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## Anglo groups disagree over question of how best to work with Bedouin sector

By [Raphael Ahren](#)

While an increasing number of Jewish organizations from abroad and local Anglos have become involved in working with Bedouins in Israel, disagreements arise over the best way to help this disadvantaged community.

A group of American rabbis recently took about 40 Bedouin children and their mothers from the unrecognized village of Hashem Zaneh to the Biblical Zoo in Jerusalem, where they enjoyed ice cream and a 3D movie in Arabic. The excursion was a "real mitzvah" and a "symbolic act" supposed to make U.S. Jews aware of "one of Israel's greatest and most shameful failures," namely the neglect of the country's Bedouin community, said group leader Rabbi Steven Shaw.

Vivian Silver, the co-director of the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development, is a close personal friend of Shaw, but says his actions are but a drop in the ocean. "I'm not against taking kids to the zoo," the Winnipeg, Canada native told Anglo File last month in Be'er Sheva. "I have a problem patting myself on the back for taking kids to the zoo and giving them ice cream as if that's something extraordinary. It's a very, very small piece in a very big picture."

Bedouins make up a quarter of the Negev's population. Yet they presently live under circumstances that are "catastrophic on all levels," Silver said, referring to their low standard of living, often in unrecognized villages without running water or electricity. She applauded Shaw for his good intentions but pointed out a fundamental difference between his approach and that of her organization. "We think the right thing to do is to empower the community to empower itself," she said. That's also one of the reasons she insisted on sharing the institute's directorship with a Bedouin community development professional, Amal Elsana Alh'jooj.

"It's not about people on the outside to come in and take them on trips or to build them buildings," says Silver, who came here from Canada 35 years ago. Recently, she said, an American donor wanted to help by erecting a

playground in a desolate Bedouin village. But since the benefactor acted without communicating with the beneficiaries, the playground was not appreciated and repeatedly vandalized. "You don't dictate what they need," she said, "but you work with the Bedouins to define the solutions. Then you work as partners to implement those solutions."

Besides the Negev Institute, which runs several development and co-existence projects and works with 450 Jewish and Bedouin volunteers a year, **another example of Anglo involvement in Bedouin capacity-building programs was a seminar held in Rahat last November. Led by Montreal native Gaila Cohen Morrison, A.H.A.V.A., a nonprofit that usually helps Jewish children with English problems, offered a three-day course teaching four Israelis and six Bedouins how to teach English.** However, only three Bedouins took advantage of the offer. She says she is still in touch with the Bedouin teachers.

Silver and Shaw might differ in their approaches, but they agree in their assessment of what might happen if the situation doesn't change soon. Shaw told Anglo File he feared a "Bedouin intifada" and Silver, too, implied a potential security risk for Israel. "If I were living on the other side," she said, "in a state where my most basic rights weren't recognized, I also wouldn't sit quietly with my hands crossed, expecting somebody from the outside to come and help me."

Silver emphasized, however, that preventing an uprising is not the reason for her engagement. "Of course it is in the state's interest to treat the Bedouins as equal citizens. But it's also a Jewish moral imperative, to live in a country that makes sure all citizens have the same rights, opportunities and resources."