

US Jews arrive to assist Sderot Kassam victims

• By MICHAEL FREUND

A delegation of American Jews arrives here tomorrow for a weeklong visit aimed at providing comfort and support to victims of recent Palestinian rocket attacks on the Negev.

The group, which is being organized by Operation Embrace, a Washington based non-profit founded five years ago by Aviva Tessler, will meet with attack victims and their families and provide assistance aimed at helping them to rebuild their lives.

"The goal of the mission," Tessler told the *Post*, "is to put a human face and heart to the ongoing assistance that we try to provide to the wounded."

"Over the years," she said, "it has been shown that personal visits are very therapeutic for people who feel like one day they are news headlines and that the next day they are forgotten."

In recent years, as part of its efforts to "embrace" victims of terror, the organization has initiated several post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) programs at hospitals throughout the country, including Rambam hospital in Haifa and Hadassah-University Hospital in Jerusalem.

Currently, group members are helping to launch similar PTSD units in Nahariya, Safed and Sderot.

"PTSD programs offer various kinds and compositions of support groups. They are creative and offer alternative ways of helping people to cope and to deal with their challenges," Tessler said.

On Tuesday, the group will visit Sderot, where they will meet with families suffering from a variety of physical and emotional traumas in the wake of recent Kassam rocket attacks.

Working closely with municipal officials, local social workers and the National Insurance Institute, the group will distribute funds to those most in need of assistance.

Later in the week, the participants will head north to Safed and Kiryat Shmona, where they will try to boost the morale of those still suffering the aftereffects of the war in Lebanon this past summer, before hosting 17 terror victims and their families at Kibbutz Nahsholim for Shabbat.

"We are an organization that sticks with people long-term," Tessler said, adding that "ongoing help offers people hope, and we want to fill in the gaps where assistance is not being given."