

# DVI's NATIONAL PEDIATRIC RESIDENTS PROGRAM

## DVI's National Pediatric Residents Program – Now Providing Urgent Care to Ukrainian Refugees

By Michelle Levine

DVI is Israel's only recognized dental pediatric residency placement facility outside of its dental schools. Pediatric Residents have to do a certain number of hours treating special needs', abused and traumatized young patients, and under the supervision of a pediatric dentist who also is an instructor at one of the dental schools in Israel. Executive Director Dr Roy Petel, a board certified specialist in Pediatric Dentistry and Professor of Pediatric Dentistry at Hadassah School of Dental Medicine, worked to expand DVI's Residents' Program in recent years. In 2019, Dr. Petel recruited Tel Aviv University's School of Dental Medicine. In early 2021 he came to an agreement with the Galilee Medical Center, and in August 2021, when Sheba (Tel HaShomer) Medical Center opened its new program of Pediatric Dentistry, Dr. Petel immediately came to an agreement with them, and they began sending their residents to DVI. Hebrew University's School of Dental Medicine (at Hadassah) also increased their rotations at DVI to twice a week during the pandemic. In July 2023, DVI came to an agreement to begin receiving residents from Barzilai Medical Center, which means that every hospital or university in Israel with a pediatric residents program is now sending their residents to DVI for part of their training! As a result, DVI now permanently has residents of Pediatric Dentistry in the clinic every day of operation. Through DVI, the young Israeli dentists are also learning patient management and dental techniques, standards and best practices from volunteer dentists from North America and around the world. These residents normally treat the most disadvantaged, abused and special needs youth in the greater Jerusalem area, but in early March 2022, they began having a greater global impact.

**Israeli Pediatric Residents Treating Ukrainians:** In 2022, with the sudden influx of Ukrainian refugees into Israel, DVI quickly built relationships formally and informally with the various individuals and groups (for example, Bridges for Peace, Keter and a dedicated social worker at Welfare Services) so that the clinic might assist them upon arrival and begin treating this population. Pediatric Residents worked the front lines, providing emergency dental care to Ukrainian refugees in pain. DVI adopted all the residents of the Chabad

Children's Home of Zhitomir, Ukraine (formerly at Nes Harim; now in Asheklon); this group continues to be treated at DVI after a donor paid for their transportation back to Jerusalem for care. In 2023, in addition to the DVI base (thousands of needy youth we already treat), Dental Volunteers for Israel is proud to be providing free dental care to a large number of Ukrainian Olim. In early 2023, DVI made inroads with the "Moked Klitah" (Absorption Center Hotline), the Municipality social worker in charge of Ukrainian Olim, and reached out to Rabbi David Abba, the equivalent at Chabad, who is based in Neve Ya'akov neighborhood of Jerusalem. Since many of these Ukrainian patients haven't seen a dentist before, the gentle approach of Pediatric Residents has been critical to their ability to participate and receive treatment.

On March 13th, 2022, Dental Volunteers for Israel received its first Ukrainian refugee patient, 4-year-old Feige, who would turn out to be the first of many in desperate need of emergency dental care. Feige has since been treated by multiple residents from several pediatric programs across the country, at DVI. Feige's family miraculously arrived in Israel from war torn Ukraine on March 9th. Living in Uman, the family was hoping to be able to ride out the storm, as Mrs. Goodrich was almost nine months pregnant. Once the Russians invaded and bombs hit just two hundred meters from their home, the Goodrich family felt they could not wait any longer. The rabbi of their community arranged transport for the Goodrich parents and their two children ages two and four, and the family took their place on the back of a truck. The driver made a sudden stop, sending the very pregnant Mrs. Goodrich flying. She refused to be taken to a hospital; got a few stitches on her forehead and continued the trek with her family. The Goodrichs managed to cross over to Hungary and arrived in Israel after a harrowing journey. Once the military incursion began, she suffered from so much oral pain, that the family managed to get her dental first aid. Unfortunately, this not only didn't alleviate the problem but created an additional trauma for the child. Upon landing in Israel, one of the first things this family searched for was dental care for Feige. This was critical since the child had been unable to eat any solid foods as a result of her situation. After being examined by Dr. Petel, the medical director who does all initial examinations, and a full set of X-rays, the extent of her dental needs became

apparent. In addition to multiple cavities, Feige needed a number of extractions, crowns, a root canal which was done at the first visit by pediatric resident Dr. Nuran Chalillah (pictured below) to alleviate the source of her pain and ultimately the application of sealants and an oral hygiene program. Mrs. Goodrich could not express her appreciation in words, and their escort was so impressed with the child-friendly approach and quality of care that she wished her own children could be treated here. **Dr. Eli Keinan, a Hadassah Resident** treated Feige and several other refugee children who struggled to cooperate: *"I feel it is a privilege to treat the recently arrived Ukrainian refugees, especially since I speak their language. Given their heightened anxiety, the fact that I can communicate with them directly, I am able to encourage and reassure them. My grandmother was a refugee from Ukraine during World War II. Treating these refugees today makes me feel like I am closing the cycle."*



**Dr. Nuran Chalilla, Tel Aviv Dental School Resident, treated Feige:**

*"Every time I see DVI on my schedule, it puts a smile on my face," said Dr. Chalillah. "It feels good to help children who are living through such difficult things." "Treating the Ukrainian children presents a unique communication problem. I rely on verbal communication to allay the fears of children, and with these patients I can only use hand motions and other*

approaches. This was particularly apparent when I treated a young boy who was both blind, deaf and Ukrainian. I felt so helpless in trying to explain to him and I could feel his anxiety as he tried to make sense of what was going on around him. It was a special learning experience and an especially good feeling when we successfully completed his treatment."

**Hadassah Resident Dr. Ofek Mishael** is pictured here treating Sergei, a patient who was bussed to DVI from the Chabad Children's Home in Ashkelon. "At DVI I encountered and treated populations and sectors which I would not otherwise have come in contact with. I felt a sense of 'mission' in that I was helping individuals who would not have had access to help otherwise, and with the assistance of an outstanding and dedicated team of staff members and the high quality dental supplies, I felt that I was able to provide the best care available today."

**Tel Aviv Resident Dr. Deia Altarescu** is pictured here treating Rotislav Donunko, a Ukrainian boy from a family who fled to Israel. They were referred to DVI by the Chabad Rabbi in Neve Ya'akov.\*

**Dr. Amar Taha, a Tel HaShomer Sheba Medical Center resident, photographed here with Noad, an Ethiopian patient:** When Sheba Medical Center's pediatric dental medicine specialty opened in the summer of 2021, Dr. Amar Taha was one of the four dentists accepted to this new program. As his first rotation, Dr. Taha requested to be placed at DVI because of all the wonderful things he heard from his colleague and friend Dr. Firhas Khalily, who volunteered at DVI regularly throughout the pandemic. Dr. Taha's first day at DVI was very busy and presented him with many challenges, especially the 'fear factor' of children who had bad experiences before coming to DVI. "I love to work with patients who start out being afraid, because it gives me a chance to show them that dental work doesn't have to be scary. At the end of the day, when these same patients tell me that it didn't hurt at all and they are all smiles, I feel like I did something worthwhile," said Dr. Taha. Thirty-one-year-old Dr. Amar Taha lives in Kfar Qassem. He got his dental degree in Italy, but after six years of study and work he returned to Israel to build his professional life in his own country. Amar believes in the supreme importance of being able to communicate with his patients. To this end, in addition to speaking

Hebrew, Arabic and English, he learned Italian and then Spanish when he was an exchange student in Grenada. Now back in Israel, he has learned enough Yiddish and Russian to be able to communicate on a basic level with his patients and he's hoping to improve those language skills as well so that he will be able to communicate with all his patients. Amar has always been active in building bridges and being a contributing member of society. At age sixteen he participated in the Peace Child of Israel program where he served as an Arab representative together with an Israeli counterpart in a delegation to the United States. Now fifteen years later he is still in touch with his friends from the US of all faiths. Even during his demanding years in dental school in Italy, Amar put together a small group of dentists who on their free time volunteered to treat those in need. Not surprising once you get to know him, at the end Dr. Taha's first day as a pediatric dental resident at DVI, he offered to volunteer during his free time on another, since he was so impressed with the clinic's work. "When you can look back on the day and feel like you made a difference in someone's life, it was a successful day." In line with this attitude, Dr. Taha dreams of becoming a successful pediatric dentist, however in his own words, that means "contributing something good to the world."

**Dr. Milly Binyamin, a Hadassah Resident, photographed here with Tal Alafi:**

**Milly Binyamin** came to DVI as a first-year pediatric dental student assigned to DVI for her residency rotation. She worked at DVI weekly for one shift in March and April and returned to complete the rotation during the months of July and August. "As a student, we are exposed to a wide range of instructors each with their own perspectives. At DVI I am being supervised by one doctor, so I am getting a single clear message which is very helpful as a student still in the learning process."

"When working at Hadassah's dental clinic, we have access to many different types of sedations and anesthesia whereas at DVI we must rely on our own skills and knowledge of behavior management and the like. This has really pushed me to develop various tools of working with difficult children and I appreciate that a lot."

"One patient was extremely difficult at his

initial visit. He had a lot of work, and I was privileged to treat him over an extended period of time. By his last visit, he was completely calm, cooperative, and unfazed by anything I needed to do. This was a very satisfying experience – seeing the relationship and trust build with the patient and his growth in managing treatment. It was also a very gratifying experience for me to see how the techniques I had learned and practiced worked so well."

"The staff is amazing! The outside of the clinic is so misleading – an old building conceals a most advanced clinic. The dental materials used are of the highest quality and the equipment is cutting edge. What a great place to learn!"

"In my work, I feel I am ultimately helping my patients maximize their potential as a result of the high quality dental care they receive here."

**Dr. Firhas Khalaly, a Tel HaShomer Resident, photographed here with Yifat Ezra:**

Firhas describes his experience at DVI "as extraordinarily rewarding," explaining "that with the supervision and new techniques he has learned here, he is often able to treat a child who would otherwise be put under general anesthesia," something he believes should not be done when there are other options.

**Dr. Rotem Dadon, a Hadassah resident, photographed here, treating Feige.**

**Dr. Maria Ahmad, a Hadassah resident,** is pictured here, treating Angelica. Coming from a divorced family, Angelica, her twin sister Dalia and ten-year-old sister were all residents of the Children's Home in Zhitomir, since her mother was unable to provide for them. One morning when she was outside, "I heard a plane overhead and then the booms started. I was so scared and ran inside, not sure where my sisters were. I ran downstairs, as far below ground level as possible." As the situation worsened, bus transport was arranged for all of the children and they made it safely to Israel, leaving behind everyone dear to them. "I speak to my mother. She said the 'booming' usually begins in the evening where she lives, and then she runs to a cellar behind her building. My father is fighting in the war." Despite her smile, her anxiety is evident. Angelica and her sisters are among the first to have come to DVI from Nes Harim orphanage for treatment because of the oral pain they were experiencing. It is quite

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clear that these girls had not seen a dentist for years. The initial checkup and X-Rays showed that extensive dental work was needed. Some teeth needed to be extracted; others needed a root canal. Of course, there were cavities to be filled and sealants to be applied. The girls will get some serious oral hygiene education together with oral hygiene treatments. DVI is doing everything to save as many of their teeth as possible. These youngsters have so much pain in their lives, at least DVI can alleviate their oral pain and enable them to enjoy the simple pleasures of food once again. Dr. Maria Ahmad is pictured here with NJ dentist Dr. Dena Lieblich Angelica, and her sister Dalia. Dr. Ahmad was touched to have the chance to treat Ukrainian Refugee children: *"Treating the refugee children from the Ukraine was a very special experience, and an added value of doing a resident rotation at DVI,"* said Dr. Maria Ahmad. *"All the children I treated were terrified when they first came in. Apparently, in addition to the recent trauma of war and fleeing, these children had also been traumatized by the dental treatment they received in the Ukraine. I was amazed to hear how in some cases they were physically restrained, no anesthetics were used, and overall, they felt that the dentists there didn't listen to them when they needed a break during the treatment because of pain."* Maria explained how she had never had such an emotional treatment experience before. *"It was essential to engage these children in the treatment process. I therefore explained every step of the process in great detail to their counselor who in turn patiently relayed the information to the children. Once they understood what would happen and they saw that I would listen to them, they cooperated very nicely, and I was able to treat them."* Dr. Ahmad said, *"I will never forget having had the privilege of treating traumatized children who were in such desperate need of emergency dental care."*

After volunteering with DVI throughout the entire pandemic through DVI's Arab Advancement Program, Maria received a recommendation from DVI directors, and on May 30th, 2021, on a day she was in the clinic volunteering at DVI, Dr. Ahmad was accepted to the pediatric specialty program at Hebrew University's Hadassah School of Dental Medicine!

Pediatric Residents really helped keep DVI open throughout the pandemic. You might think DVI patient numbers would have

fallen drastically during the pandemic, but no - despite lockdowns in Israel, in 2020 DVI dentists treated 1,946 youth and 138 elderly, **and in 2022, DVI treated 2,307 youth and 114 elderly.** The main source of new volunteer dentists from March 2020 through January 2022 (when non-citizens could not freely enter Israel) was through the heavily expanded Residents' Training Program at DVI. These residents feel very good about being able to do tzedaka while doing their residency rotation. As **Shiri Lapidus Levy**, from the Tel Aviv University's School of Dental Medicine, states: *"As a pediatric dental resident, I was privileged to be able to take part in a meaningful and significant project - to contribute and help children, who without DVI, would not receive dental care. All of this was done within a supportive, teaching, professional and all-encompassing professional framework without compromising the quality of care. This is an important opportunity for every dentist as part of their professional life."*

Thus the Residents' Program is truly a win-win for DVI and for dentistry in Israel. According to Dr. Petel, *"Growing DVI's Pediatric Residents' Training Program raises awareness of DVI among Israeli dentists, which is important for local volunteer recruitment. It also elevates DVI's prestige among the Israeli dental community, while giving back to the community by properly training new pediatric dentists to be able to perform restorative dentistry on special needs and at-risk children and youth without sedation or general anesthesia."*

**The Dunonka family** fled their home in Zaporizhzhia as soon as the war broke out. They asked the paternal grandmothers who are still alive if they would join them, however, these two women felt they were too old to begin anew in another country, and so they remained in the Ukraine. Being responsible for their family of five children, the Donunko parents felt they had to do everything possible to protect their children, so they got into their car and drove to Chernobyl immediately. Even though driving was dangerous, the road was packed with vehicles. They decided to take an alternate roundabout route hoping to make it to safety and upon reaching their destination they boarded a bus which transported them to Bucharest, Romania. There the Jewish Agency arranged for their travel to Israel. They arrived in Israel in March of 2002 - it was quite an ordeal.



They are in the process of getting citizenship, however since Mrs. Donunko was adopted, a fact she only learned about in 2021. This situation is complicating their Aliyah as she needs to prove her Jewishness. The good news is that her birth mother is Jewish and immigrated to Israel twenty years ago.

The Donunkos have five children ranging in age from seven to eighteen. The two oldest children are completing their schooling via zoom with classes from the Ukraine, and the three younger ones are in school in Israel. Mrs. Donunko was delighted to bring her children in for checkups, as they haven't seen a dentist since they left the Ukraine in early 2022. They were referred to DVI by one of the many community agencies working with new Olim from the Ukraine.

After initial checkups and x-rays, the children will receive the full gamut of treatments - each one with their own personalized treatment plan. Justin who is ten will have a cavity filled and an oral hygiene treatment; Stephanie who is eight needs a number of crowns, has a few cavities, will have sealants and of course an oral hygiene and instruction workshop; Rostislav who is seven needs a number of crowns, has a few cavities, need an extraction and of course he will also have an oral hygiene and instruction workshop. Mrs. Donunko is extremely appreciative of all the professional services and kindness shown to her family at DVI, and she is amazed that her children were all able to participate properly in treatment, but this was possible because of the gentle approach of DVI's pediatric residents.



Dr Eli Keinan - pediatric resident from Hadassah with Ukrainian refugee Feige Goodrich



Dr. Petel instructing Dr. Binyamin



Feige and Dr. Rotem Zechariyah Dadon



Professor Gideon Holan teaching Hadassah Resident Dr. Milly Binyamin



Resident Dr. Michelle Ofek with Sergei Kanayev



Rostislav Donunko being treated by Dr. Diah



Tel HaShomer, Sheba Resident Dr. Taha learning from Dr. Luria



Tel Aviv Resident Dr. Shiri Lapidus Levy with patient Elli