

SHARING

SINCE 1992

The Global Jewish Assistance and Relief Network Newsletter

Summer 1999

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Letter From the

There are many types of hardworking organizations out there. Some have strong public relations focuses, and others accomplish their goals quietly and without fanfare. Some have strong visibility, while others remain in the background.

The Global Jewish Assistance & Relief Network (GJARN) could fit any of these descriptions. Some time has passed since we last sent you a newsletter. It is not because of a lack of vitally important projects. Rather, it is

because we have simply been too busy working to be able to take off time to write about what we were accomplishing.

In Ukraine and other parts of the Former Soviet Union (FSU), Cuba, and elsewhere throughout the world, GJARN has clearly been very visible and very much in the press as we have gone about the business of feeding the hungry, providing medicine for the sick, and clothing those in need.

What has changed now is that we have added some new staff members who have taken on, among other responsibilities, that of seeing to it that we keep our friends well informed of the very extensive work we are doing. We hope you enjoy this issue of “Sharing” and all those

that will follow. After all, the work described here is made possible by the generosity, caring, and sharing of compassionate people like you.

Now for an update. Since our last newsletter was published, so very much has happened. We have successfully concluded several additional USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) food programs in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, distributing several thousand tons of food to more than two and a half million needy people.

We closed our Democracy programs in Kharkiv and Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. During the four years in which we had a special grant for this work, GJARN trained over 350 organizations in Civil Society, Fundraising, Advocacy, Management, Lobbying, Computers and the Internet, and more. Many of them are now self-sufficient and serving as mentors to others.

The first NGO (Non-Profit) Service Center was established in Kharkiv, Ukraine by GJARN, with funding from USAID and the local Soros/Renaissance Center. The first two nationwide federations for disabled children and their families were established with the help and ongoing guidance of GJARN, providing vital services for these particularly needy segments of the population.

We also sent young rabbinical students to Cuba where they



Rabbi Eliezer Avtzon, founder and Executive Director of GJARN.

Executive Director

hosted national holiday programs, a model Seder, a summer camp, and food distribution programs. In addition, two fully loaded 40 foot containers of donated pharmaceuticals and food packages were shipped there in order to help families in need.

Many volunteers, representing dozens of Jewish organizations working in the Former Soviet Union and elsewhere in the world received travel assistance with excess and overweight luggage. This special help from GJARN enabled Jewish communities in Singapore, Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Turkey, Spain, Morocco and throughout the Former Soviet Union to enjoy holidays with food and religious supplies brought from the U.S.

Hundreds of containers full of donated clothing, food and medicines were shipped and distributed throughout the FSU. Thousands of families continued to receive their regular food assistance from GJARN sponsored programs.

In this new newsletter, we will focus on our current programs

and what GJARN is doing today around the world, including our very latest project, the establishment of the exciting American Jewish Medical Center in

Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine.

Of course, we will always offer opportunities for you to become involved in this lifesaving work as well. Whether you are a doctor looking to help Jewish communities abroad, or to assist needy people right here at home, or whether you wish to organize a community clothing drive, there is a definite way each and every one of us can connect to the plight of our needy brethren anywhere and everywhere in the world.

In this spirit of “Sharing”, it is our intention to provide you with regular newsletters

so that whenever the time is right for you, GJARN will be there to provide that vital link to a needy person half way around the world — or right in your own backyard.

And remember, if you have any questions, suggestions, etc., we are always available to you. Just write or feel free to call our office. It would be my pleasure to speak with you. ❁



We hope you enjoy this issue of “Sharing” and all those that will follow. After all, the work described here is made possible by the generosity, caring, and sharing of compassionate people like you.

The American Jewish Medical

After years of observing the abysmal medical conditions in the Former Soviet Union, GJARN has undertaken the enormous task of establishing a state-of-the-art multi-functional medical center in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine which will serve that city and the surrounding area.

Medical care in the FSU is dismal at best. Hospitals often

lack the most essential supplies

and equipment. In many cases they do not have heat and in the cold months patients must wear winter clothing and coats as they shiver under thin blankets. It is important to keep in mind that winters in the FSU are severe with temperatures routinely dipping down to 30 degrees below zero. The cold in an unheated building in this climate can be bone-chilling and extremely dangerous.

linen, food and medicines. Exacerbating an already tragic situation is the fact that patients often even have to “pay” the State doctors and nurses to care for them and perform surgeries even though the Government guarantees free medical care for all its citizens.

Seeing this horrifying lack of proper medical care which complicates even further the lives of the families to whom we provide emergency food assistance, we made the far-reaching decision to initiate a medical center which would provide consistent, up-to-date care.

In keeping with our mandate to work with other organizations in order to maximize the care we provide, GJARN has established varying levels of partnership.

Primary among them is the close relationship we have developed with Drs. Steve Kutner and David Eisenberg of Project VISION, and Drs. Stephen Mackler and Robert Kreigsman, dental consultants with Jewish Health International. We are also working closely with the Boston Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), and the American Jewish Fellowship for Physicians in Israel. All of these individuals and organizations will provide important medical resources for this life-saving project.

In Dnepropetrovsk, GJARN



Renovation and construction taking place at GJARN's new medical center site.

lack the most essential supplies and equipment. In many cases they do not have heat and in the cold months patients must wear winter clothing and coats as they shiver under thin blankets. It is important to keep in mind that winters in the FSU are severe with temperatures routinely dipping down to 30 degrees below zero. The cold in an unheated building in this climate can be bone-chilling and extremely dangerous.

Surgeries often take place with outdated, inadequate equipment. Patients must more often than not supply their own

Center Will Fill a Life Saving Need

is in the process of establishing a Board consisting of representatives from all local Jewish organizations: the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Chesed Social Service Organization, the Jewish Community Center, and the local Synagogue. In addition, representatives from all major local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) will participate as well.

Physicians from Ukraine who will staff the new clinic are flown to the United States for special training at facilities such as: Massachusetts Eye and Ear, Harvard, Boston General, and the University of North Carolina Dental School.

The American Jewish Medical Center will provide care in the following areas:

- Optometry
- Ophthalmology
- Ear, Nose & Throat
- Family Dentistry
- Family Medicine
- Education in Nutrition and Preventive Care
- Education in Basic First Aid
- Pediatrics — linked to Boston JCRC clinic
- OB/GYN — linked to

In the FSU... patients must more often than not supply their own linen, food and medicines.

Boston JCRC clinic

- Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery
- Consultations via e-mail and Tel-Med for severe cases

The American Jewish Medical Center, which is going to change the face of medical care in

Ukraine and the surrounding areas and save lives that might otherwise be lost, is scheduled to open in early 2000. It is being established at a cost of over \$5,000,000. As a part of the USDA's monetization program, GJARN has received approximately \$1,000,000 towards this project.



Reviewing construction plans (from L -R) Dr. Robert Kreigsman of Greensboro, N.C., Rabbi Avtzon - Executive Director of GJARN, Chaim Stambler - project foreman, and Boris Abramovich Medgaus - general architect.

The site has been purchased, plans are drawn up, and renovations have begun at a cost of \$500,000. To complete the initial renovations and begin con-



(l to r) Drs. Stephen Mackler and Robert Kreigsman, and Mr. Hal Brooks, of Greensboro, North Carolina with boxes of donated pharmaceuticals on their way to Ukraine with a recent GJARN medical mission.

struction of the additional space will require another \$800,000.

Bringing Ukrainian physicians to the United States for six to eight months of intensive-training will cost on average over \$2,500 per month per doctor (includes air fare, tuition, apartment rental, stipend for food, etc.). With a minimum of eight physicians being trained at no less than six months each, expenses will begin at \$120,000.

The medical equipment needed for the Center is currently estimated at \$1,800,000. In addition to purchasing items, GJARN is also actively seeking the donation of used equipment from hospitals, clinics and physicians' offices. When hospitals close or merge, or offices upgrade, there is often good, useable equipment available. GJARN is looking for assistance

in identifying, locating and contacting these facilities.

Medical missions for volunteer U.S. doctors who will come to the Center to lend their expertise and treat patients cost on average \$25,000 per mission (airfare, hotels, food, etc.). In addition, because care is being offered free to families, there is the need to subsidize check-ups, treatments, and surgeries.

You will be kept up-to-date on the progress of this exceptional facility which is going to change the face of medical care in Ukraine. Future mailings and newsletters will provide progress reports and you can also visit our web site – www.globaljewish.org – for up-to-the-minute information. ❁

Pillsbury Emergency Food Distribution Successfully Accomplished

Earlier this year I was in Moscow attending high-profile meetings with the United States Secretary of Agriculture and top Russian officials. We were discussing humanitarian assistance to families in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) who have been profoundly affected by the severe economic and social crises that have plagued that area of the world.

As we concluded our talks, I received an extremely urgent request to meet with representatives of the Pillsbury Company.

They had a large shipment of food in Finland. The buyers had run out of money and Pillsbury wanted to donate the food, but they needed someone

without delay, without red tape. They knew that we were one of only five organizations selected by the U.S.

Department of Agriculture to carry out massive food distributions.

Utilizing our existing network of distribution sites, we sprang into action immediately, working around the clock to get the Pillsbury food – which had a short shelf life – out of Finland and into the hands of hungry people.

Lifesaving containers were sent as follows:

- **Russia**
 - Moscow 2
 - St. Petersburg 2
 - Samara 1
 - Ekaterinburg 1
- Riga, Latvia 1
- Minsk, Belarus 1
- Vilna, Lithuania 1
- **Ukraine**
 - Zhitomir 2
 - Kharkiv 2
 - Dnepropetrovsk 4

...they needed someone they knew they could absolutely trust to get the food to those most in need– quickly and cost-efficiently.

The following communities all received packages from the central office of distribution in Dnepropetrovsk:

- Dneprozhezhinsk
- Krivoy-Rog
- Kirvograd
- Cherkassy
- Palvograd
- Nikopol
- Kremenchug



Two elderly recipients of Pillsbury Food Mission awaiting a bus to take them home with their precious food packages.

they knew they could absolutely trust to get the food to those most in need– quickly and cost-efficiently.

They called on GJARN because of our well-established reputation of effectively moving food, medicine, and clothing directly to needy families –



A group of elderly pensioners in Zhitomir, Ukraine after receiving their Pillsbury food packages last March.

- Nikolayev
- Simferopol
- Zaporozhye
- Donetsk

This unexpected shipment of food was not in our schedule for the year, but, despite the enormous expense to ship and distribute it, we knew we had to take on the task.

Without our assistance, this food would have been destroyed because it had a relatively short shelf life. With all of the hunger we have seen over the years, we could not let this food go to waste. We had to do whatever was necessary, no matter the cost, to get it to hungry people. We began in March and the final packages were delivered in June with literally weeks to spare before the food would no longer be useable.

There are very few organizations out there that have the net-

work GJARN has, which enables us to spring into action instantly as we did with the Pillsbury shipments. This ability to act quickly is something we have cultivated over the years so that we can get food and medicine to people in need with as little delay as possible.

It is the ongoing assistance and support of wonderful friends like you that make it possible for GJARN to accomplish what often seems like miracles. Our gratitude to you comes straight from the heart. ❁

Extraordinary Concert Takes Place!

“Wow, it was great!” This simple sentence sums up succinctly the thoughts of everyone present at an exciting, one-of-a-kind, sold-out concert that took place in New York on Tuesday evening, January 12, 1999.

Sponsored by GJARN, and with the generous help of Gary Braut and Ira Yavarkosky, two long-time supporters of GJARN, this unique concert featured the extraordinary, soulful voices of the Dnepropetrovsk Boys Choir. These young gentlemen from Ukraine had already totally captured the hearts of everyone at the Metropolitan Opera two days earlier when they sang at the HASC Concert. Now they wove their very special musical magic for a standing-room-only crowd. Also on the program were the incomparable Yisroel Williger and Cantor Shneur Zalman Baumgarten, whose melodic voices brought tears to the eyes of those in the audience.

In addition, the evening’s program included a very moving video that depicted Jewish life in Dnepropetrovsk today.

Among the many positive outcomes – and there were most certainly a very large number — that resulted from the visit of the Dnepropetrovsk Boys Choir to the United States, was the

fact that the Jewish community in this country learned that Jewish life is now, indeed, very much alive in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, a city that is home to well over 70,000 Jews.

Prior to the arrival of Rabbi Shmuel and Chani Kaminezki in 1990, however, Jewish life had been desolate. With the vision, energy and leadership of this extraordinary couple, and the strong partnership of GJARN, schools have been opened, the synagogue refurbished, orphan-

...they wove their very special musical magic for a standing-room-only crowd

ages created, and sick and elderly Jews cared for through broad-scale social and medical programs.

Many of the buildings being used today by the Jewish community of Dnepropetrovsk were given to them by the government in recognition of GJARN’s work there.

The Choir also performed in Manhattan at the RAMAZ school on Friday, January 15. The opportunity for these two groups of Jewish children, from opposite sides of the world to meet was an unusual and very special one. In the words of Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, Director of RAMAZ, as he addressed both groups of children, “We have just witnessed a living miracle”.

While the boys were in the United States, GJARN was responsible for caring for them. Rabbi Avtzon and members of his staff saw to all their needs

The Global Jewish Assistance & Relief Network Presents

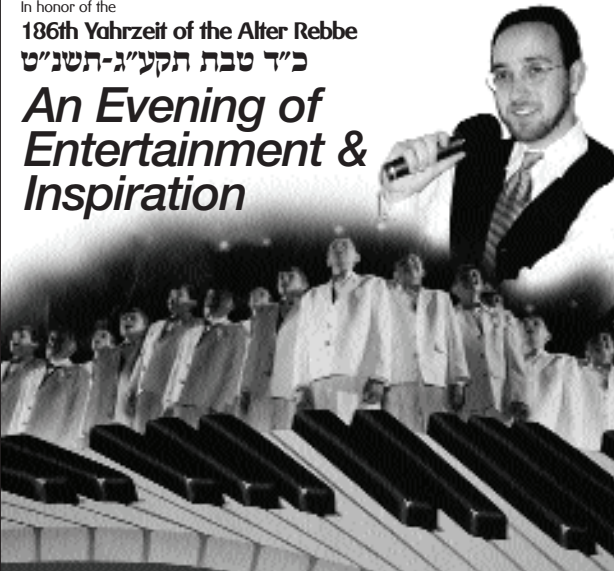
Yisroel Williger & the Neginah Orchestra

The Rebbe's Hometown Choir
Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine

Star guest performance by one of the Alter Rebbe's descendants

In honor of the
136th Yahrzeit of the Alter Rebbe
כ"ד טבת תקע"ג-תשנ"ט

An Evening of Entertainment & Inspiration



George Wingate High School
600 Kingston Avenue
24 Teves 5759
Tuesday Evening, January 12, 1999 7:00 PM

Separate and family seating options available
Tickets sold at Crown Heights Judaica & Sterling Electronics • \$18.00, \$12.00, \$8.00
For further information, please call 718 774 6497
All proceeds to further the work of the Rabbeim in spreading Yiddishkeit in the Former Soviet Union

throughout the trip, including taking them on several tours so they could visit sites of interest.

In addition, one of the boys had his eyes examined and received two pairs of glasses. Another who had dental problems had two root canals performed while he was here. One received a much-needed new coat, another a new pair of shoes, and so on. GJARN saw to it that everything was done for them during the course of their stay.

Even with all this, what made this very unique concert all the more special was the fact that a group of needy Jewish families, who would normally not be able to attend a concert like this, were given complimentary tickets.

Phyllis Mintz of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council, summed up the impact

of this in her letter to Rabbi Aytzon:

"Thank you for offering the opportunity to many of the needy families of Crown Heights to participate in this momentous event. Your generosity allowed twenty four families to enjoy a rare night out together."

In addition, overall prices for the concert were deliberately kept low to enable the largest number of families possible to attend.

Proceeds from this hugely successful GJARN concert are being used to further the work of spreading Judaism in the Former Soviet Union, something that is urgently needed as Jewish communities emerge from decades of religious suppression while also battling the disastrous effects of the economic collapse of the Former Soviet Union. ❁

The Rabbi and Mr. Kelly, An Unlikely Pair

They were an unlikely pair – the Rabbi named Eliezer Avtzon, and the tall, pony-tailed, cowboy-booted man named Tom Kelly. But they forged a partnership that has helped change the face of the Former Soviet Union.

This alliance began in 1992 when Tom worked for an organization called World Learning. When it began prior to World War II, it was called Experiment in International Living. In 1972 it became known by its current name. World Learning runs a graduate program in Brattleboro, Vermont called the School for International Training. Tom was the Project Manager for USAID grants. World Learning had received funding from AID for PVO (Private Voluntary Organizations or non-profits) initiatives in the Former Soviet Union. They were sub-granting to American groups that wished to carry out projects to assist non-profit organizations to achieve self-sufficiency in the chaotic aftermath of the restructuring of the FSU.

GJARN was one of more than 200 organizations that submitted proposals in the first round. An independent review committee, made up of experts in the FSU and in development program man-

agement, was set up to appraise the proposals and select those who would receive grants.

GJARN was one of the top six organizations out of the 200 and was recommended by the review committee for funding.

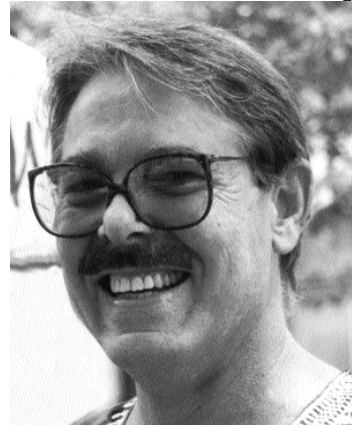
That was when Tom and Rabbi Avtzon began working together.

According to Tom, they hit it off immediately when

they first met after the grant was distributed to GJARN. Despite the vast differences in their backgrounds, they shared the common experience of both coming from very large, boisterous families. This tie transcended many of their otherwise extraordinary differences.

The two worked together during the four-year period of the grant and continue to do so today with Tom serving as an unofficial Board member, mentor, advisor and good friend.

During that time, GJARN assisted over 350 PVOs to achieve self-sufficiency and independence so that they could serve their local constituencies. This was



Mr. Tom Kelly

Despite the vast differences in their backgrounds, they shared the common experience of both coming from very large, boisterous families.





Addressing a seminar on Civil Society & Rule of Law in Kharkiv, Ukraine, 1995. (From L-R), Valentina Drubotka – Director Kharkiv NGO Service Center, Joel Levin - GJARN field director, Tom Kelly - Project Manager for World Learning, Svetlana Gorbunova - Regional Director Red Cross.

achieved with extensive classes and seminars as well as one-on-one mentoring.

Tom often traveled to the FSU to view GJARN's projects and assess their effectiveness. He chuckled as he spoke to a visitor remembering one trip in which Rabbi Avtzon was making sandwiches – pastrami to be exact – in the back of the car as they traveled to a project site.

“Lazer has an incredible rapport with local organizations in the FSU. He works harder than any other human being I know and he is indefatigable.”

Tom stressed the uniqueness of GJARN in the organization's openness to helping everyone, regardless of race, color, creed, or religion.

He also talked about something very unusual that happened when the grant was awarded. He pointed out that organizations that receive funding are required to provide a 25% match of the funds. This

can be in goods or in money. Most organizations, he said, have great difficulty achieving this. GJARN, on the other hand, exceeded that number and matched their funding with goods at a higher percentage rate.

Tom noted that GJARN's programs are exceptionally well-run and highly effective. The reports generated by Rabbi Avtzon are clear and concise.

It is clear that Rabbi Avtzon and Tom have forged a strong relationship based on mutual respect and friendship. And the result of this has been extraordinarily beneficial for many people in the Former Soviet Union.

As he finished speaking with a visitor, Tom smiled and said that he had met many people in Ukraine who call Rabbi Lazer Avtzon their “hero”. ❁

A Special Day of Life, Hope, and Commitment

The Bar Mitzvah boy had prepared well. He was ready for the day when he would become a responsible Jewish adult.

His family, with great joy and thankfulness in their hearts, had worked hard to arrange a very special celebration that would truly befit the happiness of this special day.

Then, within six weeks of the Bar Mitzvah, two very close family members – the grandmother and the uncle of the boy – tragically passed away.

The family was devastated. However, summoning their courage and great faith, they turned their own tragedy into a day of life and hope – and tremendous inspiration – for thirteen young immigrants from the Former Soviet Union.

They knew that their son's grandmother and uncle – both giving, loving people involved in the Jewish community – would have been terribly saddened at the cancellation of the family's celebration. They knew they could not have a party, but they wanted others, who might not otherwise be able to afford a Bar Mitzvah party, to have one.

Because the family is very close to Rabbi Avtzon, they turned to us at GJARN to make all the necessary arrangements, including identifying some of the needier families. The one criterion was that the boys had

to have committed themselves to an observant life.

So that is how 130 people came to be at Temple Israel in Great Neck on a late winter day to celebrate the Bar Mitzvahs of these 13 recent arrivals from the Former Soviet Union. They danced to the incomparable music of the 7-piece Neshoma Orchestra, the boys lifted high on the shoulders of their fathers



Festive dancing at the gala Bar Mitzvah celebration in Great Neck, N.Y.

and others. They feasted on an extraordinary meal that was like nothing they had ever experienced.

And they listened to inspiring speeches by Rabbi Zalman Kleinman of L'man Achai, Rabbi Yisroel Bryks of Shearith Yisroel, and Rabbi Avraham Stone of the United Lubavitcher Yeshiva, all of whom had students participating in this unique celebration. The Rabbis spoke of the great privilege of sharing in their students' embracing of their heritage.

Included among the celebrants were students from

**Rabbi Eliezer Avtzon
and Asher Steinmetz
of L'man Achai
presenting gifts to
several of the Bar
Mitzvah boys.**



Yeshiva Samson Raphael Hirsch (Breuers) who came to join in the simcha in the memory of their beloved teacher who had been the uncle of the Bar Mitzvah boy.

At one point, the music was stopped so the host family

could come into the hall and participate for a short time. Rabbi Yaacov Lerner of the Young Israel of Great Neck

It was truly a special day of life, hope, and commitment to the Jewish future of these young boys and their families. . .

addressed the large group, expressing the thoughts of everyone there when he talked about the tremendous mitzvah the family had done in providing this wonderful simcha. He talked

about the merits of both individuals in whose memory this evening was held. And he talked about the Bar Mitzvah boy's great sensitivity and the honor he showed his parents and family by sharing his simcha with others.

It was truly a special day of life, hope, and commitment to the Jewish future of these young boys and their families, all of

whom had left the Former Soviet Union seeking to re-establish their ties with their heritage.

GJARN is very proud to have been an integral part of this very special simcha. We feel privileged to have been there for the host family so that we could

assist in turning their tragedy into a life-affirming simcha. And we thank them for the wonderful example of true kindness and sensitivity that they have expressed and the great inspiration they are to all of us. ❁



A proud father looks on as his son delivers his Bar Mitzvah message.



David Goldberg, one of the Bar Mitzvah boys, leading the "Grace after Meals".

GJARN's Worldwide Humanitarian Assistance Programs

Food Programs

- Meals on Wheels
- Soup Kitchens
- Bread and Milk Programs
- Monthly Food Packages
- Distribution of USDA Surplus Food

Medical/Clothing Programs

- American Jewish Medical Center-Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine
- Satellite Medical Offices
- Medical Missions
- Distribution of Donated Medical Equipment
- Distribution of Donated Pharmaceuticals
- Training of CIS Physicians
- Toys for Hospitalized Children
- Clothing Distribution Centers (includes special holiday clothing distributions)

Cultural Programs

- National Holiday Programs – Distribution of Matzoh, Mishloach Manos, Tishrei Packets, Books
- Sponsorship of Wedding and Bar Mitzvah Celebrations
- Bris Milah Supplies to Jewish Centers
- Reclaiming of Jewish Communal Buildings
- Special Grants to Community Rabbis on Need Basis

Self-Sufficiency Programs

- Training of Non-Profit Organizations (NGOs) in Law and Democracy
- Service Center for NGOs to Obtain Global Access to Aid
- National Legal and Lobbying Association for the Poor and Disabled
- Computer Learning Center
- Job Placement Assistance

New York Programs

- Transportation of Patients and Volunteers to Hospitals in NYC Area
- Research and Medical References
- Special Fund for Needy Cases
- Toys for Hospitalized Children
- Entertainment for Sick and Hospitalized Children
- Database of Volunteer Doctors for Families Without Insurance
- Distribution of Clothing and Furniture

Can you or your business donate:

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