

Myisrael giving 100%, all of the time

• ARNIE DRAIMAN

Did you ever think that when giving *tzedaka* (charity funds) you might be committing a crime? Jewish tradition teaches that *tzedaka* money always belongs to the recipient, and we are the trusted guardians. And if we give the funds away in such a manner that the recipient isn't getting his or her full share, then we are the ones responsible for the missing money!

In March 2008, Danni Franks, a then-recent immigrant from London, instinctively understood this: Most nonprofits spend too much money on overhead, administration, fundraising and other non-program items. Franks wanted to create a meaningful way to connect donors with small inspirational causes in Israel which had previously fallen under their radar. The idea was that it should be simple and direct, something without much bureaucracy or overhead, and which would allow donors to truly understand the impact of their support.

This venture, says Franks, "was a far cry from my previous life in media marketing for SKY TV and Disney, but I haven't looked back since."

And now, after educating and guiding donors in the UK for the past 12 years, Myisrael has become an official nonprofit giving platform in Israel for these under-the-radar causes, allowing Israelis to donate in shekels, as well.

Israel has more than 10,000 active nonprofits, suggesting that only a few, and usually only the very large ones, ever get noticed.

Most of the Myisrael recipient organizations have annual budgets of less than four million shekels, with many under one million, giving donors the opportunity to support Israeli nonprofits (*amutot*) and causes which would otherwise go overlooked.

Each year, Myisrael highlights 18 carefully selected nonprofits from many different sectors in Israeli society that are helping vulnerable people from all cultural backgrounds break cycles of poverty, abuse and isolation. The selection process is what makes Myisrael stand out. Organizations are thoroughly vetted, reviewing financial documents, program and management staff, their overall effectiveness, and efficiency with precious *tzedaka* shekels. The idea is based on Danny Siegel's Ziv Tzedaka Fund and the *mitzvah* heroes who founded and run the nonprofits.

In addition, the staff of Myisrael provides expert guidance and mentoring to these causes, to ensure that 100% of every shekel received generates opportunities for maximum impact. I personally have had a hand in helping the Myisrael staff become better professionals at what they do. I have worked with Franks and Eli Rudolph, the projects

director, since the outset. I can attest to the due diligence and forensic accounting accomplished for all recipients, bar none. This means that each donor can be confident that they are supporting an honest and efficient cause that's making a big impact on lives in Israel.

Franks explains about how meaningful each and every donation is. She points this out, saying, "At Myisrael, every single donation truly makes an impact. I have watched a 12-year old child receive dental treatment for the first time and heard his relief that he is no longer in pain or embarrassed to open his mouth. His treatment cost NIS 140.

"I have witnessed the impact of art and drama therapy on Etai. He's nine years old and has autism. His therapy sessions cost just NIS 100 each. And this gave him the confidence to share his worries and fears for the first time. I feel very proud of my team and our achievements to date. We've achieved so much and now it's all about giving Israelis the chance to have the same opportunities."

To date, Myisrael has transformed thousands of lives in Israel via more than 50 nonprofits with donations exceeding NIS 40 million.

At a recent event in Tel Aviv marking the opening of Myisrael in Israel, featuring Lior Suchard, it was clear that Israelis are very interested in this type of giving platform – no longer needing to worry about what will happen to their donation.

"Too many times, when going through the vetting process," says Rudolph, "we have discovered many issues.

And these issues were enough for us to take pause, and not support the organization." Franks and Rudolph further explain that the issues are often related to finances – not even the serious issue of stealing, but rather, just inefficient use of funds.

This can include very high salaries, lack of transparency, very large amounts of cash reserves, and more. According to Franks, there appears to be "a direct correlation between the size of the organization and their efficiency," namely, the larger the organization, the less fiscally efficient they become.

Franks has one piece of advice for everyone who donates to any organization: "Be as picky about who you support as we are." ■

For more information: myisraelcharity.org.

The writer is a philanthropic consultant helping people, philanthropists and foundations from around the world give their *tzedakah* money wisely, efficiently and effectively. He has worked in this field for more than 25 years. ajdrainan@gmail.com



TZEDAKAH BOX from Gate of Heaven Synagogue, India, mid-20th century. The box is inscribed in three languages: English, Hebrew and Marathi. (Wikimedia Commons)