



ELEM volunteers patrol cities every night to help youth at risk. (Eli Hershkovitz)

NGO to hold nationwide fund-raising drive ahead of Independence Day

• By DANIELLE ZHU

The NGO ELEM, which aims at assisting youth at risk in Israel, will be holding its nationwide annual flag fund-raising drive in celebration of Independence Day next month.

As ELEM marks its 30th anniversary, it has partnered with the fund-raising organization Igul Letova to invite the public to raise money for the NGO by ordering their credit card companies to round their purchases up by a few cents each time they buy something. The added amount, which comes to an average of 4 NIS a month, then goes to ELEM.

The flag operation varies each year. In one of the most publicized ones, three years ago ELEM installed a lit-up Israeli flag on the facade of one of the Azrieli buildings in Tel Aviv. In order to donate money, the public sent SMS messages to an indicated number, which would light up a piece of the flag.

"It gives people a chance to donate a very small amount, but it adds up," executive director of the NGO Efrat Shaprut told *The Jerusalem Post* on Thursday.

The organization, which operates in approximately 40 towns across the country, provides solutions to youth in distress in order to improve their life conditions and help them find their place back in society as contributing citizens.

ELEM runs a number of different programs, including, among others: a network of information and counselling centers for youth; multicultural programs for youth from various sectors of society; a program for the prevention and treatment of sexual violence among children and youth, as well as specific solutions for

girls at risk; an employment rehabilitation and mentoring program for juvenile delinquents and day centers for homeless young adults.

In addition, Shaprut explained, each night 15 teams of volunteers patrol in over 20 cities to help youth in danger.

"We are not waiting for them to come to us; we go to them," she said. "We go to places where young people go, like parks or night clubs. We try to be relevant to their needs and their situations."

Shaprut, who is a professional lawyer, got involved with the organization some 13 years ago, as she felt unsatisfied with her career choice and decided to go into the social sector.

"I feel very proud to be heading this organization," she said. "It's about taking young people who are at a very low place and have lost hope and pulling them back up, making them feel meaningful to themselves, making them believe in themselves."

According to Shaprut, in 90 of the cases encountered, the teenagers have difficult relationships with their parents, which she sees as the "source of most problems."

"As a mother I realized how important and meaningful this relationship is," she told the *Post*. "I have difficulties like everyone else, but working with these teens really puts things in proportions. I really feel I have gained something from doing this."

ELEM's flag operation began a few weeks ago and will continue throughout the year. The organization has launched a nationwide campaign to encourage Israelis to donate, but also hopes to attract funding from the business sector, which, according to Shaprut, has been a growing source of donations over the past few years.