



NECHAMA – Jewish Response to Disaster
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PRESS RELEASE: COMBATING ANTISEMITISM IN DISASTER-STRICKEN COMMUNITIES

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On September 30, 2024 Hurricane Helene rolled through the Southeast United States, affecting Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and most devastatingly, Western North Carolina. The damage caused by the storm will take years to repair. Along with the high death toll and incomprehensible physical damage, North Carolina has faced a significant uptick in antisemitism, specifically focused on natural disasters and recovery from the storm.

[Antisemitic conspiracy theories](#), such as Jews controlling the weather and Jews withholding funds from victims because of greed, were rampant online. Additionally, hate groups claimed that the U.S. support of Israel prevented victims from receiving FEMA funds. **The uniqueness of these antisemitic claims is that much of them were directed towards disaster relief responders.** NECHAMA, as the sole national Jewish disaster relief organization, is uniquely positioned to show up and address such deceit and antisemitism.

NECHAMA is proud to announce our newest project: Combating Antisemitism in Disaster-Stricken Communities. This 6-month pilot initiative will focus on communities in Western North Carolina, where NECHAMA has been stationed since early October, providing much needed relief. NECHAMA is usually the only Jewish presence on the ground following disasters, and our clients often have had no prior interaction with Jewish organizations. Our relief efforts have already shattered stereotypes of Jews in many communities, but this project aims to more intentionally focus on combating antisemitism, utilizing the access that our disaster operations grants us.

Focusing on relationships with community influentials, church leaders, partnering disaster relief organizations (many of whom are faith-based), and local politicians, **NECHAMA will forge new allies in the fight against antisemitism and actively showcase how core Jewish values are universally beneficial to all Americans.** NECHAMA intends to publish articles in local and national press, host forums, and guide leaders on how they can educate their communities about the Jewish people.

Tzlil McDonald will lead this effort for NECHAMA. Tzlil's background makes her exceptionally well-suited for this role, with an advanced degree in Experiential Jewish Education, over a decade working in Jewish nonprofit settings, including as Executive Director of a local Jewish federation, and a strong skill set in bridging faith differences to advance *Tikkun Olam*. Tzlil shares the following:

“Antisemitism fuels division at a time when unity is most needed. My commitment to combating antisemitism is deeply personal, shaped by my experience as an Israeli, with family and friends affected by the events of October 7th, and as a granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor, a community leader and a Jewish Educator. I’ve seen firsthand how hate can isolate communities, and I’ve also witnessed how empathy, education, and collaboration can build bridges and create lasting change.”

To view Tzlil’s full background and message, click [here](#).

While the initial phase of this project focuses on Western North Carolina, NECHAMA believes that combating antisemitism will become a significant long-term focus of the organization, especially with the [astronomic rise of antisemitism in the U.S. and worldwide](#).

NECHAMA CEO, Stephan Kline, shared the following:

“This initiative is a natural extension of NECHAMA’s mission to bring comfort, hope, and support to communities in need. As antisemitism continues to rise, it’s vital that we leverage our presence and relationships in disaster-stricken areas to educate, build bridges, and stand against hate. Through this effort, we reaffirm our commitment to promoting understanding and showcasing the best of Jewish values.”

NECHAMA Board President, Stephen Matloff, added:

“Disasters impact communities in many ways, extending far beyond physical damage. NECHAMA’s initiative to combat antisemitism highlights our commitment to strengthening the communities we serve, not only through structural recovery but by fostering understanding and unity. I am proud that we are embracing this leadership role, creating lasting connections and more resilient communities.”

For more about NECHAMA’s plans for the future, as well as to inquire about funding the project, please email stephan.kline@nechama.org.