



# Six-Month Impact Update from Israel



## Building a Safety Net for the Oketz Community

Dear Friends,

Over the past six months, the Oketz Foundation has continued to expand its work in Israel, supporting the Oketz community after service.

Oketz soldiers serve in one of the IDF's most unique roles, operating side by side with their dogs in complex and often dangerous missions. The responsibility, independence, and bond between handler, dog, team, and unit create a community unlike any other.

After more than two years of war and repeated reserve duty, many Oketz alumni are carrying responsibilities that continue far beyond the battlefield. This is why the Foundation's work has become an essential safety net for the people, families, and dogs of Oketz.

This update shares a glimpse of our work during the first half of the year: resilience and processing programs, support for reservists and wounded veterans, bereaved family support, remembrance, scholarships, mentoring, alumni community-building, and care for retired Oketz dogs.

For our friends and partners abroad, this work is a meaningful way to stand with those who served Israel. Through your partnership, we can respond on the ground while building long-term programs for the future.

### The Oketz Community We Serve

The Oketz Foundation works with the full alumni community of the IDF Oketz K9 Unit: newly released soldiers entering civilian life, reservists returning from repeated service, wounded veterans rebuilding their lives, bereaved families carrying memory and loss, alumni building their next chapter, and retired Oketz dogs adjusting to life after operational work.

Each part of this community has different needs. Some need space to process. Some need practical guidance or long-term accompaniment. Others need remembrance, connection, education, career support, or help navigating the transition into civilian life.

Together, these circles form the Oketz community we serve.

# A Small Glimpse from the First Half of the Year

The numbers below represent only part of the work taking place on the ground, but they offer a clear glimpse into the Foundation's scope and impact over the past six months.

## Retired Oketz Dogs and the Karlo Fund

- Approximately **77 retired Oketz dogs** are currently supported through medical insurance.
- Around **20 newly released veterans** took part in a Karlo transition event.

## Resilience and Processing

- More than **50 reservists** participated in resilience and processing days.
- Approximately **100 additional reservists and active soldiers** are planned for upcoming resilience retreats and processing days.
- **16 Oketz veterans** participated in a Peace of Mind journey in Canada.
- **Swell Dogs** continues to meet weekly, with around **14 participants** per session.

## Wounded Veterans, Families, and Remembrance

- More than **60 wounded alumni** have been accompanied since the beginning of the war.
- The Foundation currently accompanies **16 bereaved families** from the Oketz community.
- Around **250 soldiers and alumni** joined **Shirim VeZokhrim**, our community remembrance evening.
- Around **50 alumni who lost their Oketz dogs** joined the unit's **K9 Remembrance Day** ceremony on base.

## Alumni Future and Community

- More than **2,000 alumni** are registered in the Foundation's growing community.
- **16 memorial scholarships** are planned, each providing **₪10,000** toward studies.
- **6 mentor-mentee pairs** are preparing to begin a structured six-month mentoring process.
- Around **500 alumni** are part of an alumni-led financial education community.

## National Impact

- The Foundation helped advance a historic law recognizing the contribution of security service dogs in Israel.

Behind each number is a person, a family, a team, or a dog who remains part of the Oketz community after service.

# A Historic Milestone: National Recognition for Security Service Dogs

Last month, Israel approved the first law of its kind recognizing the contribution of security service dogs who served in the IDF, Israel Police, and Prison Service.

This was a historic milestone for the Oketz community and for all security service dogs in Israel. The Oketz Foundation helped advance this issue over a long period of time, bringing the voice of handlers, adopters, veterans, and the dogs themselves from the community to the national stage



*At the Knesset, advancing formal recognition for Israel's security service dogs.*

The impact of this law will continue for generations to come. It creates formal recognition for dogs who served the country, and sets a new standard of responsibility toward them after their service ends.

For every Oketz handler, this law gives national recognition to a truth they already know: the dog beside them was a true partner in the mission.



## A Special Message from the President of Israel

Honoring the Oketz Unit, its service dogs, and the partners who support the Foundation's mission.

[To watch the video, click here.](#)

## Karlo Fund: Caring for Retired Oketz Dogs

The Karlo Fund is one of the Foundation's core areas of responsibility.

After years of serving Israel in demanding operational environments, Oketz dogs eventually leave military service and begin a new chapter in civilian life. This transition is meaningful, but also complex. These dogs move from a structured operational setting into homes, families, new routines, and new medical and behavioral needs.

For Oketz veterans, these dogs are not simply animals who completed a mission. They are partners who served beside soldiers, entered dangerous places, protected lives, and became part of the unit's story.

Today, approximately **75 retired Oketz dogs** are supported through medical insurance. Without a dedicated support system, the responsibility for this transition can fall entirely on the veteran who adopts the dog, often while both the veteran and the dog are adjusting to a new life.

The Karlo Fund provides a unique response: medical insurance, guidance, community, and a growing support system for retired Oketz dogs and the veterans who bring them home.



*After years of service, Oketz dogs begin civilian life alongside the veterans who bring them home.*

Behind this transition is a real gap. During military service, these dogs live within a structured system with professional care, clear routines, and operational purpose. After release, they enter civilian homes, where medical decisions, costs, behavioral changes, and daily adjustment often become the responsibility of the veteran adopter.

The Karlo Fund helps bridge this gap, ensuring that years of service are followed by continued care, responsibility, and support.



This year, we held a dedicated transition event for around **20 newly released veterans and their retired dogs**, focused on beginning civilian life together.



*Newly released Oketz veterans learning about the transition from operational service to civilian life with their dogs.*

The event introduced them to the Foundation and the Karlo Fund, and provided practical guidance on veterinary care, home adjustment, routine-building, behavioral changes, and when to consult professionals.

For the adopters, this guidance is more than information. It gives them confidence, a direct connection to trusted professionals, and a clear reminder that they are entering a community that will continue to walk with them.



*A small gift for the veterans and their dogs and the beginning of an ongoing connection with the Karlo community.*

The message was simple: from the first day after release, both the veteran and the dog should know they are not alone.

We are now working to expand the Karlo Fund's long-term model, creating a stronger and more sustainable system of medical insurance, emergency support, guidance, and community for adopters.

## Resilience and Processing: Supporting Reservists and Veterans

After more than two years of war and repeated reserve duty, many Oketz alumni are moving between combat service, home, work, studies, and family life — often with very little time to process what they have experienced.

Oketz service carries a unique kind of responsibility. Handlers often operate independently within different units and missions, while carrying responsibility for themselves, their dog, the team around them, and the mission ahead.

This builds strength and leadership, but it can also leave a weight that continues long after service ends.

The Foundation's resilience programs give veterans, reservists, and active soldiers a place to pause, process, and receive tools for the road ahead.

Over the past six months, more than **50 reservists** took part in resilience and processing days, including programs at **Sheba** and in **Eilat**.



*More than 50 reservists took part in resilience and processing days supported by the Foundation.*

These days provide a protected space for guided conversation, reflection, and recovery after intense periods of service — supported by professionals and by a community that understands what they are carrying.

In the coming months, we are planning additional resilience retreats and processing days for approximately **100 more reservists, recently released Oketz soldiers, and active soldiers**.

This work also connects to deeper team-based processes, such as Peace of Mind journeys, which are described in the next section.

## Peace of Mind: Team Zaks in Canada

One of the most meaningful resilience programs this period was the **Peace of Mind journey of Team Zaks**, an Oketz combat team from November 2015.

**Peace of Mind** is a long-term processing program for Israeli combat teams after military service. It allows an entire team to go through a structured process together — beginning in Israel, continuing with a central week hosted by a Jewish community abroad, and ending with follow-up sessions back home.

Team Zaks included **16 Oketz veterans** and took part in a process lasting around nine months: a preparation workshop in Israel, a central week in Canada, a closing workshop, and a follow-up session.



*Team Zaks on their way to Canada as part of their Peace of Mind process.*

During the week in Canada, the team was hosted by families from the local Jewish community. The hospitality created a safe and meaningful environment, far from daily pressure, where the team could focus on connection, honest conversation, and shared healing.

What made this journey so powerful was the fact that the participants had served together in the same unit, carried shared memories, and often experienced the same missions from different perspectives. During the process, stories and emotions surfaced that some team members had carried quietly for years — moments they had never spoken about, and in some cases, moments their own teammates had never fully known.

For many of them, this was life-changing. It allowed them to understand their own experiences differently, hear their teammates in a new way, and reconnect with the people who had been beside them during some of the most meaningful and difficult moments of their service.



Alongside community experiences and visits such as Niagara Falls, the heart of the journey was not the travel, it was the team process.



*A shared moment in Canada - part of the team's renewed connection and healing process.*

The journey helped them close circles that had remained open for years, and reminded them that their team and community remain with them long after service ends.

We are now preparing to support **two additional Peace of Mind journeys** for Oketz teams, allowing more veterans to take part in this kind of long-term team-based healing and reconnection.

# Swell Dogs: Weekly Resilience Through the Sea

Alongside structured retreats and processing programs, the Foundation also supports ongoing community-based resilience through **Swell Dogs**.

For nearly two years, Swell Dogs has brought Oketz alumni together at the sea every week - on Mondays during the winter, and twice a week during the summer.

The group includes around **60 active participants** from different stages of life: recently released soldiers, older alumni, fathers, students, and professionals. They come from different generations, but they share the same unit, the same language, and experiences that only Oketz veterans fully understand.

Each session usually brings together around **14 different participants**, with larger sessions of up to **21 participants** when demand is especially high.



*Swell Dogs - a weekly space for resilience, community, and healing through the sea.*

There is something deeply fitting about Oketz veterans finding resilience through surfing. The leash that connects the surfer to the board echoes the bond between handler and dog: trust, balance, responsibility, and movement through uncertainty.

For many veterans, the sea creates a space where words are not always necessary. Showing up, moving, breathing, and being part of a group becomes part of the healing process.

Swell Dogs reflects one of the Foundation's core beliefs: resilience is built not only in crisis moments, but also through ongoing community, routine, movement, and connection.



## Wounded Veterans: Long-Term Presence and Support

The Foundation continues to accompany wounded Oketz veterans and their families through recovery, rehabilitation, and the long return to daily life after injury.

Since the beginning of the war, the Foundation has accompanied more than **60 wounded alumni**, helping connect them with support, guidance, professional referrals, community, and personal presence.



*During Passover, a wounded Oketz veteran reunited with his dog at the hospital - a powerful reminder of the bond that continues through injury, healing, and return.*

While wounded veterans are formally supported by the IDF and Israel's official systems, the Foundation provides something different: a personal and community-based layer of support from people who know them, understand where they come from, and remain present beyond the first stage of treatment.

Our role is not to replace official systems. It is to stand beside the wounded and their families, identify needs that may fall between the cracks, and provide connection, guidance, and belonging throughout the long recovery process.

Recovery is not only physical. It is emotional, social, practical and it often continues long after the injury itself.

In the coming months, we are planning a dedicated gathering for wounded Oketz veterans: an evening of connection, community, and meaningful activity designed to strengthen the bond between them and remind them that they continue to be part of the Oketz family.

## Bereaved Families: Remembrance, and Living Legacy

The Foundation currently accompanies **16 bereaved families** connected to the Oketz community.

For many families, the bond with Oketz is deep and personal. They know how proud their sons and daughters were to serve in the unit, how meaningful Oketz was in their lives, and how much identity, purpose, and belonging they found there.

While bereaved families receive formal recognition and support through official systems, the Foundation provides a different kind of layer: a personal, community-based embrace from within the Oketz family itself. We know the unit, the people, the stories, and the meaning this place held for their loved ones.

Our support is not limited to memorial days or official ceremonies. Throughout the year, we stay connected with the families, invite them into community moments, remember together, and work to ensure they continue to feel part of the Oketz family.



*Ten bereaved families joined us for an evening of connection, resilience, and choosing life after loss.*

Recently, we invited bereaved families to an intimate evening at a restaurant, with a lecture focused on resilience and choosing life after loss. After the event, many families shared how meaningful and uplifting the evening was for them. Whether their loss is recent or many years have passed, the evening offered space for reflection, new insights, connection, and shared strength.

Our responsibility is to make sure that this connection is felt not only in words, but through presence, sensitivity, and action.

## **Memorial Scholarships: Turning Service and Memory Into the Future**

Our memorial scholarship program supports **16 Oketz alumni**, each receiving **\$10,000** toward their studies.

Each scholarship is given in memory of a fallen member of the unit, carrying two stories forward: the legacy of someone who gave everything, and the future of an Oketz alumnus or alumna building life after service.

The program is not only financial support. Scholarship recipients also give back to the Foundation and the Oketz community through volunteering, connection with bereaved families, and meaningful involvement in the Foundation's ongoing work.

In this way, the scholarships help turn military service into civilian leadership, while keeping the memory, values, and stories of the fallen active within the community.

Next month, we will begin interviews for the next scholarship cycle, continuing this living chain of remembrance, service, and community.

## Remembrance as Community

This period included meaningful moments of remembrance, bringing together soldiers, alumni, families, and handlers to honor the legacy of the Oketz community.

**Shirim VeZokhrim** brought together around **250 soldiers and alumni** for an evening of memory, music, and community ahead of Israel's Memorial Day. The event created a shared space for current soldiers, alumni, and families to remember together and strengthen the connection between generations of the unit.



*An evening of memory, music, and community - bringing together soldiers, alumni, and families ahead of Israel's Memorial Day.*

**K9 Remembrance Day** brought around **50 alumni who lost their Oketz dogs** back to the unit's official ceremony on base, together with all current soldiers.

For Oketz, remembrance also means honoring the dogs who served beside the fighters. They were not tools or equipment — they were partners in the mission, part of the team, and part of the unit's story.



*Honoring the dogs who served beside Oketz soldiers and the lasting bond between handlers, dogs, and the unit.*

These moments strengthen memory, belonging, and shared identity. They remind us that the Oketz legacy is carried forward through people, families, handlers, and the four-legged partners who served beside them.



# Alumni Community, Mentoring, and Long-Term Transition

The Foundation now has more than **2,000 registered Oketz alumni**, and we continue to build an active, long-term community for veterans after service.

For many Oketz alumni, the transition into civilian life begins after years of responsibility, independence, and intense service. They leave the unit with strong skills and leadership, but often need guidance in translating that experience into education, career direction, financial independence, and civilian belonging.

Our role is to help them build the next chapter — not only in moments of crisis, but also in everyday life after service.

## Mentoring Program

Our mentoring program currently includes **6 mentor-mentee pairs**, preparing to begin a structured **six-month process**.

The program connects Oketz alumni with experienced professionals who support them through career guidance, personal development, decision-making, and the first steps of building their civilian path.

## Alumni-Led Financial Education Community

We also continue to grow our alumni-led financial education community, which now includes around **500 members**.

This initiative was created from within the alumni community itself, based on a real need raised by veterans. The group shares practical knowledge, hosts events and lectures, and gives alumni tools for smarter financial decision-making after service.

Together, these programs reflect a core belief of the Foundation: those who served should have a community behind them as they build their future.

## What's Next?

The initiatives below represent only part of what lies ahead, but they highlight several key areas where the Foundation is working to deepen and expand its support.

The work of the Oketz Foundation is growing because the needs of the Oketz community continue to grow. In the coming months, we are focused on turning this momentum into deeper, more structured, and more sustainable support.

### Expanding the Karlo Fund

Building a stronger long-term model for retired Oketz dogs, including medical insurance, emergency support, professional guidance, and community for adopters.

### More Resilience Support for Reservists and Soldiers

Providing resilience retreats and processing days for approximately **100 additional reservists, recently released soldiers, and active soldiers**, giving them space to pause, process, reconnect, and receive tools.

### Opening the Next Memorial Scholarship Cycle

Beginning interviews next month for the next scholarship cycle, continuing to support Oketz alumni while honoring the legacy of fallen members of the unit.

### Peace of Mind Journeys for Additional Teams

Moving forward with **two additional Peace of Mind journeys**, allowing more Oketz teams to take part in a deep process of team-based healing and reconnection.

### Support for Wounded Veterans and Bereaved Families

Expanding dedicated gatherings and programs that provide personal presence, community, and long-term accompaniment beyond formal systems.

### Weekly Swell Dogs Sessions

Continuing the weekly Swell Dogs community, creating a consistent space for veterans to reconnect through surfing, movement, and shared experience.

### Growing Alumni Transition Programs

Expanding mentoring, financial education, community-building, and transition support so Oketz veterans have tools not only in moments of crisis, but also as they build their futures.

Together, these priorities represent only part of the Foundation's work ahead and reflect our next stage: building a broader, stronger safety net for the people, families, and dogs of the Oketz community.

## A Message from the Oketz Foundation

On behalf of the Chairman, the Board, our team in Israel, and myself, thank you for taking the time to learn about the Oketz Foundation and the community we serve.

Over the past six months, we have continued to expand our work because the needs of the Oketz community are growing. Veterans are returning from reserve duty, wounded soldiers are rebuilding their lives, bereaved families remain part of our family, alumni are taking their first steps into civilian life, and retired Oketz dogs are beginning a new chapter after years of service.

The impact shared in this update is possible because of partners who understand that our responsibility does not end when the mission ends.

Your support allows us to respond to real needs on the ground while building long-term programs for the future - providing resilience, community, remembrance, practical tools, and continued care for the people, families, and dogs of Oketz.

For us, support from friends abroad is much more than a donation. It is a powerful expression of connection, responsibility, and shared commitment between the Jewish people and those who served Israel.

We invite you to partner with us in the next stage and help expand this safety net for the entire Oketz community. Whether through a one-time gift, a recurring contribution, or a larger partnership, every gift helps us turn responsibility into action.

The next page includes several ways to support this work through **American Friends of Oketz**.

With deep appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Moran Bruchim', with a stylized flourish extending to the left.

**Moran Bruchim**

CEO, Oketz Foundation