

**“From the miklat (bomb shelter)” – by Netzer Shnatties Jarrah Schlesinger, Ella Ronen and Joel Williamson**

It is safe to say that our decision to come to Israel in a post October 7 climate was met with mixed emotions from my community. Luckily for us, the extremely dedicated Netzer team in both Israel and Australia managed to put together a terrific Shnat program for us despite the obvious adversaries. As the smallest Shnat group for 30 years, we embarked on a mission around the country to further our understanding and commitment to Judaism and Zionism. To begin our year, we spent 3 months at the Machon in Jerusalem, hearing from educators and visiting key sites around Israel. This was followed by 2 months volunteering in Kibbutz Revivim alongside Habonim Dror, supporting the local cowshed and kindergarten. We then reunited with 6 of our fellow Kvutzah (group) members in the USA to experience American Jewry in the form of a Jewish summer camp. We learned about their culture and experiences, as well as sharing ours. Back in Israel, we ended the program volunteering on Project 10 - A program in Kibbutz Harduf that strives to find the bridge to humanity through teaching English in local Arab schools and building connections between Jews, Bedouins, Druze and Arabs.

With our program cut from twenty-two people to three following the war, us few who made the decision to come in January would quickly have our previous beliefs and values challenged and re-formed in so many different ways. It truly is a special time to be in Israel. Our consistent volunteering at Kibbutzim and food centres have an added value now - we feel like our efforts are really making a positive difference to this country going through difficult times. Our experiences living here have only strengthened our relationship with Israel, and the shocking rise of antisemitism back home seen through hateful protests, offensive chants and the vandalism of Jewish and Israeli property has consolidated our belief in the need for a Jewish state. Our time in Israel, despite the challenges since October 7th, has deepened our commitment to Judaism and Zionism. Witnessing the resilience here has reinforced our belief in the Jewish state's importance and strengthened our resolve to stand with Israel amid rising anti-Semitism.

From the miklat (bomb shelter): Jarrah Schlesinger, Ella, Joel (current participants in Netzer Shnat)