



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Annual Report

2022 - 2023

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MISSION

The Aleph Institute is a non-profit Jewish organization offering religious, educational, and humanitarian services to incarcerated people and their families.

MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERS

Over this past year, the level of need in the Pittsburgh community has remained high. People in the Jewish community need food, shelter, enriching educational opportunities, assistance with childcare, space to build social connections, and support to adjust to life after prison. An often overlooked aspect is ensuring that all community members can access available resources. Aleph works with the community to make services accessible to all. We will maintain our commitment to providing crucial services, especially in the context of a potential recession and persistent inflation that disproportionately harms low-income families. Aleph met the community's needs during the pandemic and will continue to do so through these new challenges.

More families are using the Shifra food shed program, more women are attending the support groups, and more families are enrolling in the after-school childcare program. Aleph remains responsive to the evolving needs of those we serve, consistently adjusting our services to align with the community's needs. This adaptability is evident in our proactive measures, such as organizing support groups and initiating the after-school program.

Aleph designs its services to meet the diverse needs of families, as we know that one solution does not fit the whole community. We help families meet their most pressing needs: childcare, food, and reducing social isolation. Assisting these groups most in need carries a ripple effect that benefits the community as a whole.

The Aleph Institute is one of the only Orthodox Jewish nonprofits in Pittsburgh. The services we provide represent the values of this otherwise under-represented group, providing Orthodox Jewish members of our community with an organization that serves their specific needs.



RE-ENTRY & ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING PROGRAM



Re-entry Services to

190

individuals



12-Step Programs

6

Weekly Sessions



Alternative Sentences

5

SHIFRA SHED



Food Distributed

1ton

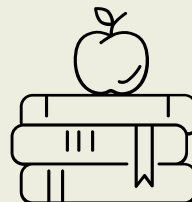
Weekly



Families Served

140

SHIFRA AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM



Children Served

35



Families Supported

96

IN PRISON & RE-ENTRY PROGRAMS

The Aleph Institute is driven to address U.S. high incarceration rates by supporting alternatives to incarceration, providing in-prison resources, and offering re-entry services. We are committed to supporting incarcerated people's needs. Our in-prison programs advocate for humanitarian needs, religious accommodations and provide spiritual and educational services for incarcerated individuals. In their transition to society, Aleph provides a holistic approach to re-entry by connecting individuals to community resources, government-provided services, and housing.

RE-ENTRY SUPPORT

Following any period of incarceration, former prisoners are tasked with the responsibility of rebuilding their lives, with little to no assistance from the prison. This task can often prove difficult to impossible for these individuals who frequently lack any source of income, making it difficult to afford necessities such as housing, food, and clothing. With a criminal record and often an extended period of unemployment, it can be difficult for the formerly incarcerated to obtain employment. Ultimately, release from prison can create many problems in itself, and these individuals may need assistance to help ease the burden.

The unfortunate result of this is a high amount of recidivism in Pennsylvania:

- Pennsylvania Department of Corrections found that 64.7% of people in the first three years after being released from prison have another run-in with the justice system. [2]
- About 75% of these occur within the first 16 months of release. [2]
- These rates have remained close to the same over the last ten years, indicating a systemic problem. [2]

This issue is not just a normative one; recidivism carries a substantial economic burden:

- Inmates with multiple incarcerations make up about half of the beds in the PA Department of Corrections, costing about \$1.2 billion. [2]
- A 5% reduction in recidivism would save approximately \$1.9 million. [2]

The Aleph Institute tackles the issue of reintegration and re-entry head-on by assisting former prisoners with finding housing, employment, and helpful resources and programs that make the transition easier and help reduce the risk of re-incarceration. We do all of this free of charge, positioning ourselves as an accessible and useful resource to those trying to rebuild their lives.

ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING PROGRAM

The Aleph Institute works with the courts on behalf of individuals who are first-time, non-violent offenders to find an alternative sentence to incarceration. Imprisonment is a considerable disruption for a person and their family; it comes with a loss of employment, potential loss of housing for the family, and substantial psychological stress. By finding alternative sentences, Aleph can keep individuals stabilized without needing re-entry services in the future.

By offering alternative sentencing to reduce the prison population, we not only cut down the state's incarceration expenses but also enhance our ability to address the needs of the incarcerated population without stretching resources across a larger number of incarcerated people.

In Fall 2023, Aleph Institute is re-launching its Alternative Sentencing Program (ASP) after a pause during the covid era. The program staff will consist of undergraduate and graduate students from local universities. Students will conduct prison visits at Allegheny County Jail to meet with incarcerated individuals who may be eligible for alternative sentencing.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Jewish inmates disconnected from their faith and community may experience a particularly high level of isolation. Aleph offers a variety of programs to lessen this feeling of isolation through Rabbinical visits, independent Torah studies, and coordination of a Jewish library.

Rabbinical Visits:

Recidivism is higher for those with fewer in-prison visits, which makes Aleph Institute's Rabbinical visits to jail and prison impactful. Aleph has a network of 40 Rabbis and community members who visit incarcerated people in federal, state, and local jails throughout the Northeastern United States. In one year, individual visits and Jewish services are provided to 2,600 unique people, multiple times a year.

Jewish Library:

Aleph has a lot of resources related to the Jewish faith, such as readings, videotapes, and audio. These resources are mailed to incarcerated Jewish people who express interest in connecting to their faith and community. Aleph offers inmates kosher meals on Jewish holidays, allowing them to observe and partake in these significant occasions.

Jewish Burials:

If there is no next-of-kin to claim the remains of an inmate who passes away, the prison system will cremate the inmate and bury the ashes. The Aleph Institute has worked to provide proper Jewish burials for inmates and those in long-term medical facilities.



Dorothy's Program

The Aleph Institute created the Dorothy Program in honor of Dorothy, a Jewish woman who lived 87 years in a state mental hospital before passing away without any connection to loved ones or community members. The Dorothy Program is a database of patients in state hospitals, long-term medical facilities, and nursing homes who are connected with volunteers who make visits to prevent social isolation. With the difficulty of correctly identifying Jews in state hospitals, Rabbi Vogel has vowed to make sure another person like Dorothy does not have to spend their life alone and forgotten.

12-Step Programs

Aleph partners with facilitators of the 12-step programs to host sessions at our building. Aleph is a trusted community space, and hosting these programs at our facility makes the programs more accessible to community members. There are six in-person meetings and four virtual meetings that occur weekly. The program serves about twenty community members. These support groups are open to anyone, and Aleph welcomes a diverse community.

12-step programs are proven to be effective in helping people decrease their dependency on substances. The meetings offer a place for people to connect with others in similar situations, helping people to feel more connected to their community and less alone. For people moving through the criminal justice system, Aleph can provide a record of their attendance in these programs to present in court or to a probation officer.

FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Aleph leads community programs that lessen the burden on households in the Jewish community of Greater Pittsburgh. Aleph coordinates a community food pantry, support groups for women, and an after-school program. These three programs are stabilizing forces for people in need, especially when used together. Programming benefits every family member by increasing the family's quality of life.

SHIFRA PROGRAM



The Shifra Program, named for a midwife in the Torah (Bible) committed to protecting human life and ensuring that families thrive, is a resource available to mothers in Pittsburgh's Jewish communities. The program was established in partnership and with funding from Allegheny County's Department of Human Services. The Aleph Institute embodies the spirit of Shifra's legacy in community-based programming that supports families through the Shifra Program, Shifra After-School Program, and the Shifra Shed food pantry.

Shifra caseworkers support about 150 women and their families annually. Caseworkers are dedicated to supporting women and their families by providing or connecting them with the following services:

- Employment
- Housing
- Food pantries
- School supplies
- Childcare
- Mental health resources
- Women's support groups

If you or someone you know could benefit from the services offered by the Aleph Institute's Project Shifra, please contact shifra@alephne.org or 412-421-0111 Ext. 115.



SHIFRA SHED

The Aleph Institute is tackling food insecurity locally with the Shifra food shed program. Our food shed was established with grant support from the Charles M. Morris Charitable Trust and the Opportunity Fund. For some people in the Jewish community, food access can be made more difficult by current food pantries lacking kosher options. Aleph's food shed is here to fill in that gap. In doing so, we make it easier for people to practice their faith and make sure people get the nutrients they need for a healthier life.

The "Shifra Shed" provides a valuable food resource for the Jewish community in Squirrel Hill, as kosher food is typically 40% more expensive than non-kosher food and often more challenging to obtain. The community has expressed significant gratitude for this project, and it is clear that there is demand for it to continue to operate. Aleph partners with 412 Food Rescue and the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank to keep the shed stocked with perishable and non-perishable items and fresh produce. In addition, Elegant Edge Catering provides the shed with 40-50 ready-made kosher meals a week. Through these partnerships, we distribute more than 1½ tons of kosher food weekly to 140 Jewish families.

SHIFRA SHED



The food pantry is open to all community members but mainly serves the Jewish community. It has become a model for other food pantries; the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank and city officials will visit the Aleph Institute this fall as they plan to replicate its structure in other parts of Pittsburgh.

Our Program is necessary for tackling food insecurity:

- According to Feeding America's latest report, food insecurity affects 8.9% of the population in Pennsylvania, meaning 1,136,400 people are food insecure [1].
- In Allegheny County, of the 131,440 who are food insecure, only 52% qualify for SNAP benefits [1].
- According to the USDA, food prices are predicted to increase by 6.5% in 2023 [1].

The rising cost of food is exacerbating an already significant issue of food insecurity. Aleph and our partner agencies are working hard to get as much food saved and into the homes of people who can use the food and mitigate the harm caused by rising food prices.



MIRIAM'S CENTER



Aleph is seeing an enthusiastic community response to programming at our second location at 2008 Murray Ave. Miriam's Center supplements our Shifra program, which is currently working with 96 families. Miriam's Center offers a women's support group, providing respite for women going through the stresses of family life. The support group gives women who participate not only a respite from care but also a chance to connect and reduce feelings of isolation.

According to the CDC, 1 in 10 women in the United States reported symptoms that suggest they experienced an episode of major depression in the last year [3]. The CDC also notes that one risk factor of depression is low social support. By giving women the opportunity to make connections, we can reduce mental health issues in the community. The support group strengthens participants' support network by helping them connect with others in similar situations. Guest speakers have made presentations on navigating post-partum life and financial strategies, topics proposed by the participants that reflect their interests.

SHIFRA AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM



At Miriam's Center, Aleph offers a free after-school program, the only one for families in the Orthodox Jewish community. Our program provides essential after-school enrichment and culturally competent support to Jewish families facing economic hardship, food insecurity, and challenges related to childcare. The program has proven to be a very valuable resource for families participating in our initial pilot phase over the past year.

Overview of our Service:

- Provide kosher snacks
- One-to-one homework assistance
- A space for children to socialize

Along with the academic tools needed for success, we provide students with the basic supplies they need. In partnership with the National Council of Jewish Women, we provide 150 families with supplies such as backpacks.

Our program serves 2nd to 5th-grade students. Last year we had an enrollment of 30-35 children.

REFERENCES

[1] Governor Tom Wolf Administration. (December, 2022). Governor's Food Security Partnership 2022 Report: Reviews and Recommendations.

https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Food_Security/Documents/2022GovernorsFoodSecurityReport_Final.pdf

[2] Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.(2022).RECIDIVISM REPORT 2022.

<https://www.cor.pa.gov/About%20Us/Statistics/Documents/Reports/Recidivism%202022%20Report.pdf>

[3] Zhou, J., Ko, J. Y., Haight, S. C., & Tong, V. T. (2019). Treatment of Substance Use Disorders Among Women of Reproductive Age by Depression and Anxiety Disorder Status, 2008-2014. Journal of women's health (2002), 28(8), 1068–1076. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2018.7597>

Financial Statements

FOR THE TWELVE-MONTHS ENDING
DECEMBER 31, 2022

REVENUE

Private Donations	\$100,171.61
Foundations	\$64,960.00
Government Contracts	\$80,093.20

Total Revenues	\$245,224.81
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EXPENSES

Family Programs	\$37,140.31
Hospital Programs	\$33,714.52
In-Prison Programs	\$146,412.24
Training Programs	\$13,157.64
Re-entry Programs	\$9,121.46
General Admin and Fundraising	\$36,168.96

Total Expenses	\$275,715.13
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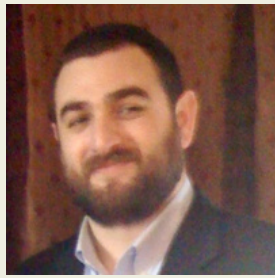
Board



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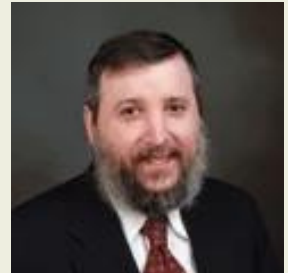
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Thank you !

Aleph Institute is grateful for all our supporters and donors.

We deeply appreciate your unwavering commitment over the past 31 years in establishing vital resources for both the Jewish community in Squirrel Hill, Pittsburgh, and incarcerated Jewish individuals in the Northeastern United States. Your enduring support has been instrumental in making a meaningful impact in our communities.

Thank you for being an integral part of our mission.

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