

Helping Repair the World

One USYer's incredible effort for victims of terror

by Emily Dubois, *New Frontier*

I am Emily Dubois and am Palo Alto USY's Social Action/Tikun Olam Vice President, from the New Frontier region. I began the "1.5 Million Penny Drive" on July 31, 2002, in response to a terrorist attack that killed nine people at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. When I visited my Israeli relatives in 1999, I felt truly connected to the country. The terrorist attack ignited a fear for my family's safety, and I decided to raise money for the families of Israeli victims of terror. I chose 1.5 million, because that is the number of children who perished in the Holocaust. I have grown up hearing about my relative's struggle and miraculous escape to freedom in Israel - by hiding from the Nazis in haystacks and walking miles in the snow without shoes. Linking the terrorism of this century with the unimaginable horrors of the past made sense to me.

At first, I wondered how I could possibly gather 1.5 million pennies (\$15,000). I started by putting ads in temple bulletins, transporting jugs and flyers, emailing congregants and making phone calls over the Bay Area. I began to realize how difficult raising this money was going to be.

After a few months of hard work, I started to get community support. Over twenty temples and



Jewish day schools became involved. Religious school children competed to collect coins, and rabbis spread the word from their pulpits. Mollie Stones market waived the Coinstar coin counting fee so I can guarantee to donors that every penny goes to the victims. Last spring the San Jose Mercury news and Jewish Bulletin helped by running articles on the drive. Due to syndication, letters of thanks and donations came in from all over the U.S., and now the "1.5 Million Penny Drive" is national. A girl, who read about the drive in her newspaper, is collecting coins in Ohio.

So far I have collected over \$11,000 and sent out \$9,000 to victims of terror. The bags and jugs of coins, dollars, and checks got heavy but the hardest part was finding a way to be sure that the money collected would go directly to the victims without an intermediary organization collecting fees or keeping some of the money for

themselves. The answer to this is the ZIV Tzedakah Fund in New Jersey. They help me locate families in need and deliver funds directly to those I select.

I have a file on everyone the drive has helped. Most of the people were poor before the terrorist attacks and the added burden of disability made their situations almost hopeless. One man who is American immigrated to Israel and due to a bus bombing is now a quadriplegic. He is too proud to accept charity, so I get the money to him anonymously through his wife's bank account. One woman's husband is brain damaged from a suicide bomb attack. She uses the money to pay long-overdue rent and buy food and other necessities for her family of nine. Another man was a famous Israeli artist; after multiple terrorist attacks on his family he became severely depressed and suicidal. I helped him by contributing money towards a computer and music program so he can record in his home and have a diversion from his nightmares.

I hope that you will join me in this incredible effort to "repair our world". □

Editor's Note: If your USY chapter would like to contribute to the Penny Drive, please write in "1.5 Million Penny Drive" under "Your Local Tzedakah" on the Tikun Olam Allocations Form.

*Bein Adam l'Haveiro (בין אדם לחברו) is Hebrew for "for one another"