

ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY EMERGENCY CENTERS IN JERUSALEM

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Introduction

This paper will report how we have set-up CECs in Jerusalem neighborhoods in the past three years. I will explain what circumstances brought about the visualization of this concept – from its initial conception until the present. I will describe the steps we took to formulate these CECs, what their goals are and how they operate and what we have learned from our experience. I will conclude with describing the challenges in the present and for the future.

A CEC is a neighborhood-based organization - manned by volunteer residents and professionals who work in the neighborhood - and its goal is to provide various services to the community in times of emergencies of all kinds. The CEC is meant to coordinate its work with the authorized emergency forces and agencies, but should also be able to work independently in catastrophic situations. The CEC is meant to be mobilized in all kinds of emergency situations : snow storms that sometimes cause the city to be immobilized for a few days, forest fires, earthquakes – which occur in our region every once in a while - terrorist incidents, large-scale accidents in which many residents are injured or effected (such as the blackout that occurred in North America two years ago), criminal incidents that have wide-ranging effects – for instance, the disappearance or murder of one of the residents – epidemics (such as SARS) or wars , such as the Gulf War – in which Scud missiles fell on Israel in 1990 - or preparation for war when the outcome is unknown, as was the case before the recent Iraq War.

This project was implemented for about three years, from 2003 to 2006, and now we are in the maintenance part of the project. There is now about 18 such CASs in and we are hopeful that we will have one CEC in each of the 24 neighborhoods of Jerusalem in the future.

The main partners taking part in the planning and implementation of this project and that are part of the steering committee of the project, are: the umbrella organization for the Community Centers and Councils in Jerusalem and the Jerusalem Municipality – its main departments being, the Emergency and Security Dept., The Community Dept., The Social Welfare Dept. and the Education Dept. The Funding of this project is provided by the Jerusalem Foundation and the UJF of New York. Other relevant representatives of Ministries and organizations also joined us in the steering committee of the project, which formulated the model which I will describe below; the implementation processes and monitors the project on an on-going basis.

The idea to set up such a body began to formulate at the beginning of 2000, when the second Intifada – or Palestinian uprising – began. Jerusalem, being the capital of Israel and in a very sensitive location as well as being the Holy city to three religions, was hard hit. In the years 2000-2004 Jerusalem suffered from over 600 terrorist incidents –that included 30 suicide bombing in public places – such as on public transportation, the market place, the central shopping district of town, restaurants and coffee houses. 210 residents were killed - 174 of them, due to 30 suicide bombing incidents and thousands more were injured. On top of that, thousands more

suffered either short or long-range trauma – some of them developing PTSD. Besides these on-going and almost daily occurrences, one of the neighborhoods, quite near Bethlehem, was being shot at nightly by terrorists from the neighboring Arab village. This went on for 10 months until the army finally stepped in and put an end to it. But until this happened, the residents living on the streets, which were targeted, could not get a night's sleep, the children couldn't go out of the house without special security, and the institutions nearby had to close their doors.

If that was not enough, in 2004, we had a very large-scale accident happening in Jerusalem as well, in which a second floor wedding hall collapsed while the 700 guests were dancing – killing 23 and injuring hundreds. A year or so ago, we had two small earthquakes, which may be warnings of what lies ahead – considering that we are living on the Syrian-African fault that is prone to earthquakes. Already the National Committee on Earthquake Preparedness as well as the Municipality are warning the residents that if a 7.4 Richter scale earthquake will happen in the city, we will probably see about 1000 building collapsing, in which case the resources to deal with such a catastrophe will not be there for all the neighborhoods at the onset of the earthquake – and residents may have to wait days on end until they receive professional assistance. In 2001, we were advised to prepare ourselves for another Gulf War, after 9/11 when the US and the Coalition States, decided to attack Iraq. Remembering our experiences from the previous war in 1990, when scud missiles fell on cities in Israel, people began to prepare for chemical or biological attacks – renewing their gas-mask kits and buying food supplies and water.

So, all these occurrences caused great consternation for the public. Many residents felt helpless and frightened, causing their resilience to wane. Others wanted to assist but didn't really know how.

The Emergency Units' Response

Although, the official emergency agencies were becoming increasingly efficient in taking care of isolated incidents (mainly accident and terrorist suicide bombings), it also became evident that the community can assist in various ways – especially over the medium and long-range.

Following is a short description of those emergency services which we have in place just in order to clarify what we envisioned as the services that could be provided by the Community Emergency Centre. These are not intended to be **substitutes for** those provided by the official agencies, but rather they ought to **complement and assist** them where possible – and especially, provide needed services after these official agencies leave the scene.

When, for example, a terrorist incident occurs on a bus, the police immediately arrive, set up a Command and Control Centre (CCC), cordon off the area, control traffic in order to allow ambulances to arrive; they prevent on-lookers or family members from coming near the scene; they make sure that there are no further bombs in the area; they then gather evidence – both for investigative purposes as well as for the future identification of the victims.

Immediately after this, the Municipal Emergency and Security Dept. representatives join up with the police in the CCC and oversee all the work concerning with the repair of infrastructure - water mains, electricity, gas mains - clean-up, and coordinate the Property Tax Unit personnel who come to the scene to estimate damages to property owners and the reparations they can receive.

Simultaneously, the representative of the Municipal Community Dept. arrives and coordinates the teams of social workers who are constantly on-call, to support victims and their families; to accompany families to the police identification units; to accompany the nearest kin to the morgue; to inform of the tragedy to family members and to assist in funeral arrangements and coordination with hospital staff in case of the injured.

Concurrently, the municipality opens up a hotline for public queries and information dissemination, which also collates all the information coming from the hospitals. Via the media, the public is immediately informed what the numbers of these hotlines are – at the various hospitals to which the injured have been sent. Other agencies and municipal departments come into play a bit later – such as the Psychological Support Units of the Education Dept. in the schools, the National Social Insurance Agency, which is responsible for the rehabilitation of victims and their immediate families, in terrorist incidents – etc.

And so, as you can construe from this short summary, things are fairly streamlined when it comes to dealing with a localized terrorist or other emergency incident – during the first hours and days.

But what will happen when the situation is drawn out and needs many more resources? What can and should the community do?

After each such emergency incident, as described previously, feedback sessions are made and many lessons have been learned. During these sessions, several issues, concerning the community and coordination, have come up over and over again.

Lessons Learned

It was observed that volunteer members of the community are more than willing to be mobilized to assist emergency forces in times of need and rush to provide help. In some cases, hundreds of volunteers arrived at the CC's doors or phoned to ask what they can do. As this happens spontaneously, without any preparation or training, it often caused duplication of effort, some waste of needed resources and occasionally, even hampered the efficient work of the emergency forces on hand. The volunteers need guidance, need to be knowledgeable in the procedures and the workings of the authorized agencies, and need to be organized under some kind of authorized leadership. Furthermore, often these volunteers are needed not immediately, but rather at a later stage – but by then, they have gone home and cannot or do not want to be reached.

Another lesson learned from previous emergency situations in Israel, is that the community can provide many resources – especially local information and logistic ones – that are not utilized properly.

A lack of coordination between the community and the authorized agencies, and use of these resources sometimes leads to duplication of effort and waste.

Furthermore, from what was learned about emergency situations such a collapse of buildings due to earthquakes or terrorist incidents, such as 9/11, plane crashes, environmental emergencies and other catastrophes - the authorized agencies may not be able to reach the victims immediately, and it is most important to be able to provide leadership to those helping hands that want to assist, in order to save lives. In those important life-saving minutes or hours, immediately after the incident, when

indeed, lives **can** be saved, people that have been trained or prepared beforehand, can save lives by guiding those who are in shock and need to be led out to safety or given first aid. It was clear that if an extended emergency situation would occur - for instance more than one mass-terrorist attack occurring simultaneously in the city, a missile assault; an earthquake, etc. - the professional services would not be able to attend to all the needs of the population, and the demand for trained volunteers would be even more imperative.

Furthermore, it is important to provide support and a myriad of other needed services to victims in the medium and long range – that are not always provided by the authorized municipal or national agencies.

Also, it was identified by all concerned, that due to lack of resources, some secondary and tertiary victims do not receive adequate assistance and support. These might include friends of victims, classmates of the injured or dead, or just those who saw the incident happen because of their proximity.

When the official agencies leave the scene, there is still much to be done post-incident, that can be provided by volunteers in the community – in order to rehabilitate the victims and assist them in returning to the “new normal”.

And about inter and intra agency coordination, we have learned that getting to know each other personally can go a long way to efficient coordination and cooperation. Some of the agencies’ never sat together or discussed common issues and procedures before they were brought together in this project! Much unhealthy competition for scarce resources (funding etc) was going on and this was manifested sometimes at the scene of the disaster itself.

In summary: It seems that some of these needed services and upgrading of coordination, can be provided by a proper mobilization of volunteers from the community. Can a Community Emergency Centre be a means to solve some of those problems that we encountered in the past?

The Community Council and Centre

Before, I describe the model of the CEC in Jerusalem and its goals, a short description of the Community Council and Centre (CC) - which is a special organization existing in Jerusalem - is called for.

The city's population is about 700,000 – of which 65% are Jews and 35% are Arab residents. The city is geographically divided into 24 neighborhoods. In each such neighborhood – whose population range between 20,000 to 45,000 – there is a CC, which is a non-profit organization? The goal of such a CC is to provide services that would improve the quality of life of local residents, while empowering, involving and integrating the residents as volunteers in community work. The Council is responsible for the smooth integration of neighborhood activity with the services provided by the Jerusalem Municipality, as well as by the various local and national agencies. It also serves as a community social center – providing extracurricular activities for its population (social, sport and educational activities for all ages), while at the same time, acting as a “mini-municipality” responsible for the planning and implementation of activity in all areas of life: educational needs, social services, security, health, immigrant absorption, town-planning, environmental conservation and more.

For each such function, a committee is appointed, headed by a lay-leader and manned by volunteers from the community. The Board is elected by the residents and consists of volunteers; the director and the coordinators of various functions in the CC are paid employees.

Since this organization exists in every neighborhood and is well known by most of the residents, it seemed only natural to build the CEC on the infrastructure of this organization.

The CEC Model

Taking into consideration the emergency situations that occurred almost daily, the Jerusalem Association of Community Councils and Centers, suggested, in 2001, a model for the implementation of CASs in all the neighborhoods of Jerusalem. I should mention that simultaneously, a CEC was set up by one of the CCs in the northern part of the city, and so a sort of "pilot project" was available for evaluation and feedback. Some months later, funding was found for the city-wide project and a steering committee was formulated, as mentioned previously.

Such a CEC, it was envisioned, would promote the strengthening of community resilience, would lower stress and tensions running high at this time, and would allow the community to work effectively with the municipality, police, Home Front Command of the army, ambulance and fire services and with all the welfare services that come into play in an emergency situation as well as be able to provide complimentary and long-range services so direly needed

The model of the CEC, is meant to provide some of the answers to the problems that arose in the past in dealing with emergencies, furthermore, it incorporates the **principles of efficient community emergency services** which we identified from the literature: These ought to incorporate the following aspects:

- Multi-agency cooperation and coordination
- Enabling the pooling of resources
- Taking an "all-hazards" approach and enabling preparation for various kinds of emergencies
- It should be reactive as well as proactive
- It should be flexible enough to allow for the provision of services in various situations and for various kinds of populations
- It ought to be multi-level and interdisciplinary – incorporating a holistic approach spanning all possible areas and kinds of services.

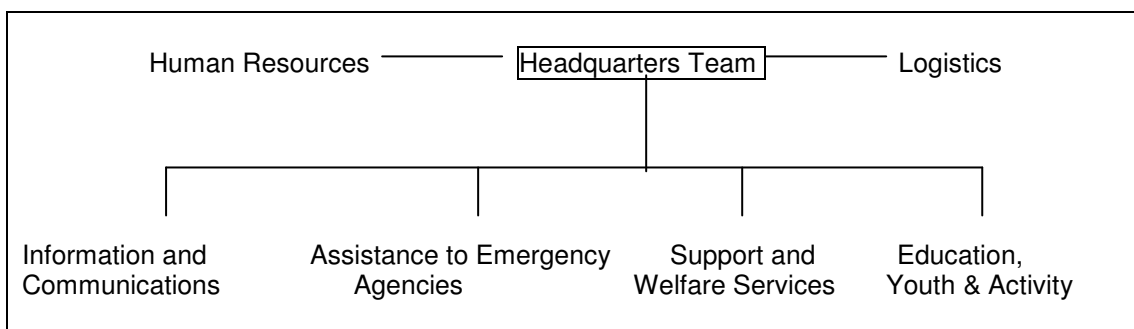
Based on the model that was formulated by the steering committee of the project, as well as the pilot project made in the Ramot neighborhood, the following is the model which we now are implementing:

- *The CEC "HQ team"*: decides when the CEC would be mobilized and for how long; sets priorities; is responsible for budgeting, and for monitoring the activities of the other teams.
- *The "assistance to authorized emergency services" team*: works with the emergency forces (police, fire, ambulance, army) and provide assistance to them in all logistical, security or medical fields as needed. It must be mentioned here that in every neighborhood there are volunteers that work with the police – the Civil Guard – who receive on-going basic training and patrol the streets, armed with rifles and have police authority while on duty. Furthermore, there are local first aid teams who receive on-going training from the Ambulance Service. These

two groups of volunteers would, in emergencies, coordinate their efforts with this team.

- *The “support and welfare” team:* provides psychological and social-welfare assistance to the residents – either through home-visits, telephone assistance, or group counseling.
- *The “information and communications” team:* mans the telephone “hot-line” and would provide and receive local and other information to and from the community regarding the situation and would be responsible for disseminating information through the local media and all other possible means.
- *The “education, youth and activity” team:* provides planning and implementation of activity or educational frameworks in order to occupy children, elderly the infirm and all other groups, when the regular frameworks (schools, clubs etc.) would not be able to function because of the situation (such was the case in the Gulf War, when all the schools were closed for over a month); and would assist citizens who would be evacuated from other areas, outside the neighborhood to special “evacuation centers” that would be set-up as temporary shelters for them.
- *The “logistics” team* provides all kinds of logistic assistance to the other teams and would also gather information regarding possible sources of resources in the community – whether it is human resources or equipment that may be needed in emergencies.
- *The HR team recruits,* interviews, selects and allocates volunteers to the various tasks needed (especially during the incident, when many new volunteers appear on the scene) as well as provides training to the members of the CEC on a regular basis.

The CEC Framework



For each team it was suggested to appoint - together with a staff member from the CC or a professional representative of a local service, who is the Commander of the team – a lay-leader (a volunteer). The volunteer is meant to be the deputy of the Commander of the team, in cases when the Commander is not able to arrive to take on his role. For each position there is a second-in-command in order to make sure that someone is available at all times to act as leader of the team. In some cases, we came to the conclusion that it is imperative to place a specific person in charge of the team. For instance, the Commander of the Support Team is the Director of the Social Welfare Bureau in the area, since she or he has the most experience in this area, can provide guidance to the volunteers, is authorized, by law, to receive

information on victims from the police or from the municipality emergency center, and thus can decide which information can be passed on to the community to act upon. The team members – numbering between 5-15 in each team – consist of both professionals, representatives of various services or organizations in the community, as well as other volunteers.

Implementation

The first steps that were taken were to convince the Directors of the CC that such an organization is necessary and feasible. We paired with each CC an organizational consultant who sat with them, and then with their staff, and explained the necessity of such a formalized institution. Next, a local steering committee - comprising of major service providers in the community (for instance, the community policing officer and the security officer of the Municipality), lay-leaders and staff of the CC - met in order to hear about the CEC, how it will work and who will staff its teams. Then, recruitment of members of the teams took place, in order to fill the ranks - 5-10 members in each team. Next, all the members of the CEC received training about emergency situations, the psychological and other aspects of emergencies, and what each team can do to assist in various situations. In the last stages, an emergency booklet was compiled, comprising of all the municipal and local information needed in emergencies, basic equipment was provided to each CEC by the project, and finally, a simulation exercise was made.

The scenario which we chose for this exercise was one in which a few children, taking part in a sports activity, suddenly become ill, and it is decided that the drinking water was probably contaminated or poisoned. This causes wide-spread panic in the neighborhood and later, in the whole city. Finally the municipality decides to close off the water mains and begin distributing drinking water in containers. This simulation exercise pinpointed the strengths and weaknesses of the specific CEC – regarding the preparations made by the team members, as well as their proficiency in undertaking various tasks, and illustrated to the team members what they are supposed to do in such situations; how they need to disseminate information – both to and from the authorized agencies and the community – and the coordination needed between them and the other services and between the CEC teams. At the end of each such exercise an evaluation was made and feedback from the participants was heard. Improvements were implemented following this exercise.

Later, the teams received specific training regarding support to victims and information dissemination in emergencies. These training sessions took place during 3 evening sessions, 4 hours each.

The whole process took between 4 to 6 months. Some CCs managed to reach this stage quickly, but some are still struggling to recruit enough volunteers or to bring together representatives of their community services and integrate them in the CEC.

Evaluation

The steering committee continually monitors the implementation processes, Questionnaires, interviews of key persons and with focus groups, were carried out during various intervals of the project. It has been found that the main difficulties in the implementation stages were as follows:

Difficulties

Not in all cases did the Directors of the CCs feel that this was a priority for them. Overburdened and usually under-staffed, they put it on the back-burner, not showing much leadership or involvement in the project. In these cases, the staff, of-course, were apathetic or disinterested, at best. Although in some cases, another staff member took on the lead, this was the exception and did not always lead to enthusiastic cooperation of other staff members.

Furthermore, it was not (and still isn't) quite clear which of the staff is most suited to assist the Director in the implementation and maintenance steps and often the responsibility "fell between the cracks" – making the process drawn-out.

The staff of the CC and of the local services is constantly changing and therefore, in order to maintain a professional leadership of the teams, one has to constantly train and re-train these functionaries.

Volunteers were also sometimes hard to recruit. Although, as mentioned above, there is no problem in recruiting volunteer assistance when an actual emergency occurs, it is far more difficult to recruit someone when there is no "clear and present" danger. Our population has become almost immune to danger and life-threatening situations, and unless something seems clearly eminent, it is very difficult to find volunteers who will want to undergo training, come to seminars and make all sorts of preparations for the unforeseen future. It is also very difficult to maintain this volunteer force, if we don't use them on a regular basis, as other volunteer organizations do. Therefore, many who did come at the onset, dropped out as the months went by. We have to find a way to maintain this group, keeping them "on their toes", so to speak, and ready for any emergency.

Successes

Jerusalem is a very heterogeneous city – its population consisting of many ethnic groups, new immigrants from the former USSR and Ethiopia, Jews ranging from ultra-orthodox religious ones to secular and Arab Moslem and Christian residents. When training these very different types of volunteers, one has to find the common-denominator that suites them all. Also, very often one has to train women and men separately – making this a costly and time-consuming procedure. However, it is heart-warming to see these varied groups working together, meeting, discussing and working together toward a common cause. This project has actually brought together these varied populations.

Coordinating the various emergency agencies in order to clarify and solidify procedures and working methods, was not an easy task, and remains on-going and on our agenda for the coming year. However, we have managed to pool resources and coordinate work with all departments in the Municipality as well as with other emergency agencies. Some, before our project, had very little connections one to the other – especially on the local level - and this project acquainted them with one another and brought about a healthy working atmosphere.

We are now extending our training to the CEC members to areas in which they have not yet been exposed. We are working with the Ministry of Environment to provide the CEC members with training regarding hazardous materials, waste disposal and other hazards that are of importance in the recovery stage, post-emergency. We are liaising with the Municipality regarding the use of the CEC Support team in dealing with traffic accident victims and their families; we are working with the Home Front

Command of the army and the Municipality in order to incorporate the CEC teams in training exercises regarding earthquakes or other large scale exercises.

Conclusion

What have we achieved?

We have already set up 18 CECs and the others are working on volunteer recruitment and setting up the various teams. We have provided training to all the CECs that have been set-up, including special training sessions to the Support Team members – regarding the psychological aspects of trauma and how to assist those in need – as well training on Information and Communications and how to provide effective information to the public in times of emergency. We have made simulation exercises in all the CECs and have equipped all the CECs with basic equipment – including detailed maps of each neighborhood. In the next few months, we hope to continue training the leaders of each team – both volunteer and staff – on the topics of management in emergencies and team-work; we hope to provide further simulation exercises to all CECs, since this seems to be the most effective way to train them; we hope to build a maintenance programme for each CEC for the coming year.

All in all, we have found this to be a challenging, though rewarding on-going experience. Combining volunteers with professional staff can be a difficult task, but it can provide the necessary complimentary services in times when the official services will not be forthcoming or when they have already left the field for their next assignment. When the next emergency will occur – and we are quite sure it will, unfortunately – the resources of an **organized community** that knows what it must do and has leadership that can guide those who want to help – can make the difference between saving lives or not, can assist traumatized persons overcome and return to a “new normal” life-style, and can mitigate pain and loss.

I have touched only briefly on many topics and on a complex process which we are still in its midst. We would be happy to further share with anyone our experiences and assist in setting-up such an organization, which we believe can be an invaluable resource in times of disaster.
