



Project Keshar

Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2010 - 2011

Project Keshar

ANNUAL REPORT 2010-2011

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A MESSAGE FROM RITA KASHNER, PK Board Chair

IN 1997, I SAT IN A ROOM IN CHERNIGOV, UKRAINE WITH A FEW OTHER AMERICAN WOMEN and a group of women from Russia and Ukraine. Project Keshar had invited the Russian and Ukrainian women to participate in leadership training based on Jewish values, because they had shown leadership potential in small groups in their towns. The women sat uneasily in a circle. They were used to sitting in rows and listening to someone in authority. But here a whole new kind of leadership, built on consensus and active participation, was being modeled by Sallie Gratch and Sveta Yakimenko.

Flash forward to June 2011. I sat in as the key staff leaders of Project Keshar – women who had risen to leadership from our grassroots groups throughout Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, and Israel – worked together intensely for days, hammering out the year’s goals and strategies. Their work would affect thousands of women in hundreds of communities.

In the past year, they had represented women’s causes in the Russian Duma and to the Ukrainian presidency, and advocated to local and national governments. They had met with State Department representatives in Washington DC. They had worked together across national lines to create a civil society that would further women’s health and safety, inter-ethnic tolerance, and

gender justice. Now they were focusing on creating programs to address gender-based violence, the need for breast cancer services, and women’s economic empowerment.

Every step of the way, an active and activist board has given its resources and energies to support the growth of this unique movement in partnership with Project Keshar’s dedicated U.S. staff. In a challenging economic climate, Project Keshar has not dropped a single program or backed away from any opportunity to serve the women and girls of the region. On the contrary, using every electronic tool and stretching our resources by engaging, inspiring and training more and more lay leaders, Project Keshar has continued to grow and expand its network, woman by woman and community by community. We have you, our partners and supporters, to thank for this.

Rita Kashner, Project Keshar Board Chair



A MESSAGE FROM KARYN GERSHON, PK Executive Director

PROJECT KESHAR TOOK A MAJOR LEAP THIS YEAR WHEN FOUR JEWISH WOMEN ACTIVISTS FROM Belarus, Russia and Ukraine traveled to the U.S. this past March to participate in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women week-long meeting. In many instances, they were the only representatives from their entire region. From there, they traveled on to D.C. where they met with Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, Ambassador Hannah Rosenthal, members of the State Department, representatives of the Helsinki Commission, NCJW and Vital Voices. Each place they visited, the response was – how can we work with you more? And, they were interviewed on Voice of America, a dream come true for those whose families still recall when “Golos V’America” was a catalyst for the rebirth of Jewish identity during the Communist era because through it, they learned of Israel’s victory during the Six Day War.

This trip to the U.S. highlights the successes that characterize fiscal year 2010-11. After years of developing women leaders who are at the forefront of their Jewish communities and their larger societies in Russian speaking communities, Project Keshar’s leaders had the opportunity to see how their activism fits into the global arena. And, in turn, Project Keshar supporters in the US had the opportunity to learn how our support and our engagement in our own society impact the rights of women and Jews around the world.

The flow of information between activists in the US and Russian speaking activists worldwide is exploding. From the incredible work done by students at Northwestern University’s *CampusCatalyst* program to help PK create a Russian-language computerized evaluation system, to Jayne Guberman and Pearl Gluck’s assistance in helping to envision and implement a Project Keshar archive, we are increasingly in a position to adapt best practices worldwide and make them instantly available through our trained network of activists.

Activities in Project Keshar-Israel have been fully integrated with the programs we have been conducting in Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine and continue to surpass our goals for growth and collaboration with existing Israeli organizations.

We thank everyone who has partnered with Project Keshar in this important work. We could not have done this without you.

Karyn Gershon, Executive Director



Project Keshet

WORKING IN RUSSIA, UKRAINE, MOLDOVA, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN AND ISRAEL:

- Gives women and girls the tools to change themselves and their society.
- Invests in leadership training, in pilot projects, and in technology that allows volunteers anywhere in this vast region to replicate projects on any scale.
- Addresses the critical need for Jewish identity building and for protecting the health and safety of women and girls in the countries where we operate.
- Remains a leading voice in the Jewish community and on issues impacting the lives of all women and girls, their families and communities, including:

Jewish Renewal: Torah Return Project, Jewish holiday celebrations, Mother-Daughter Retreats, Beit Binah *Text to Activism*

Women's Health: Breast Cancer Support and Information, HIV-AIDS prevention and Information, Smoking Cessation, Promoting healthy lifestyles

Safety: Preventing human trafficking, fighting domestic and date violence, engendering tolerance

Economic Empowerment: Providing job and computer skills training through the ORT Keshet Computer Centers, which also serve as community meeting places and opportunities for women to receive information on a wide range of issues impacting their health and safety.



No other organization is doing this work in the region. Our model is cost-effective, replicable, scalable, and adaptable. It is uniquely designed both to inspire Jewish continuity and to ensure that women have a voice as the society defines itself.

Project Keshet represents the values and voices of women and girls. When the Jewish community in the FSU produces materials or plans conferences that in no way reflect the lives of Jewish women (or the needs of women and girls), we intercede. Project Keshet is literally and continuously front-and-center working to ensure representation of women when legislative and resource allocation decisions are made impacting the health and safety of women.

Fiscal Year Highlights

IN THE PAST FISCAL YEAR PROJECT KESHET RAN MORE THAN 4,500 PROGRAMS IN RUSSIA, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Israel on a budget of \$1.5 million.

Taking place in more than 180 women's groups, on college campuses, at weekend seminars, in governmental meetings and during major city-wide events, our programs ranged from **high level leadership training** to **Jewish education** and **holiday celebrations** to **grassroots** and **widespread activism**.

Leadership Training

More than 600 graduates of PK's leadership training program have become professional and lay leaders in the Jewish community in this region. PK's Advanced Leadership Training is underwritten by UJA Federation of NY and is a yearlong academic and in-the-field training program that creates grassroots leaders. In 2010, 40 women completed the program, half under the age of 30 (many of them identified through a partnership with Hillel in the region).

Jewish Identity and Renewal

1. Beit Binah – More than 1,500 women in 100 locations studied Torah each month through PK's volunteer-led text study program. The project connects "text to activism," with groups advancing the needs of women and girls in their communities as part of the program content.



2. Global Women's Celebrations – Women in PK's network conduct year-round Jewish holiday celebrations for themselves and the larger Jewish community. In 2010, more than 160 communities took part in this program, reaching more than 3,500 women and their families.

3. Mother/Daughter Retreats – This semi-annual program catalyzes Jewish leadership among



teens and women by giving them an opportunity for Jewish educational programming, relationship building and leadership training. In November 2010, Project Keshet's U.S. Board traveled to Minsk, Belarus, and saw this program in action, meeting with eight pairs of mothers and daughters.



4. Torah Return Project – To date, PK has placed 21 Torahs in communities throughout the region.

5. Tolerance – Inspired by the *Not In Our Town* model developed in the US, PK has developed programming in more than 40 cities in this region that enables people of different faiths to work with their local governments on proactively creating tolerant communities and responding decisively to hate crimes. A "Scroll of Tolerance" project, patterned after the United States-based AIDS quilt, brought communities across the region together.



Improving the Lives of Women and Girls

1. A Seat at the Table –PK has trained women in its network in methods for getting the legislation, enforcement and resources necessary to meet their needs at the local, regional and national levels.

- PK –Russia was invited to serve on the Russian Duma's expert committee on women's issues, lay committee on women's issues and committee on reproductive rights.
- In partnership with other organizations, PK helped write a proposal draft for a Belarusian National Action Plan On Gender Equality for 2011 – 2012.
- Project Kesher was invited to participate in a Georgian government nation-wide forum on the issue of "Gender Equality in Georgia."
- With the Chief Rabbis' blessing, PK has become the official voice of the Jewish community at interfaith events in Ukraine and Russia. PK has worked particularly closely with the Russian Orthodox Church on the issue of HIV/AIDS.



2. Women's Health – PK provides year-round health education to women in the PK network on issues from pre-natal care to end of life decision making. We do this in our monthly programming in PK's Jewish women's groups, through Beit Binah text study and activism, and through interfaith community-wide education advocacy to promote diagnosis, treatment and resource allocation. PK is a proud partner of the JDC in its Susan G. Komen breast cancer project in Russia.



3. Domestic Violence – With a 40% Domestic Violence (DV) rate in this region, PK conducted more than 500 anti-violence programs this past year. PK's DV advocacy work has been supported by the European Union and the US embassies in Russia and Ukraine, and has been transitioning from community-by-community activism to strategic advocacy for improved legislation and enforcement; police training; the creation and implementation of in-school curriculum; the creation of local and regional committees of government; NGO and media representatives enlisted to address DV; and widespread media campaigns to shift societal attitudes about this issue.



Preventing Human Trafficking

PROJECT KESHER HAS LONG BEEN A LEADER IN THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING MOVEMENT THROUGHOUT Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus and Israel. Project Kesher's activities include widespread education, media outreach and repatriation of trafficked women.

Our goal is to increase the awareness of people about human trafficking issues and the high level of violence against women, leading them to consider it part of a global social problem rooted in the violation of women's rights and in gender inequality.

During the last fiscal year more than **thirty Project Kesher Jewish women's groups in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova and Georgia** were significantly engaged in anti-trafficking work: Kirovograd, Donetsk, Lutsk, Yevpatoria, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kherson, Kharkov, Alupka, Dnepropetrovsk, Cherkassy, Dneprodzerzhynsk, Zaporozhzhye, Khmelnytsky, Lvov, Rovno, Gomel, Bryansk, Tula, Kineshma, Volgograd, Oryol, Balakovo, Makhachkala, Nizhny Novgorod, Kislovodsk, Tambov, Derbent, Ryazan, Tbilisi and Gomel.

In addition, more than **100 groups** participating in Project Kesher's Annual Campaign "**16 Days Against Violence**" included human trafficking issues in their programming. The campaign is an international program created by and coordinated annually by Rutgers University. Project Kesher regularly addresses the prevention of human trafficking and violence on our Russian-language website, and in newsletters, brochures and booklets distributed in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Israel.

In the last year, Project Kesher conducted more than 145 anti-trafficking programs:

- 20 seminars and trainings for women, including youth with parents;
- 17 inter-ethnic roundtables and conferences;
- More than 80 informational and educational meetings;
- 3 issue-related exhibitions and contests;

Highlighting Major Accomplishments

Next Generation

PROJECT KESHER'S NEXT GENERATION

program engages women from their teens through mid thirties in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, strengthening their Jewish identity and building a life-long commitment to Jewish community life through leadership development, a creative approach to text study, local social activism.

"In the last year, we have noticed

an increase in younger women connecting to Project Kesher, drawn by our programs in social activism, health issues and Jewish tradition. Girls meet in youth groups or join existing PK women's groups. PK-sponsored local youth retreats where girls meet each other and get to know each other better contribute a lot to that.

At Project Kesher seminars girls have a chance to learn new materials and methodology, to meet activists from other cities, and to plan the activities for the reporting period."

*– Lena Pysinna, Director
Project Kesher Next Generation*

Youth Groups

PROJECT KESHER YOUTH GROUPS BEGAN organically as the daughters of Project Kesher activists began creating their own groups. Today, Project Kesher has a full time Next Generation Director who is working to ensure the continuity of Jewish life and social activism in the region.

continued on page 4

KESHER:

NOUN (HEBREW): CONNECTION

- 8 issue-related documentaries with follow-up discussions;
- 17 outdoor campaigns for youth and the general population in city streets and squares.

The participants in Project Kesher anti-trafficking activities included:

- Students and teachers of secondary schools, vocational schools, colleges and universities, and medical schools;
- Activists of NGOs and public unions;
- National and religious leaders, members of ethnic communities;
- Travel agency personnel;
- Social workers;
- Unemployed, needy and socially vulnerable people;
- Local authorities;
- Immigration personnel.

Youth Groups *continued from page 3*

Next Generation youth groups include Jewish content in their programming (ranging from text study to holiday celebrations) and are working on a wide range of social issues including tolerance,



trafficking, domestic violence and healthy living. This past year, the groups did extensive outreach work in their communities on the issues of smoking cessation and date violence. In addition, the youth groups partner with existing Project Keshet Women's Groups, creating multi-generational programs and holiday celebrations across the region.

Youth groups currently operate in thirty-one locations.

- **Russia** - Balakovo, *Nizhny Novgorod*, Kislovodsk, Voronezh, Volgograd, Belgorod, Veliky Novgorod, Vladimir, Bryansk, Tula, Ivanovo and Yaroslavl.
- **Ukraine** - 16 groups are working in 15 cities - Lutsk, Lviv, Kamyansky-Podilsky, Kirovograd, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kiev, Cherkassy, Dnipropetrovsk, Odessa, Simferopol, Sevastopol, Poltava, Rivne and Mykolaiv.
- **Belarus:** Minsk, Mogilev, Gomel and Vitebsk.

ORT KESHNET

PROJECT KESHER RUNS 18 AWARD-winning vocational computer centers in Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, in partnership with World ORT. They are open to women of all ethnicities and faiths.

Our computer centers teach the fundamentals of Microsoft Office and offer training in bookkeeping and graphic design, as well as legal literacy, career counseling, job placement and resource management. The ORT/Keshnet certificate is highly valued by companies in this region.

The Centers have graduated nearly 20,000 women at a cost of less than \$75 per woman.

The Centers also serve as safe women's centers where participants learn about access to valuable resources for women needing domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers or local vocational placement services.

A Snapshot of ORT KESHNET:

For the period of October 2010 - April 2011:

- ORT Keshnet computer centers trained 1,824 students;
- 85% of graduates were women and more than 80% responded that their economic status has been improved as a result of this training.

HIGHLIGHTING PK ISRAEL, BELARUS AND GEORGIA

Project Keshet Israel

In 2009, Russian-speaking activists in Israel joined the Project Keshet network with the incorporation of Project Keshet - Israel (PKI). PKI addresses the needs and challenges of the Russian-speaking community in Israel. The core of all activity is the network of PKI's women's groups. Currently, PKI has 14 active groups, spreading from the northern border down to the south of Israel.

PKI women's groups meet several times a month to learn about the fundamentals of Judaism (so they can stay ahead of their children in the Israeli school system); celebrate holidays; share information about issues and resources available to Russian-speaking Israeli women; attend programs throughout Israel for Russian-speaking Israelis; and begin the process of learning to meet their own needs within Israeli society.

- In 2010 - 2011, PKI groups conducted 116 programs; 1,370 women and girls took part in our activities. In the last two years, 32 women have graduated from Project Keshet's **leadership training program**. Twenty-four are currently enrolled in our 2011-2012 leadership training program.

In our leadership training program, women are trained to be effective lay leaders, run PK women's groups, mentor their Russian-speaking peers, and advocate for the needs of Russian speaking women and girls. Empowering the women who participate in this training is a key component to

the success of the Project Keshet model.

- In 2010-2011, PKI established the **Alice Shalvi Jewish learning program**, in which one woman from each PKI group attends a monthly 5-hour study seminar. The seminar's curriculum teaches Jewish content and the tools to effectively share this information with participants' local PKI groups. As a result, hundreds of women in Israel participated in Project Keshet's **Global Jewish Holiday Celebrations** (along with their counterparts in the countries of the former Soviet Union), including the Global Women's Seder, Rosh Hashanah and more. In addition, 150 women attended 9 different national learning festivals and seminars run by a wide range of organizations as representatives of PKI. In this case, Project Keshet simply "piggybacks" on existing programs targeting this population by identifying suitable candidates and covering the transportation costs for women living in marginal circumstances who otherwise would not have access to the programs.
- Project Keshet Israel holds monthly Coordinating Forum meetings for volunteer leader representatives throughout our network of women's groups. At these meetings, participants discuss successes

Torah Return Project

THIS PAST YEAR:

- Several thousand people participated in weekly Torah study classes (and an additional 1,500 are engaged in our Beit Binah: Text to Activism program);
- 36 people of all ages received Hebrew names;
- 44 people became a Bar or Bat Mitzvah;
- More than 6,000 people participated in community celebrations using a Torah Scroll;
- A Torah was brought to Balakovo, Russia, the 21st Torah Scroll in our Torah Return Project.

"After the Torah was carried in, many community members came to look at it and asked us to tell them about the Scroll, the history of the Torah, its traditions etc. That is why we decided to start classes devoted to this issue. We conduct classes using the Scroll in the synagogue, in woman's group and in a Day center together with Hebrew and Jewish tradition teacher Irina Gutnik. The Torah Scroll has become a basis for strengthening and uniting the progressive and Chabad communities - their representatives use it for Shabbat and on holidays. With the return of the Scroll the life of Rovno Jews will be filled with its light as it is said in Mishlei: 'The commandment is a lantern and Torah is light.'"

-Darya Yefimenko, Rovno, Ukraine

"The new Sefer Torah brought new energy to the Gori, Georgia community. We conduct Jewish study for the youth from 14 to 25 years old. Now, every week we study Torah with them, discuss it. Such weekly meetings are very important for us. We've noticed how our students change, going deeper into Jewish tradition, learning more about Judaism. We see these young people grow up, some of them met at our meetings and get married later!"

-Zizi Shaptozhvili, Project Keshet Regional Representative in Georgia





and challenges facing their groups, identify needs, expand their learning, and determine relevant programming together. In this way, the constituency being served determines the direction and activities of the organization. This year's forum meetings included a legal presentation on working in Israel and *aliyah*; a workshop on the history of feminism in Israel; and a workshop on group dynamics, including learning new games, ice breakers and activities to open group discussions.

"I've lived in Israel for 7 years, and today for the first time, I feel like an Israeli."

*—Svetlana K. of Haifa, Israel
(After she attended her first PK leadership training seminar)*

- As a result of the expressed need by our Russian speaking leadership, PKI established its first **UI-pan** (learning Hebrew) program and will be providing additional financial literacy training and computer skills training in the coming year.
- Project Kesher remains a pluralist organization working with the Progressive, Conservative and Modern Orthodox movements in Israel to provide different access points of Jewish observance for the Russian speaking community. In particular, this year we continued our collaboration with Hebrew Union College and the World Union for Progressive Judaism, added Conservative **Rabbi Tamar Elad-Appelbaum** to our board and conducted a wide range of activities in partnership with the Masorti movement in Israel.
- Project Kesher Israel received a donation of five each "gently used" laptops and computers from Marvell technology and 3 "gently used" computer screens from IRAC (the Israel Religious Action Center). This has enabled us to provide an introductory computer course to women who are making the transition into Israeli society and, at the same time attempting to keep strong connections with their Russian-speaking families worldwide. In addition, Project Kesher has taught introductory financial literacy programs to enable Russian speakers to make good consumer decisions in such areas as banking and the purchase of cell phone plans and consumer products.

Project Kesher Belarus

- In partnership with other organizations, PK helped write a proposal draft for a Belarusian National Action Plan On Gender Equality for 2011 – 2012;
- In Gomel, the newly-established youth group (mentored by PK-trained activists) conducted a number of programs and six city-wide campaigns on issues including gender equality, interfaith/interethnic tolerance and reproductive health.

In November, 2010, The Chief breast cancer doctor in Belarus met with Project Kesher-USA's board in Minsk and stated that:

"Project Kesher-Belarus is one of the most effective groups I have ever met and I would partner with them anytime, anywhere."

"Project Kesher is the only organization in Belarus that is supporting Jewish activism, involving women ages 25 through 40 years old in community life, and bringing an innovative format to Jewish life. We incorporate Judaism, Feminism and Activism into joint activities. And the women desperately need our training and support."

*—Svetlana Yakimenko, Project Kesher's
Director, Moscow, Russia*

Project Kesher Georgia

"Today it's useless to talk about ending domestic violence and sex trafficking if we don't empower women with legal and financial knowledge."

*— Olga Krasko, (Polotsk, Belarus) PK Program Director
(Quoted in JTA article FSU Jewish Women Take Women's Case to U.N., D.C. by Sue Fishkoff),*

ORT Keshernet Computer Centers located in Tbilisi and Gori provided critical computer skills, job training, legal and financial literacy to women (with priority given to those most at risk).

PK-Georgia at a Glance:

- **September 2010:** Project Kesher was invited by the Georgian government to represent the Jewish community at the "Democratic Georgia" exhibition and international symposium held at the Georgian Parliament.
- **October 2010:** Project Kesher was invited to participate in a Georgian government nation-wide forum on the issue of "Gender Equality in Georgia". The meeting was held under the auspices of Gender Equality Council at the Parliament of Georgia and the United Nations to support gender equality in Georgia. More than two hundred representatives of governmental and non-governmental women's organizations addressed five key issues, including health, education, gender and political equality, economic gender development, and trafficking and domestic violence. *An appeal to the Georgian Parliament was written with specific proposals to change legislation to meet women's needs and increase their social status.*
- **November 2010:** Project Kesher was invited to speak at the Georgian Parliament's "Day of Tolerance."

- **March 2010:** PK Georgia convened a round-table meeting devoted to organizing implementation strategies for equal rights legislation to be included in the Georgian Constitution. **Interestingly, our Georgian activists felt the biggest example of their increasing status in Georgia was the high-level participation at a program of remembrance for Holocaust victims they initiated in January at the central synagogue in Tbilisi.** In attendance was the Vice Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, members of Parliament, United Nation representatives, Israeli embassy diplomatic staff, leaders of various ethnic communities as well as leaders of state, Jewish and non-governmental organizations. The event was covered by all local media including four television and radio stations.

"Representatives of other ethnic groups were greatly interested in our activism on behalf of women and girls, as were members of Parliament. As a result, it was a turning point for us. We have created new [working] relationships and became very visible at the governmental level."

*— Zizi Shaptoshvili
Project Kesher Regional Representative
in Georgia*



In this month, PK Georgia also met with the Georgian Ministry of Reintegration to discuss issues of ethnic minorities and women's rights.

- **April 2010:** Project Kesher participated in a governmental council on the prevention of domestic violence, which included representatives from various ethnic groups. The meeting focused on the "introduction of the issue of protection of trafficked people, the issues of protection for ethnic groups and domestic violence issues."



Our Partners



Project Keshet maximizes the impact of our infrastructure of Jewish women's groups and multi-faith coalitions by partnering with other organizations. Here are some of our partners:

American Bar Association CEELI

Hebrew Union College (HUC)

Hillel in the former Soviet Union

Jewish Women International (JWI)

**La Strada Program: Prevention of
Trafficking in Women in Central
and Eastern Europe**

Masorti

**National Conference on Soviet Jewry
(NCSJ)**

**National Council of Women's
Organizations**

Not in Our Town (NIOT)

**Paideia - The European Institute for
Jewish Studies in Sweden**

Tahirih Justice Center

World ORT

Women's Funding Network

**World Union for Progressive Judaism
(WUPJ)**

World Pulse



Financial Review for Fiscal Year 2010-2011

Total Income raised by PK USA – \$1,389,486

Total Income raised by PK CIS - \$143,751**

Total Expenses for PK USA, CIS and Israel - \$1,529,876

* Income and Expense figures are cash-basis.

** Project Keshet CIS raised this amount in-country in 2010-2011 to help cover programming expenses.

Project Keshet Funders

Project Keshet would like to thank all the individuals and foundations that support our work. They are vital partners in building this far-reaching network.

\$50,000 and above

Michele and Marty Cohen

Sheila and Bill Lambert

Arleen and Aaron Priest

Deborah and David Roberts

Diane and Howard Wohl

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