

# 'We are trying to bring the world together'

Volunteers from around the globe help Jerusalem's needy children at DVI clinic

**BY STACIE CROZIER**

*Jerusalem*—In a melting pot city where thousands of indigent children lack access to oral health care, the Dental Volunteers for Israel Trudi Birger Dental Clinic has spent 30 years focusing on its mission: "To prevent suffering of Jerusalem's indigent children and youth—of all ethnic and religious backgrounds—from physical and psychological pain by providing quality dental care and oral health education."

All qualified children ages 5-18 can find a dental home in the free clinic that is staffed with Israeli pediatric dentists and team members, plus a constant rotation of international dentist volunteers. Since its founding, the clinic has treated more than 20,000 children.

Jerusalem's Social Welfare Service and at-risk youth centers refer patients to the clinic. According to Israeli government statistics, some 200,000 Jerusalem children live in poverty.

Before receiving treatment, children and their parents must participate in a preventive health care program provided on-site by the dental hygienists to learn about oral health and how to care for



**Successful practice model:** Dr. Susan Gross, shown with a DVI patient, admires the continuity of care the clinic is able to offer its patients.



**Smiles:** Dr. Michael Goldberg and a DVI patient pause for a photo before treatment begins.

patients without consideration of cost constraints. Our clinic brings the whole world of

visits, or they can't continue as patients there. The model stresses continuity of care and all kids

children and families, showing a dental health education video and passing out toothbrushes, while



600 children and parents each month.

In 2009 the clinic provided 13,411 treatments for 3,353 children with the help of its staff and 141 volunteer dentists. DVI is also an authorized training facility for pediatric dentistry residents from Hebrew University, and about four residents switch out quarterly each year to serve pediatric dentistry rotations in the clinic.

Volunteer dentists treat patients five days a week for one to four weeks and pay their own transportation costs to and from Jerusalem. DVI supplies them with housing for themselves and a couple of guests or family members. Volunteers can use Fridays and Saturdays for sightseeing and vacation time. DVI staff members help volunteers to obtain a temporary license to practice in the clinic.

"We make it easy for dentists around the world to come and volunteer," said Michelle Levine, DVI's director of international relations and development. "Everything is ready for them. All they need to do is come and focus on the dentistry. There are no concerns, no paperwork, and they can provide optimal care for our

Since it was founded in 1980, the clinic has drawn more than 4,500 dentist volunteers—more than half non-Jewish—from 34 countries in North and South America, Europe, Africa and New Zealand. Support from charitable donations comes from around the globe and finances about 95 percent of the clinic's budget.

"A lopsided percentage of the free clinic's budget is composed of in-kind donations (which must be legally recorded in DVI's budget), such as the time of volunteer dentists, as well as clinic supplies, which are primarily donated by Henry Schein Cares and other philanthropic companies like Premier USA," said Ms. Levine. "Thanks to this combined effort of dentists, industry leaders and private donors, DVI is such a cost-efficient nonprofit organization that every dollar donated makes an incredible impact."

"I get a little twang before I go," says Dr. Susan Gross, a general dentist in suburban Minneapolis who has made four trips to volunteer at the DVI clinic. "This clinic has such an interesting model. Patients and parents have a big responsibility to keep up with oral care between

in one of the most volatile parts of the world, and it's very fulfilling to be a part of it."

Dr. Gross, who is Jewish, says she learned about the clinic from a Christian colleague who regularly volunteers there. "I know a little bit of Hebrew and I like to practice it when I'm there," she says. "The kids laugh at me when I make mistakes. I also enjoy exploring the cultural and religious activities there during my free time."

At home, Dr. Gross also teaches part time at the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry, working with residents in the general practice residency program. Her volunteer efforts in Minneapolis include serving on the dental board, the alumni association and the Give Kids A Smile committee.

"I know you don't have to get on a plane to help provide access to dental care. There's a lot we can do in our own communities," Dr. Gross added. "But at the DVI clinic, you're not involved in a short-term program. You're not just doing extractions or working in temporary facilities. You can immerse yourself in providing care. You're not wasting time and resources, because the staff here is organized and the program is well established. Volunteers can provide high-quality care and the children get continuity of care, no matter who is volunteering when they come to the clinic."

For the past eight years, Dr. Orice Z. Helmer Jr., a general dentist in Fort Worth, Texas, has observed a new tradition in celebrating Christmas—volunteering at the DVI clinic.

"I saw a little notice in the ADA News about 15 years ago," said Dr. Helmer, "asking for volunteer dentists to travel to Jerusalem. I cut it out and stuck it in a drawer and forgot about it. But it came to the surface again and I called. I explained that my office was usually closed for the Christmas holidays so that would be a good time for me to go, and they put me on the schedule."

Now, he and his wife Brenda make the two-week trip every year. Brenda helps DVI staff with the preventive program activities, gathering chil-

clinic.

"We have a big family gathering at Thanksgiving, but once we get on the plane for Israel, we are in work mode," said Dr. Helmer. "As Christians, we feel that because Jesus served others while he was on earth, he would support us helping children on Christmas day."

The Helmers will visit Israel twice this year, he added. "Since we've begun volunteering for DVI, we've made a lot of friends in Israel. In August, two of our friends are getting married, so we are going to attend the wedding. I told the clinic I could help out while I'm there, so I will be a back-up dentist if they need help."

Dr. Robin Katzman, a general dentist in Orlando, Fla., said from the time she graduated from dental school she knew she wanted to volunteer in Israel.

"After establishing a practice and raising a family, I was finally able to go for the first time in 2003," said Dr. Katzman. "It was a great fit for me because at least half the patients in my practice are children. I was doing exactly what I like to do."

Now preparing for her seventh trip this month, Dr. Katzman said her volunteer experiences "pick me up professionally and spiritually. My patients at home really love that I do this. It makes them feel good about their dentist and about dentistry in the U.S."

Volunteering for DVI, said Dr. Michael Goldberg, a Manhattan dentist, former dental educator and vice president of the American Friends of DVI, helps give him a broader perspective about international relations.

"I've been volunteering for DVI since 1984, and I have worked with dentists from all over the world," said Dr. Goldberg. "Last year, I worked with dentists from Norway, Finland and Chile. The clinic brings dentists from all over the world to treat children of all backgrounds. What we are trying to accomplish is not just helping children's oral health. We are trying to bring the world together—something that in Judaism we refer to as 'tikkun olam,' a phrase that means 'repairing

## Dr. Silverstein receives Trudi Birger award

Dr. Irvin Silverstein, La Mesa, Calif., received the 2009 Trudi Birger Award for volunteerism from the Alpha Omega international dental fraternity.

The award is named in honor of Trudi Birger, a Holocaust survivor and founder of the Dental Volunteers for Israel free clinic in Jerusalem, which treats children of all faiths and nationalities, ages 5-18. (See story, this page.) Ms. Birger was an honorary member of Alpha Omega.

Dr. Silverstein received the award in recognition of his exemplary volunteer efforts.

Since 2003, he has served as the dental advisor/director for the University of California San

Diego Student-Run Free Dental Clinic Project, which operates three clinics that provide care for the underserved in San Diego county. He also advises the UCSD Pre dental Society, and has mentored more than 275 undergraduate students who are now dental students or dental school graduates. He coordinates opportunities for pre-dental students to participate in humanitarian programs outside the San Diego clinics as well.

For the past five years, Dr. Silverstein has assisted the U.S. Navy's humanitarian efforts by coordinating pre dental students, dentists and others in mission trips to Central America, India and Southeast Asia aboard Navy ships like the USNS Mercy and Comfort hospital ships. ■



**Season of giving:** Dr. Otice Helmer and his wife Brenda have volunteered at the DVI clinic during Christmas week for the past eight years.



Dr. Alayyan



Dr. Katzman

the world.”

Dr. Goldberg is also a firm believer in the practical benefits volunteering can have on a dentist's career.

“I say the best practice management advice I can give a colleague is to volunteer. Giving your time away makes you feel more entitled. It keeps your enthusiasm up. It keeps you current and energized.”

Dr. Goldberg also spends time working to obtain charitable donations for the clinic through the American Friends of DVI. He is chair for the organization's international gala planned for November (See story, this page).

The clinic's mission has already come full circle, Dr. Goldberg added, since one of its past patients, a Palestinian from East Jerusalem, is now one of its volunteer dentists.

Dr. Nedal Alayyan, a patient from 1984-93, now practices dentistry in East Jerusalem and has volunteered in the clinic since 2006. His story is profiled in a DVI brochure available to donors, potential donors and volunteers.

“From my first day at the clinic, DVI dentists were so kind to me, so concerned with me personally, inquiring about me, rewarding me with a gift they'd brought from abroad to Israel,” said Dr. Alayyan. “From that moment, I knew I wanted to be a dentist—and especially to treat children with kindness and compassion, because children really need this extra level of care.”

“Today, I treat many patients with Down syndrome who are rejected by other clinics—having learned from DVI dentists how patience, kindness and a gentle touch makes a profound difference,” said Dr. Alayyan. “DVI dentists treat every child equally. Jewish dentists treated me with kindness. I will do the same with Jewish children. I learn to be a better dentist from so many dentists around the world—it's an experience I wouldn't trade for anything. I want to give back to DVI, but I end up still on the receiving end.”

More information on the DVI clinic is available at the website, “[www.dental-dvi.org.il](http://www.dental-dvi.org.il)”, and you can also find it on Facebook, YouTube and the ADA International Volunteer website.

To learn about other international dental volunteer opportunities visit the ADA International Volunteer website, “<http://internationalvolunteer.ada.org>” or contact the ADA Division of Global Affairs, 1-312-440-2726 or “[international@ada.org](mailto:international@ada.org)”.

—[croziers@ada.org](mailto:croziers@ada.org)

will also have the opportunity to add on a day trip with Zev Birger, husband of DVI founder Trudi Birger, and DVI staff.

Since Trudi died in 2002, the clinic has

conjunction with the Greater New York Dental Meeting.

“Our founder and inspiration was Trudi Birger, a Holocaust survivor who established the

happ  
For  
event  
ameri

More brawn than beauty

**BruxZir®**

SOLID ZIRCONIA CROWNS & BRIDGES

For more information,  
visit [www.bruxzir.com](http://www.bruxzir.com).



This patient fractured a porcelain all-ceramic crown on the second molar and chipped the first molar. Both crowns were replaced with BruxZir.

### Authorized BruxZir® Laboratories

LAB	LOCATION	PHONE	LAB	LOC
Albensi Laboratories	Irwin, PA	724-864-8880	New West Dental Ceramics	Lak
BDL Prosthetics	Irvine, CA	800-411-9723	Nichols Dental Lab	Gler
Dental Arts Laboratories, Inc.	Peoria, IL	800-227-4142	Noel Laboratories, Inc.	San
Dental Dynamics Laboratory	Arlington, TX	817-792-3000	Oral Arts Dental Laboratories, Inc.	Hun
Glidewell Laboratories	Newport Beach, CA	800-854-7256	Pacific Edge Dental Laboratories	Baja
Griffin Dental Laboratories, LLC	Louisville, KY	859-433-5247	Precision Ceramics Dental Lab	Mon
Keller Laboratories, Inc.	Fenton, MO	800-325-3056	Protec Dental Laboratories Ltd.	Vanc
KSH Ceramics	Rancho Cucamonga, CA	909-938-2883	Riverside Dental Ceramics	Rive
Las Vegas Digital Dental Solutions	Las Vegas, NV	800-936-1848	Smith-Sterling Dental Laboratories	Cost
MobileTek Labs	Bronx, NY	917-747-7519	Tooth Fairy Dental Lab	Find
New Image Dental Laboratory	Morrow, GA	800-233-6785		

BruxZir is made from translucent Prismatic Clinical Zirconia™. BruxZir is a registered trademark and Prismatic Clinical Zirconia is