

From Israel ~ The Dream Doctors go to Thailand



Israeli clown, Dudi Brashi, entertains a Thai teenager on March 1 in Khao Yai, Thailand.

50 Buddhist and Muslim teenagers aged 16-23 from Thailand's tsunami-ravaged Andaman coast went to A camp organized by the Israeli Embassy in Thailand, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and a local nonprofit agency, the Population Community Development Association. The Post-Tsunami Camp was located in the mountains well away from the coast in Kaoyai National Park

The young survivors participated in activities including meetings with psychologists, hiking, sports, games. And treatment by the Israeli "Dream Doctors."

The "Dream Doctor" program from Israel, one of the most essential components of the camp activities, is a group of professional clowns who specialize in treating traumatized children and youth with humor. Their job is to ease the work of the psychologists by evoking fun and ore carefree atmosphere. They have been successful in several Israeli hospitals in relieving children's suffering with the gift of laughter.

Below is an article in part from Guy Sharett, (JTA), The Jerusalem Post Mar. 16, 2005 Khao Yai, Thailand

Laughter Is Best Medicine for Tsunami-affected Teens

The international Jewish community has sent in the clowns to help teenagers traumatized by the tsunami. And they seem to be helping.

"The clowns might not be able to give us physical help, but they help us to get out of the trauma because we are laughing a lot here. Sense of humor is important for us, especially now," says Darin Wahalak, 18, from Phang Nga in South Thailand, who spent a week in a camp with a group of Israeli clowns in Khao Yai.

"I feel that for these kids it's a huge change to be here in the mountains, where you do not see the effects of the tsunami and can laugh with clowns," says Shlomi Kofman, first secretary of the Israeli embassy in Thailand.

"At first I was sad all the time. Now I am better," says Chusak Kokang, 18, of Krabi, who lost 10 of his good friends in Koh Phi Phi. After the tsunami, he worked in a rescue team collecting bodies in the island. "I am happy to be here in Khao Yai. It's fun to do stuff with the clowns. I feel that they are more expressive, more open than Thai clowns. In Thailand clowns only play on stage, but here we're working with them side by side."

The Dream Doctors work with children in hospitals in Israel — mainly kids who fight cancer and children who survived terror attacks. They speak gibberish to them, taking them out of their difficult lives for a few hours of laughter.

"Actually we did not know exactly whom we would meet in Thailand," says Nimrod Eisenberg, or "Max," his clown name. "So we focused on preparations: We brought lots of red noses for the kids, tons of bubble liquid and balloons. These are all working tools we feel good with, and we have to work with things that make us happy, because this is how we can pass this joy to the kids."

The teenagers were not told in advance that the clowns would visit them. "On the first day we decided the first encounter would be at lunch, and we would be the ones who would serve them the food," says "Prof. Chimichuri," clown Alex Gruber.

"We thought that the kids would find it funny that clowns dressed up as chefs are the ones who serve them lunch, but they didn't laugh at all. At some stage I saw lots of flies around, and I asked every kid whether he wanted his rice with flies or without. They found it hilarious. Then I knew we found a way into their hearts, across the cultural and linguistic boundaries."



A Message for the Soul

Activities with the teenagers included lots of group games and improvisation. At the end of the week every teenager performed in front of the group.

"Basically we came to give those kids a kind of Thai massage. Not a foot massage, not shoulders massage, but a massage for the soul," says clown Dudi Brashi, or "Dudon."

The embassy and the JDC are planning more tsunami-related projects in the near future.