like angels who bring joy to others. Even the most modest assistance given to those who sought your help is a matter of profound significance in the eyes of the Creator. Orli Sharbani [Director of SPNI's Mitzpe Ramon Field School] and her team are true examples of these people. They care about every detail and show concern for all our needs. They exemplify an unwavering commitment to this place. Your boundless generosity, at all times and in every place, is both recognized and acknowledged."*

Orli, a mother who received shelter at our Mitzpe Ramon Field School



### Free Tours and a Warm Welcome for Evacuated Israelis

Over 60,000 Israelis from northern Israel and the Gaza border area benefited from free eco-therapy nature tours and activities at SPNI's Eilat Bird Center and Gazelle Valley Park in Jerusalem. We estimate that over half of displaced Israelis living in hotels in Eilat and the surrounding area visited our Eilat Bird Center at least once during the first year of the war.

*"Sometimes in chaos, all you need is routine, thank you..."*

Guest at the Eilat Bird Center evacuated to Eilat, originally from Kiryat Shmona.





*Tens of thousands of internally displaced refugees received a warm welcome at our Eilat Bird Center*

### Field Schools Transformed into Temporary Campuses

In partnership with IsraAID and the Ministry of Education, our Eilat and Ein Gedi Field Schools became “pop-up” elementary school campuses, providing vital routine and a sense of security for evacuated 6-12-year-olds. SPNI’s educational teams supported regular teaching staff by integrating outdoor learning into the curriculum. For example, they brought the Chanukah story to life by taking children to local olive groves to harvest and press oil.

An SPNI counselor teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> graders at our Eilat Field School

### Wilderness Camps Provide Respite to Traumatized Youth

Thousands of teens and children from communities near the Gaza and northern borders had their lives destroyed overnight. Traumatized and mourning friends and family who had been killed, wounded, or kidnapped, they found themselves confined to tiny hotel rooms that became physical and emotional pressure cookers. It was no surprise that substance abuse became prevalent, with nearly half turning to alcohol or drugs to cope with their trauma.

Thanks to your support, SPNI provided 4,000 displaced youth with one, two and three-day wilderness experiences providing relief, respite and a dose of healthy adrenaline under our safe supervision. Our wilderness camps were powerful experiences, bringing friends together from across the country, helping reduce anxiety and providing them with respite and relief from the horrific situation that they had experienced.

*“Wow. This is the longest time since October 7 that I've just thought about me and my life and not the situation.”*

11th grader from Kfar Aza

### Wilderness Camps: Key Metrics



**2,034**  
participants  
aged 11-18



**27**  
Wilderness  
Camps Organized



**92%**  
teens who said they  
felt less anxious after  
a wilderness camp



**97%**  
parents saying their  
child had a significant  
experience because of  
the Wilderness Camps





A group of teens from Mateh Asher enjoying the view after completing a challenging ascent

### Family-Friendly Eco-Therapy for IDF Reservists' Families

Two thousand five hundred participants joined our family-friendly eco-therapy activities for reservists and their families at no cost. With families of reservists underprecedented emotional strain due to a parent serving in the reserves, SPNI, in partnership with local municipalities, organized eco-therapy activities designed for young families. SPNI guides took parents on a quiet walk in nature, and a second guide took younger children on an alternative route where they could expand their energy. At the end of the tour, parents and children joined together to complete an arts and crafts activity.



A group of wives and partners enjoying some respite in nature

*Thank you for the warm and welcoming activity and for helping us breathe together in nature. Your guiding was excellent and gave me a sense of calm, peace and love.*

Yarden, a mother of 3 from Nes Ziona

### Making Nature's Healing Power Accessible to the Public

Since October 7, we have provided low- and no-cost short eco-therapy activities every weekend across the country. So far, over 10,000 members of the general public have participated in one of our activities.

### Online Eco-Therapy during War's Frightening First Weeks

Over 30,000 Israelis of all ages have tuned into our "Nature at Home" programming. This series of daily online broadcasts connected Israelis with nature's restorative and therapeutic power when it was most needed. The Nature at Home series included live bird ringing, tours, stories and lectures. Parents have thanked us for providing high-quality educational programming when schools were closed. We also organized several English bird ringing sessions to cater to Anglo-Israelis.

### Forming Partnerships to Expand our Reach

SPNI has partnered with mainstream organizations to provide eco-therapy to Israelis in need. Through our partnerships with Brothers and Sisters in Arms, HaOgen and Lev Ehad, we have provided eco-therapy to hundreds of displaced youth and their families and reservists and their families.

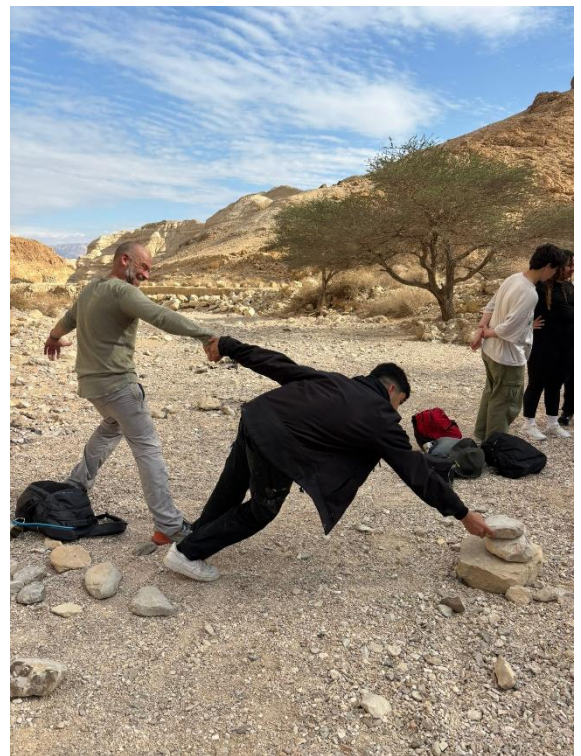
## LOOKING AHEAD TO NATURE HEALS ECO-THERAPY IN 2025

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### Resilience Journeys for High School Youth

The second phase of Nature Heals is centered around the Resilience Journeys program. This program was developed and piloted in 2024 to meet educators' expected demand for effective resilience-building programs for 16-18-year-olds. Resilience Journeys are a four-day immersive experience outdoors that helps teens reclaim a sense of control and competence. Our program uniquely combines outdoor informal education, social-emotional learning, and docu-education to help teens develop needed mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and instill a growth mindset to bounce back from crisis and trauma and move forward.

Our goal for 2025 is to raise funds to sponsor 700 students from communities from the western Negev and northern Israel to participate in a Resilience Journey at no cost. We also plan to adapt the core program to meet the needs of other audiences including discharged combat soldiers and students transitioning from elementary to junior high school.



*"We are the survivors of October 7 and the hotels. We can do anything!"*

12<sup>th</sup> grader from Kibbutz Bror Hayil

Teens learning they can succeed against the odds on a Resilience Journey



### Partnering with Sheba Medical Center to Create an Eco-Therapy Retreat in Eilat

SPNI, Sheba Medical Center and the Eilat Municipality have agreed to establish an eco-therapy retreat for IDF soldiers who need time to process their experiences before returning to their routine. Located on the grounds of our Eilat Field School on the shores of the Red Sea, experts in trauma treatment will provide professional psychological therapy in a peaceful, natural setting using this cutting-edge combination of trauma treatment with our eco-therapy expertise.



An artist's rendering of the planned Eco-Therapy Retreat in Eilat

**We are deeply thankful to you for your past support of our Nature Heals eco-therapy project that has helped over 110,000 traumatized Israelis since the horrific events of October 7. We hope you will renew your support for this project in the coming year. Thank you.**



Youth from Kibbutz Bror Hayil, located in the Gaza Envelope, receiving a taste of freedom after being evacuated to crowded hotel rooms