

THE ABRAHAM INITIATIVES STAFF EXPERIENCES:

LIVING AND WORKING DURING WARTIME

Fayrouz Alatayka

Safe Communities Coordinator in the Negev

In an interview with Davar, Fayrouz describes how she and her loved ones have scrambled for cover in recent days, digging trenches to gain cover from Iranian strikes:

“Yesterday, I stayed at a school because we don’t have a shelter...We returned home at nine or ten o’clock in the morning. Fear became routine and anxiety became reality. We returned home from school and sat down to watch the news. We started preparing food, water, and lighting to take with us to school.’

She says that where she lives, they dug a hole to protect themselves from the missiles and the shrapnel from missile interception. ‘That was actually more dangerous. If a missile falls, no one will know there are people below.’” (You can read the full article in Hebrew [here](#).)

Navigating between her family's safety and that of her community, Fayrouz is working to build a cadre of volunteers who will report and address the needs of the Bedouin community as they arise:

"I'm currently working with the Home Front Command, who reached out to me to help recruit volunteers from the [emergency response training program](#) we held last year. The program had ten sessions covering topics like first aid and had around 110 graduates from four different Bedouin towns and villages, plus over 60 from the regional course — and they're all really eager to volunteer and help assess needs as they come up.

I'm also going to be part of the Abraham Initiative's involvement in a Regional Civilian Emergency Operations Center that Bedouin community organizations are now setting up to handle urgent needs like food distribution and more. A refresher event that will launch the Center's activities is expected to take place in the next few days.

I am proud of The Abraham Initiatives for its concern for me and my family, and for giving my community the opportunity in recent years to shoulder its responsibilities, improve security and stability, and promote volunteer work among women and youth.”

Shany Payes

Director of Research and Evaluation

I live in Central Tel Aviv, and it's shaking. 618 days of war in Gaza and the North left the city wounded, but stable. Amidst photos of those kidnapped and graffiti and stickers commemorating the dead and carrying political messages of a divided society, the city's heartbeat kept beating. It was open and alive. Since the war with Iran has started, Tel Aviv is shaking — literally, from the heavy Iranian missiles and their consequences, and more symbolically, its life force is turned off.

Being under life-threatening, building-toppling missile attacks is as scary as it sounds. The brutality of the Iranian attack is scarier than all wars we've lived through before – for me, the first big one was the 1991 Gulf War, in which we presumed a tape would protect us from chemical weapons. There were so many in between, each one manifesting the futility of war and conflict. My family is privileged, we have a shelter in the building. When we come out of the shelter, we feel relieved to be safe.

On our way home, we meet the less privileged neighbors, dozens of them, who have to spend the attacks in the neighborhood's school. Some neighbors gave up the shelter altogether. They are not mobile enough to make it up and down the stairs, and prefer to stay near home. Their lives are in extreme danger. We all go home quietly, exhausted, waiting for the next alert. Our bodies ache, muscles stiff. I think of my friend in the Bedouin village, with no shelter at all. I think of those who did not make it on October 7th, of those kidnapped to Gaza and are still tortured there. I think of Gazans, being under constant attacks for 618 days. All of their pain and fears merge with mine, intensifies it. I find a little comfort in my neighbors. During the attacks, in the shelter, we build together, night after night, a 1000-piece puzzle. I so hope the war will be over long before we finish it.

In the research department, our main focus now is to analyze and publish our learning from The Abraham Initiatives' firsthand experiences of supporting and promoting Jewish-Arab shared society during the first 12-18 months of the war. Following October 7, The Abraham Initiatives [worked across several fields](#) to help lead de-escalation efforts and promote Jewish-Arab partnership in the shadow of the war. We

accompanied those actions with qualitative and quantitative research measures, including questionnaires, observations and interviews.

In the field of education, this learning has already been gathered and published in the booklet Education for a Shared Jewish-Arab Society in the Midst of a Crisis. Currently, we are working on publishing our lessons learned in the field of mixed cities; an analysis and publication about our experience in welfare departments, together with Prof. Edith Blit-Cohen, a professor at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare at the Hebrew University; and an analysis and publication of multi-year graduates' experiences in pre-military academies, where we have continued delivering an annual course about the Palestinian-Arab society even during wartime.

Our goal is to make this knowledge available to the field and draw recommendations from lessons learned. We feel that this is acutely important these days, as the level of conflict escalates again, and unfortunately, we witness [hatred and incitement](#) towards Arab society.

Yana Neuman

Director of Shared Workplaces Initiative

It's 4:29 a.m. The Homefront app on both my phone and my partner's goes off with its shrill alert. My heart races. Without thinking, I jump out of bed and run to the kids' room, urging them into the shelter. Then I dash upstairs to get the dogs, who are already in a frenzy. The kibbutz siren is blaring—a sound that falls somewhere between panicked coyotes and a World War II air raid.

In the shelter, my thoughts drift to colleagues and family members who aren't as fortunate—those without a safe room or even one within reasonable distance.

Four hours later, the day begins. We are exhausted, but strangely calmer. Most of the missiles were launched during the night. My daughter is actually happy—she won our dark-humor family bet about when the Iranians would strike, and now she gets to choose dessert for dinner.

I sit down to work and find myself thinking about all the medical staff I've met this past year—Jewish and Arab. I think about the rupture in trust, the deep fears, the enormous pressure to ensure operational continuity despite trauma, grief, and the effects of war. Since the horror of October 7, many have had to face not only the devastating impact of violence and loss but also the fear of being part of communities under suspicion, workplaces sometimes strained by racism or hostility.

And yet, they continue. Together. Working side-by-side to save lives.

I think of the managers—coping with trauma, polarization, and immense responsibility. Their efforts to hold teams together, to keep systems running, are nothing short of heroic.

As a team, we came to a decision: the right thing now is to stand with these leaders and teams. To support their ongoing efforts to build safe, equal, shared organizations for both Jews and Arabs. Together with our partners at the Galilee Association, we offered both personal and professional support.

We are now defining principles and tools to help organizations respond to this emergency—from immediate crisis management, through an emergency-informed routine, and eventually toward recovery, healing, and rebuilding.

We are reaching out to the members of our professional steering committee, reaffirming our commitment to work side by side—in times of war and peace—to build a model of shared society.

Even when it feels like it's against all odds, and even when the darkness seems overwhelming, it is our responsibility to offer an alternative to this cruel reality. It is our responsibility to replace despair with action—and with hope.

More than that, it is our responsibility to help the health system in Israel become a true model of a shared society—one in which Jews and Arabs shoulder the responsibility together, working side by side toward a better future for all, in times of crisis and in times of calm.

Yanal Jabarin

Director of Public Affairs

On a personal and family level, these past few days have been very difficult. My sister had to cancel her bridal shower — something every woman dreams of before her wedding and moving into a new home with her partner. We were in a state of uncertainty, not knowing if this situation would last just a few hours or much longer. As a family, we decided to hold a small, intimate gathering in our garden instead.

On a collective and professional level, at first, as an organization, we tried to understand where we could be most effective given the limited resources at our disposal.

The Knesset immediately shifted to emergency protocol, which initially meant canceling all committee meetings. But I didn't give up. In my role as an advocate, I activated our partners, other civil society organizations, and members of Knesset — both from the opposition and the coalition — and managed to convince them to push for discussions related to the war, focusing specifically on the home front.

A series of conversations and planning meetings have taken place since. Shahira Shalaby, Co-CEO of The Abraham Initiatives, and I took part in a meeting of the Emergency Civil Society Committee, a coalition that was established following October 7 and has recently resumed its activities in light of the renewed escalation that began last Friday. Tomorrow there will be a session in the Interior Committee, which will include the Minister of Interior, focusing on the government's response and support for affected communities and areas — including topics such as temporary housing solutions.

Next Monday, there will be an evaluation session regarding compensation from the Property Tax Authority resulting from damages from the war. Together with opposition members, we advanced an urgent request to discuss the severe lack of shelters and protection infrastructure across the country.

We remain active in the media as well, striving to proactively shape discourse surrounding the war. My own opinion piece was published by Walla! which responds to the racist remarks aired on Channel 14 in the wake of missile strikes on the Arab city of Tamra. You can read it [here](#) in Hebrew.