



NECHAMA – Jewish Response to Disaster
P.O. Box 17249
St. Paul, MN 55117
(763) 732-0610
NECHAMA.org

Focus Area: Combating Antisemitism

NECHAMA is the only national Jewish organization that focuses solely on disaster relief in the continental United States. We provide relief and recovery services in a sector that is dominated by faith-based organizations, the vast majority of which are Christian relief agencies. Our work is deeply rooted in the Jewish value of *Tikkun Olam* (repair of the world) and we always provide a strong visible presence for Judaism when deployed. Volunteers and staff wear blue shirts emblazoned with our name in Hebrew and English characters and the Star of David logo.

NECHAMA was founded to promote community relations by providing a platform for Jews to show up and offer assistance to communities devastated by disasters. We offer a stark contrast to many other faith-based organizations, who proselytize, often serve only those clients who share their religious identity, and have religious goals for this work. NECHAMA does not! Throughout our history we have noticed an unintended and positive consequence for our efforts: Our actions help combat antisemitism.

In the United States and worldwide, rates of antisemitism have risen steadily since 2013 (according to ADL's statistics), and combating antisemitism has become a top priority for the Jewish community. While many tools are necessary in this fight, we believe that turning our core value of *Tikkun Olam* into action is a key one.

Most of the communities that NECHAMA works in are isolated and lack any local Jewish presence. These are intentional destinations for NECHAMA as we typically provide assistance for the most vulnerable clients, who are often located far from cities and have limited resources. As a result, most of our clients are non-Jewish. NECHAMA's motto is "We do this restorative work not because you are Jewish, but because we are."

Our clients often express to us that NECHAMA staff and volunteers are the very first Jewish people they have ever knowingly seen or had a conversation with. It is nearly impossible to understand the members of a community without having first encountered them, and NECHAMA has provided thousands of people with this foundational opportunity.

Not only are many clients meeting Jewish people for the first time, but they are also seeing how Jews care about their stricken communities and how Jewish people respond with assistance at times of crisis. NECHAMA showcases the positive value of Jewish people in society, providing a direct contrast to the antisemitism disseminated online and in the media. The ripple effects from our work have increased appreciation for Jews, especially in rural areas with limited connections to Jewish life.

Our volunteers find this element of our work compelling. Following a flood in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, one young volunteer sent us this message: "I'm from New Orleans and I know a lot of lives have been touched by the flooding. Your organization makes me so proud to be Jewish and so proud that my religion cares for other people." As NECHAMA grows as an organization and expands our partnerships with other institutions, we will continue to seek out opportunities that allow us to better serve non-Jewish communities, humanizing our people in the best way possible - through direct service.