



The  
Lillian and Larry Goodman  
Open Apartments  
Program  
Story



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# The Program

The Lillian and Larry Goodman Open Apartments Program at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) is the flagship program of the Department of Community Action. The program gives a group of outstanding BGU students a unique opportunity to experience and get involved in community life in the city of Beer-Sheva.

The students live in the community among local residents.

They run classes for all ages, take part in the “adopted families” project and conduct community events for and together with their neighbors, to promote shared community responsibility. Through the program, students make a positive impact on the lives of residents in the veteran neighborhoods of Beer-Sheva.

In exchange for their involvement in the program, the students receive a scholarship that covers their living expenses and enjoy a unique experience that enhances their social awareness and sensitivity.



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# Who We Are



Participating students study in a range of programs and departments at BGU. Their engagement in social action stems from their motivation to promote healthy and vibrant communities in the veteran neighborhoods of Beer-Sheva.

**Areen:** I'm Areen, 24 years old, from Samia, a Druze village in the north. I study medicine. Growing up, I loved learning about the human body and whenever anyone got hurt, I was always the one who ran to get bandages. In high school, I volunteered at Magen David Adom (the Israeli Red Cross).

**Elad:** I'm Elad, 24, and I study biotechnology engineering. I'm from Ashdod and have two sisters.

**Gai:** I'm Gai and I study politics & government and communications. I'm from Ma'alot Tarshiha, a town in the north. In the army, I served as an officer in the Computer Corps. Afterwards, I participated in two Jewish Agency delegations, teaching Israeli culture at the JCC in upstate New York.

**Ruth:** I'm Ruth. I study Middle East studies and Jewish history. I was born in Mexico City and made Aliyah when I was 15 years old. I have one older brother and two younger brothers. I did my IDF service in the navy.

**Shady:** I'm Shady, from the Druze town of Beit Jann in the north. I study mechanical engineering. I served in the IDF as an officer in a combat unit for five years.

**Sujood:** I'm Sujood, from Ar'ara in the north, and I'm in my fifth year of medical school. I'm the oldest of four sisters and my parents are both teachers.

**Yarin:** I'm Yarin, 28 years old. I'm married to Avi and mother of Ofri (6) and Be'eri (2). I study business and management. I grew up in the town of Ofakim and have five siblings.

\*Want to know who's who? see page 26

The students are a diverse group, each with their own hobbies and interests. As part of the program, they can share those interests with their neighbors through classes and clubs.

**Sujood:** I love swimming and travelling overseas (especially to Italy!) and going shoe shopping. I love math and enjoy fixing things around the house.

**Elad:** I love cooking Asian food – sushi and stir-fries. Cooking gives me quiet time with myself, and food always connects people. Our program members usually eat Friday night dinner together and everyone brings their favorite dish.

**Shady:** I love soccer and hiking. When I was little, I was very fearful of everything. Now I do extreme sports, like rappelling, rock climbing and scuba diving whenever I can.

**Gai:** I love music and I play piano and guitar. Music transports me to another place and makes me feel special. I also like going to the market, shopping for simple ingredients, and creating delicious meals.

**Ruth:** I love scuba diving and surfing with my friends. I like the silence of the ocean. Being underwater gives you time to think about life, listen to yourself breathing and discover new ocean creatures. It makes you realize how little we know about the world. There's so much to discover!

**Yarin:** I love horseback riding and biking. My husband and I are part of a community of young families. We organize special women-only events and have big communal meals on the holidays.

**Areen:** I'm obsessed with upcycling! I collect paper and other materials and shape them into statues that I display in my room...

## My Favorite Things



# Why BGU?



Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) is an internationally renowned research university in Israel's south. The University is a recognized national and global leader in many fields, actively encouraging multi-disciplinary collaborations with government and industry, and nurturing entrepreneurship and innovation in all its forms.

With 20,000 students and three campuses in Beer-Sheva, Sde Boker and Eilat, BGU is an agent of change, fulfilling the vision of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's legendary first prime minister. Over a third of the students are active in the community.

**Gai:** In the army, I served in a base near Beer-Sheva and fell in love with the beautiful desert landscape. I wanted to study at a socially oriented university. I just love my studies! I'm learning about what's going on in Israeli government today, rather than accepting things without questioning.

**Areen:** BGU emphasizes the human connection between doctors and patients and encourages us to volunteer. I knew that at BGU I would get to experience a whole new world.

**Ruth:** I wanted to learn about the periphery, to leave the center of Israel and step out of my bubble. People at BGU are so involved – they're active in the student union and political groups, and volunteer with children and senior citizens.

**Sujood:** I was accepted to several universities, but chose BGU, and I'm happy I did. The Negev is a much friendlier place, and the University feels like one big family.

**Elad:** I love that BGU has such a vibrant social life and that so many of the students volunteer in the community.



## Our Open Apartments Program

The students are deeply involved in the communal life of Beer-Sheva's neighborhoods and become part of a big, yet close-knit community of students and residents.

**Yarin:** The strong bonds that we form let us make an impact. I've talked with kids about their dreams, about someday going to university. I've helped neighbors suffering from domestic violence and informed the police about prostitution. If you don't actually live here, there no way for you to know everything that's going on.

**Sujood:** I felt like I needed to get to know the local population, so I could communicate better with patients. This amazing program was perfect for me. I've learned so much! I love my adopted family. I'm like their older sister, and they're my family away from home.

**Ruth:** I needed a job and wanted to go to sleep at night feeling like I did something good for the world. This program lets you give back to the community – and it pays the rent!

**Shady:** I'm good at communicating with young people and I like the idea of living where you volunteer. Just being with the neighborhood residents every day makes all of us see our lives differently.

The students live in the veteran, less-affluent neighborhoods of Beer-Sheva and become part of the neighborhood communities; people that children can look up to and adult residents can turn to.

**Gai:** My parents came from Morocco and grew up in a very poor neighborhood too, so living here lets me experience what they went through.

**Sujood:** When I get back from class, I sit outside our building and talk to people. I hear what's going on in their lives and get to know them. Before joining the program, I had never met anyone who had almost nothing. But here I met a family who couldn't afford a computer, which meant that during the lockdown their kids couldn't zoom and fell behind in their classwork. Somehow, I managed to get them a computer, and it made my day!

**Elad:** Our neighborhood is made up of people from many different ethnic groups. Sephardi and Ashkenazi; Jews and Arabs. So, I've learned a lot about Israeli society. One of our neighbors is always knocking on our door, saying she just cooked dinner and asking us to come over and eat with her. When I walk down the street, all the kids run up and climb on me.

**Shady:** At first people didn't smile at us, but now we all say good morning. I go up to the older people, ask how they are and if they need anything. They say that talking to us really cheers them up. During the recent Gaza conflict, every time there was a siren warning about rockets, we all met in the shelter. It brought us even closer together.



## Living in the Neighborhood



## Our Neighbors

Close ties are formed between students and residents as they share meals and experiences. The residents confide in the students, telling them about the problems they face and asking their advice. The students do what they can to help.

**Areen:** One of the women told me I'm like a daughter to her. On my birthday, she actually made me a cake with my picture on it! When I walk down the street, the kids are so happy to see me! They jump on me and hug me. At first, people had stigmas about me as a Druze, but now we have a really strong connection.

**Ruth:** The kids sit on the steps of our apartment building and wait for me to come home from class. They tell me how their day was, who fought with whom, all the "juice". Every day, they knock on my door, asking to borrow some glue or a cup of sugar or just to say hi to my dog, Toto. He's the local rock star!



Each student teaches a class or runs a club for neighborhood children, youth, or adults. These classes meet in the students' apartments, in the neighborhood bomb shelter, the community center, or outdoors, in playgrounds. The students might lead their building committee or community garden; run an afterschool homework help club; and teach anything from community theater, sports, yoga, and dance to cooking and healthy living, arts and crafts, chess, and games.

**Gai:** I teach English to a group of girls and try make it fun for them with games. Sometimes they bring their little brothers and sisters to the club. I can't just send them away, because I know their parents won't be home all day.

**Sujood:** I teach a women's exercise class and give residents advice on how to eat healthier and stay fit. It was hard to do during corona.

**Areen:** I teach Hebrew to Bedouin women. They really want to learn and get out of the house. They never miss a class! They say I make them feel more independent. We don't just practice Hebrew. We learn how to get on the bus, go to the bank or the doctor, buy a cup of coffee. The women in my class are becoming more confident and some have started looking for a job.

# My Adopted Family (Mishpacha)

Every student is paired with a neighborhood family (who might be senior citizens or single parents). Strong bonds are formed, and they often become enduring relationships that last long after the students graduate and move away.

**Gai:** My adopted sister Adel is eight years old. She has a lot of responsibilities caring for her younger siblings. We meet at my apartment, a place where she can be free and just have fun. We practice reading together and bake cookies. We go on walks in the neighborhood and eat ice cream. She shows me all the short cuts.

**Ruth:** My adopted parents are an older couple, originally from Tunisia. They are constantly feeding me! Even if I stop by to visit at eight am, my Yasmina always makes me blintzes! It's hard for them to walk long distances, so we go grocery shopping together every week. They told me they weren't planning to vote in the last elections, but I convinced them to come and vote with me and we all voted together.

**Areen:** My adopted father always calls after I have an exam to ask how it went and worries when I come home late at night. He calls me "Dr. Areen". When I say I'm not actually a doctor yet, he says, well, to me you are!

**Sujood:** My adopted family lives in a tiny apartment and there's not enough room there for beds for their five kids. I meet my adopted mother in the evenings, and I help her write letters to the municipality asking for help in moving to a bigger apartment. She says I'm a big help in dealing with bureaucracy.



# In the Community

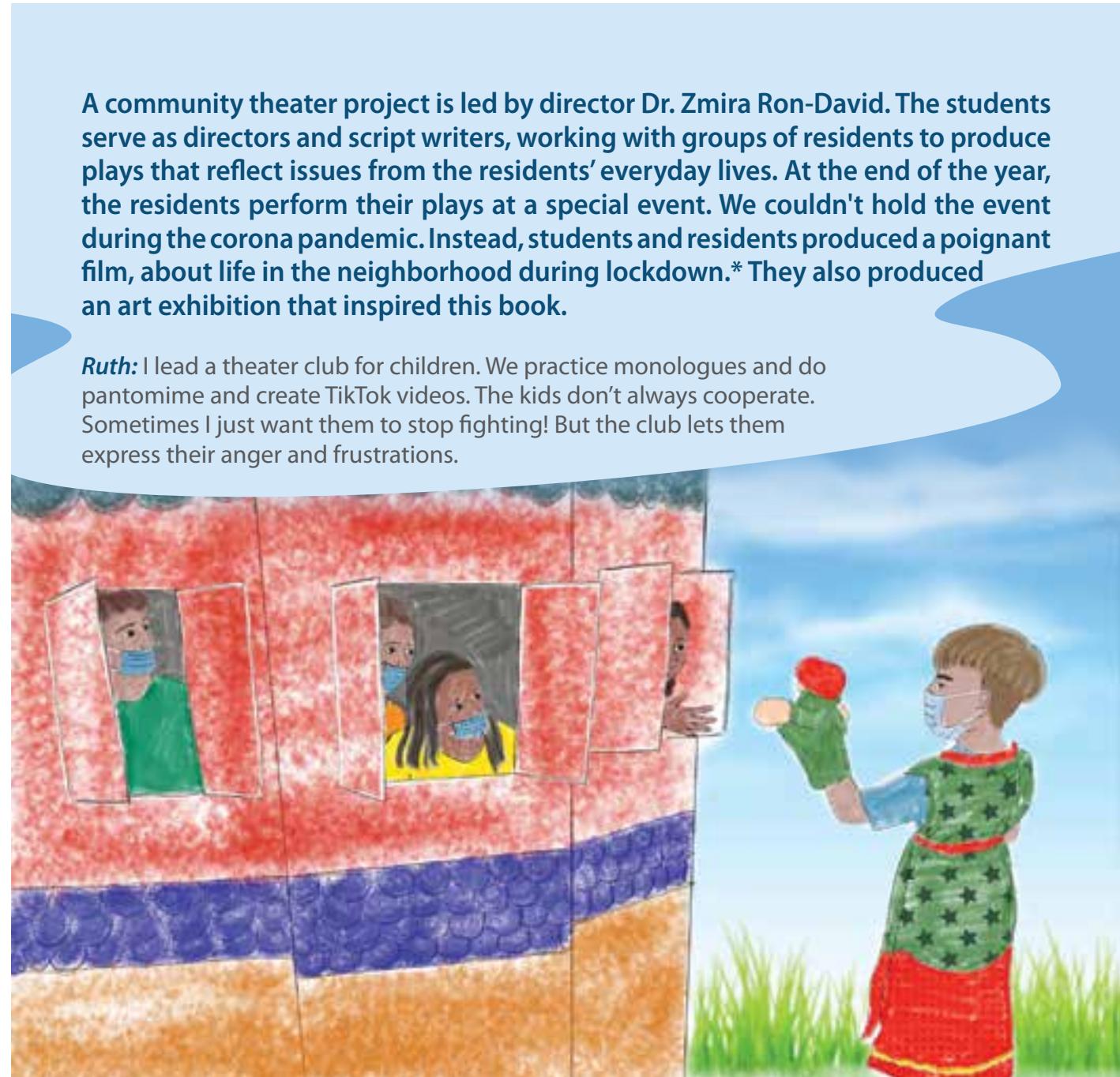
The Open Apartments Program stages a variety of community events to enrich the residents' lives and bring them joy. These include a big Purim party, the annual Passover house painting drive, summer camp activities, and more.

**Sujood:** On Purim this year, we weren't sure if we could hold the party because of the coronavirus. But we went to the kids' houses and brought them gifts and candy. Just seeing them smile felt great!

**Ruth:** Our team painted two apartments before Passover. We're not professional painters, but we did our best and the owners were so happy!

**Yarin:** Summer camp was very meaningful. It was an opportunity for the kids to set their screens aside for a few days and enjoy real life, fun activities and special experiences.





\* Watch the film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqASLQda7Ns>

# Summer Day Camp

Every year, the program provides summer activities for neighborhood children. Accompanied by students, the children participate in activities such as visits to the science park, the zoo, museums, and the cinema. They get to enjoy adventures, nature hikes, arts and crafts, and more. The children really look forward to this fun-filled program, which takes place when other programs have ended and the children have nothing to do.

*Yarin:* I loved watching the neighborhood kids at summer camp. They were so full of enthusiasm, curiosity, and joy! We went on field trips to places they had never been before, that their parents couldn't afford, like the science center and amusement parks. As soon as we arrived, their faces lit up!





**You Get What You Give**

The Lillian and Larry Goodman Open Apartments Program provides a framework for meaningful community-social action, a "new family," based on strong bonds between the students themselves and between the students and their neighbors. It also creates a cadre of high-quality students who contribute to society, while heightening their social sensitivity and awareness and providing them with scholarships to help them financially.

**Shady:** The students in the program love giving to others. Watching them kick a ball around with the neighborhood kids, letting them have fun and just be kids – it's inspiring.

**Yarin:** The program taught me to accept people who are different from me. There's a single mother in our neighborhood who has four children living with her and another in foster care. At first, I was very critical of her. But then I discovered that she's very diligent and tries her best to support her family. I tell her that she should be proud of herself.

**Sujood:** This program showed me that some people have much more difficult lives than mine. Their children don't even have beds or toys, and still, they try to teach their children to be decent and kind people.

**Areen:** This program taught me to look around and see other people and their needs. People don't always come up to you and tell you their problems. Now I'm more sensitive to what they're going through. My experience in the program will definitely help me be a better doctor.

**Ruth:** I used to think that when people don't succeed, it's their own fault. I would think to myself, just go get a job! But now I know that if you grow up with nine siblings, like my neighbors, and your father is in jail and your mother works all day, you simply don't have the same starting point as other people do. Leaders need to reach out to those who are less fortunate – it's the only way to make the world better.

**Gai:** I learned how to approach people in complex situations with more acceptance and humility. Now I understand that you can't always change the world. Sometimes, it's enough to just be a bright spot in someone's day.

# We Need you!



*From left to right:* Top row - Yarin, Gai, Toto, Ruth. Bottom row - Sujood, Areen, Shady, Elad.

**To keep this amazing and important program going,  
we need your help!**

To support the Lillian and Larry Goodman Open Apartments Program,  
please contact the BGU Associates organization in your country

[https://in.bgu.ac.il/en/associates/Pages/Worldwide\\_Associates.aspx](https://in.bgu.ac.il/en/associates/Pages/Worldwide_Associates.aspx)



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