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## Bedouin volunteers fix vandalized Jewish Israeli cemetery

Alumni of Desert Stars sprang into action after seeing a social-media post from the two Bedouin youth who caused the damage.

Desert Stars is a Village Way Educational Initiatives partner community with a unique Bedouin educational framework.

By *Abigail Klein Leichman*



After two young Bedouin teenagers bragged on TikTok about vandalizing a Jewish graveyard at Moshav Nevatim about five miles south of Beersheva in the Negev, a group of about 20 young adults from a variety of Bedouin villages sprang into action.

Armed with paint and brushes, they headed to the cemetery the next morning – even though it was Friday, the Muslim Sabbath – and worked for hours to repair damaged tombstones and scrape and paint over hateful graffiti.

All the volunteers in this heartwarming deed are recent alumni of Desert Stars, a not-for-profit organization that creates a cross-tribal network of young Bedouin leaders in the Negev.



“Because they are connected to social media, they saw the post on TikTok and soon there was a message that went out on our alumni WhatsApp group,” says Desert Stars co-CEO Yousef Abu Jaffar.

That was on the afternoon of Thursday, January 14.

“They called me when I was on my way home and by 7 in the evening everyone was ready,” Abu Jaffar tells ISRAEL21c. “I said I would join them in the morning.”

When he got to Nevatim at 8 o’clock Friday morning, with fresh bourekas for everyone, they were almost done with the fixup.

Several volunteers posted on [Desert Stars’ Facebook page](#) about why they decided to make a show of solidarity.

“Our actions are making a statement beyond the immediate impact,” wrote Saad Abu Ayad, an alumnus who now works as an instructor in the Desert Stars high school’s informal education program.



*The group of Bedouin volunteers who fixed up a vandalized Jewish graveyard in the Negev. At left, in white shirt, is Yochai, the cemetery’s caretaker. Photo courtesy of Desert Stars*

“We are sending a message here to both sides — to Jewish society but also inward to the Bedouin society – so that everyone will know that we condemn vandalism, and that the youth of our society would see that such acts give them no prestige, but rather the opposite. We will not accept it and we will not let such things slide.”

Alumni program manager Adam Al-Assad bought the supplies the night before and brought them to the cemetery.

“We would like all of Israeli society that has heard about the vandalism to hear about the rectification as well,” Al-Assad wrote.

“We feel that showing the beautiful face of Bedouin society is news that is just as important, and that we can continue to spread a message of unity.”

Abu Jaffar notes that the 20-somethings who volunteered came from different villages, and they all have jobs or are continuing their studies. Approximately 250,000 Arab Bedouins live in nine Bedouin municipalities and dozens of herding and farming villages scattered throughout the Negev.

“We thought about 10 volunteers would come and in the end it was much more. They took the time to clean and paint and put everything right as well as they could.”

**IMPACTISRAEL NOTE: The Desert Stars community is comprised of a high school, after-school program, a gap-year leadership program, and graduate network. Village Way Educational Initiative’s strong partnership and its caring and supportive facilitators, along with the Village Way methodology, successfully provides meaningful guidance and inspiration to this complex cultural landscape.**

[Read more about the Village Way methodology](#) and how it is changing the nature of education for Israel’s at-risk youth population.