

Families Healing Together: SafeHeart Hosts First-Ever Retreat for Survivors of Nova Festival Massacre and Their Families

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Amid the emotionally charged days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, SafeHeart, a pioneering therapeutic NGO supporting survivors of the Nova Festival massacre, hosted a groundbreaking four-day retreat in Cyprus for survivors of the Nova and other music festival attacks and their families.

While SafeHeart has organized numerous therapeutic retreats for survivors over the past two years, this was the first dedicated to families, bringing together 24 survivor-family pairs of parents, siblings, and partners for an unprecedented shared healing journey ahead of the first memorial.



Photo Credit: Felipe Wolokita

Set in the tranquil “Secret Forest” retreat center in Cyprus, the gathering created a rare and supportive environment where survivors and their loved ones could speak openly about their trauma, many for the first time. Freed from the pressures of daily life in Israel, participants who had carried heavy silences for nearly two years were able to express their pain, listen deeply to one another, and begin to process the impact of October 7 as a family. Survivors and relatives who had never spoken about the events found the courage to share their stories, supported by a team of experienced trauma therapists.

Efrat Atun, CEO of SafeHeart, said: “On October 7, while survivors were fighting for their lives, their families experienced their own trauma, some rushed into danger to save their children, some listened in real time to the unfolding horror, and others scrolled through endless videos trying to find out if their loved ones were alive. After that day, survivors received therapy and community support, but many families never sought help for themselves. Just as we are told to put on our own oxygen mask first, parents and relatives must allow themselves to heal too. Our programs - from support groups to family retreats - are designed to give them that space. The

Cyprus retreat was deeply powerful, a place where families could speak, process, and truly reflect on their shared trauma together.”

The retreat focused not only on those who survived the massacre but also on what SafeHeart calls the “1.5 Circle” - parents, siblings, and partners who were profoundly affected by the events of October 7 but whose trauma has often gone unrecognized. On that day, many parents drove into active combat zones to rescue their children, stayed on the phone for hours listening live to horrors, or scoured hundreds of Telegram videos in desperate attempts to locate loved ones. Yet while survivors have received significant therapeutic support, families often did not allow themselves to seek help, focusing instead on caring for their children while carrying their own unprocessed trauma.

This retreat was designed to change that, providing families with a dedicated therapeutic space and practical tools to support both themselves and their loved ones. Therapists reported remarkable breakthroughs in communication and emotional processing: families previously trapped in silence found ways to listen without fear, survivors felt deeply understood, and parents gained new skills to help their children heal.

Dr. Ayelet Cohen Wider: “I was surprised by the sheer intensity. One of the mothers shared that she feels she’s not the same woman after just two days here with us at the retreat. That really illustrates the power of the process, something about the intergenerational connection, the willingness to put the parent, survivor relationship on the table, and the work with fathers and with mothers was deeply significant. Hearing from survivors’ siblings about how they experience the parents was jarring and shaking for the parents, in a very positive sense, as if it shook them awake and allowed them to look at their children anew. To see them in a different light, to have deep, meaningful conversations, to talk about things they hadn’t had the chance to talk about before.

We have a pair in the group, and here, for the first time, the mother and daughter spoke about what happened on 7/10. For the first time the daughter could feel that her mother truly sees her, can be with her and hold her, and be present with her in that painful wound. It set in motion a very powerful and unique process, and in a short time an enormous amount happened here.”

Emilia Kutchman, a Nova survivor, noted: “These retreats are an alternative way to get more help within a different framework. Suddenly you meet other survivors, so many people who went through the same thing, even those you didn’t necessarily know or ever meet, and then you find yourself with people who are really “with” you. You get a much more enjoyable, supportive framework, and as human beings we always tend to seek frameworks.”

Her mother added: Her mother added, “The parents’ circle was very very important. First of all, I saw the other parents, and I understood... and I listened to each one’s story, and how each one is coping. I took so many, many, many tools and insights for myself from it. Because I kept wondering: am I behaving the right way? Am I doing something wrong? And I realized that in fact,

everyone behaves the way they know how, the way they can. I also saw the children, and we heard the children, and we looked at them from a completely different perspective. It opened things for me that I don't think we would ever have spoken about at home. Certainly, we would not have spoken about it at home. I saw her from another, different side, and I understood how mature she is. I understood how much of a survivor she is."

About SafeHeart

SafeHeart was founded on October 7, 2023, by a collective of trauma therapists from Israel's festival and safe-space communities. The NGO provides holistic, innovative, and trauma-informed care for survivors of the October 7 massacre and their families. With a network of more than 400 certified therapists, including many specializing in psychedelic-informed therapy, SafeHeart has delivered over 40,000 hours of free therapy to more than 1,000 survivors and family members, making it the largest initiative of its kind in Israel.

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