

CASE STUDY 23

Masha

Living with rockets

Masha Rifkin of Newton, Massachusetts, was a volunteer at the Mishol social work office in the Israeli town of Sderot in 2007.

“The first Tzeva Adom (code red) Kassam rocket warning siren went off while I was across the street from my office... As usual, we stepped into the corridor – the safest place in the apartment building – and waited. I counted: 15, 14, 13... I had gotten to 12 when I heard the screams. It was a type of scream I couldn’t recognise, half laughter, half terror, complete madness: 11, 10... it hit. A block away at most. Everyone else raced outside; it wasn’t until 30 seconds later – when I woke from my daze – that I realised the screaming hadn’t stopped. I was about to join everyone outside when, once more, Tzeva Adom: 15, 14... I had barely reached 13 when it crashed, shaking my entire body – half a block away...

“Suddenly I heard [Masha’s boss] Natasha’s voice, ‘Masha, water! Hurry!’”

I ran outside and found a circle of women, Natasha at the centre, trying to comfort a young girl. Hyperventilating, choking on her tears, yelling for her mother, over and over again. Another “anxiety victim”. Natasha quickly poured cold water on the girl’s face, and embraced her. The girl clawed Natasha’s back and shoulders, leaving deep scratches. Eventually her breathing returned to normal, when it came again: Tzeva Adom, Tzeva Adom. The girl fell to the ground screaming, “No, no, no, no, no!”

Masha’s account is sourced from www.jpost.com.



Sderot

Sderot is an Israeli town of about 25,000 people near the border with Gaza.

“Our group of eight ecumenical companions stood in a mute semi-circle under the caved-in roof.”

An EA describing Sderot

Hamas fighters and other Palestinian militants have fired thousands of rockets at the town from Gaza. There is a warning siren, but this only gives 15 seconds to seek cover. Some bus shelters have been reinforced for protection.

According to the BBC, 28 Israelis had been killed by rockets up to the beginning of 2009. Many residents experience fear and trauma from the ongoing threat.

A defence system called ‘Iron Dome’ shoots down some but not all rockets. Israel has conducted large military operations and bombings in Gaza with the stated aim of stopping these rockets.