

How the parents of a girl killed in the blast overcame their grief to help disabled children

A caring legacy of the Sbarro bombing

ON AUGUST 9, 2001, a young man carrying a guitar case strolled into the crowded Sbarro pizza parlour on the corner of Jerusalem's Jaffa and King George roads, and blew himself up.

The huge explosion killed 15 civilians, aged two to 62, and wounded more than 100 others. One woman, five years on, is still in a coma. Hamas and Islamic Jihad took responsibility.

The tragedy changed the lives of Arnold Roth, an Australian immigrant lawyer, and his wife Frimet — and through them those of countless other Israelis. Their 15-year-old daughter, Malki, the fourth of seven children, was one of the dead, along with her best friend, Michal Raziel.

Malki was a gifted flautist, a youth-movement madricha and an enthusiastic volunteer, who worked with severely handicapped children, starting with her own youngest sister, Haya Elisheva.

While sitting shivah, the parents decided they were not going to spend the rest of their lives in mourning. They set up a charity to help the families of disabled children cut through the red tape and cope in their own homes. "We are there," Arnold Roth told the JC, "to empower and enable."

Five years later, Keren Malki (the Malki Foundation) is subsidising 1,200 families from all of Israel's diverse communities. About one-third are Arabs. The fund's annual budget of £125,000 comes entirely from donations.

"We decided to go out and do something positive to remember the life that has been taken from us," Mr Roth

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explained. "By doing that, you're able to think of yourself as being very different from those barbarians who brought hatred and destruction into the world.

"There's no way to neutralise that, but in your own life it's terribly important to be able to say we're not like that at all. We're not two sides of the same coin. We're coming from completely different places and we're certainly going to completely different places."

The foundation does not provide services. It pays 75 per cent of the bill for a range of therapies, from occupational and physical therapy to therapeutic horse-riding, demanding only that the therapist is a registered professional and the receipts valid. In partnership with the Yad Sarah social welfare network, it supplies wheelchairs, orthopaedic beds and other equipment.

"We're not in a dialogue with the families," Mr Roth insisted. "We discourage communication with them. We don't want them to look at us as being involved in their lives. We say, you make the decisions, we'll make them possible. You don't have to go to a committee and plead your case. It means that we can support a very large number of families, though we have only one employee."

Since Israel went to war with Hizbollah on July 12, the Roths have broken their own rule. About 200 of their 1,200 client families live in the north of Israel. Some have fled south, others are living in shelters. They are calling for ad-



Sbarro pizza snackbar reopened for a short time soon after the 2001 bombing but the iconic corner site at King George and Jaffa Road, Jerusalem, is now occupied by a café belonging to a coffee chain

vice, and Keren Malki is providing it. One family moved from Nahariya to Jerusalem, staying with a family they had not known before. Their child, who suffers from cerebral palsy, needed horseback riding. Malki found them a local riding stable.

"There's nothing more isolating than being in a home that can be under a missile attack at any moment," Mr Roth said. "But when you're already predisposed to be upset at the world because you've got a very disabled child and your neighbour doesn't, it sets you off-

balance. It creates tremendous anxieties. You can't easily move to a different part of the country with a disabled child. Those who do, need the kind of flexibility we offer.

"We say, find the best available therapist, then send us the receipt."

Photo: AP