

**Building Recovery from Within:
Culture, Community, and Holding the Holders in
Times of Collective Trauma**

***A Practice-Based Framework Developed from BINA's
Work Since October 7, 2023***

Research report

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Executive Summary

The attacks of 7 October 2023 and the prolonged war that followed, confronted Israeli communities and civil-society organizations with overlapping forms of disruption, including bereavement and trauma, displacement, extended reserve duty, geographic separation, and continuing uncertainty. Organizations and recovery programs were required to respond rapidly across markedly different settings, often without an established framework for sustaining community-based support during an unfolding national crisis. Against this background, the present study asks a practical question: what principles enable community organizations and recovery interventions to foster meaning, belonging, and sustained support under conditions of collective trauma?

The study examines professional practice and the tacit knowledge embedded within it across three BINA initiatives: (1) the “Heart Spaces” project, which provides supportive spaces for young Israelis travelling in India and the Far East; (2) the “Growing Again” project, which supports community recovery among displaced and affected communities from Southern and Northern Israel; and (3) facilitated processing groups for military reservists returning from operational service. The analysis draws on 23 in-depth interviews with program managers and facilitators (social workers and local community leaders). Using an inductive thematic approach, the study identified recurring patterns and principles of practice across interviews and program settings, while also attending to contextual differences. The resulting themes were subsequently interpreted and refined in relation to relevant scholarship on trauma and recovery, meaning-making, narrative and ritual, social identity, community resilience, secondary trauma, and professional supervision.

The analysis produced a three-dimensional framework. The first dimension, cultural-narrative resources, describes how texts, rituals, stories, music, writing, and creative practices can provide an indirect and shared language for approaching difficult experiences and constructing meaning. The second, community belonging and collective agency, emphasizes relationships, trust, local participation, and the community’s capacity to become an active resource for its members. The third, holding the holders’, concerns the professional, emotional, and organizational support required by the staff members, facilitators, volunteers, and local leaders responsible

for sustaining others. These dimensions are not sequential stages or independent intervention components. They operate as an interdependent system: cultural resources gain meaning within trusted relationships, community ownership depends on supported local leadership, and practitioners' capacity to sustain others is shaped by the support available to them.

The framework offers an evidence-informed basis for designing, reviewing, and adapting community interventions during prolonged crises. It directs organizational attention beyond the delivery of visible activities toward the conditions that allow those activities to become meaningful and sustainable: cultural relevance, relationships, local ownership, reflective supervision, organizational learning, professional boundaries, and pathways to specialized care. It also emphasizes the importance of identifying and strengthening existing local capacities, relationships, and structures, so that intervention supports not only immediate needs but the community's own capacity to generate meaning, belonging, agency, and support over time. Its innovation lies in integrating cultural meaning-making, community capacity, and support for those sustaining the response within a single practice-based framework, developed through comparative analysis of tacit professional knowledge across three distinct crisis settings. The study does not measure clinical recovery, establish causal effects, or claim that the framework can be transferred unchanged to every context. Rather, it translates recurring field-based insights into an integrated and potentially transferable framework that can inform organizational practice and provide a foundation for comparative and longitudinal research in Israel and across diverse Jewish communities.

Introduction

The practical challenge after 7 October

The events of 7 October created not one bounded emergency, but a protracted social condition. Individuals and communities were required to function while confronting loss, disrupted routines, repeated exposure to threat, and uncertainty. The affected populations were also dispersed: some were evacuated from their homes, some were serving for extended periods in the IDF reserves, and others were abroad, physically distant from familiar support systems. This produced a challenge for psychosocial and recovery intervention mechanisms. Assistance had to be rapid but not generic, emotionally meaningful but not necessarily clinical, locally adapted but still coherent, and sustainable even when staff members and community leaders were themselves affected by the crisis.

The study addresses a gap between two common trauma responses. One treats trauma primarily as an individual clinical matter; the other treats community response primarily as the delivery of activities and services. The field evidence suggests that recovery interventions depend on the relationship between personal meaning, social belonging, and the capacity of those who lead and facilitate the response. The resulting framework therefore shifts attention from isolated interventions to the conditions that allow communities and organizations to carry recovery over time.

Organizational Context

BINA is an Israeli educational and community organization that has worked for nearly three decades to develop an inclusive and pluralistic Jewish-Israeli identity. Its approach brings Jewish texts, traditions, rituals, and cultural practices into dialogue with democratic values, civic responsibility, and contemporary Israeli life. BINA works through educational programs, leadership development, community-based initiatives, and cultural and social programming in Israel and among Jewish and Israeli communities abroad. This organizational background is relevant to the present study because BINA's established practice already combined cultural interpretation, community building, and the development of local leadership before 7 October. Following the attacks and the prolonged crisis that ensued, these practices were

adapted to markedly different populations and circumstances: Israelis travelling abroad, displaced and affected communities in Israel, and military reservists returning from operational service. The presence of recurring principles across these distinct settings made it possible to examine how an existing organizational approach was adapted under crisis conditions and to identify the elements that appeared consistently across different applications.

Relevance beyond one organization

BINA provides the empirical case, but the object of inquiry is broader than BINA's organizational performance. The study compares recurring practices across three programs, populations, and operating environments to identify principles that may be useful to community organizations, municipalities, Jewish educational and cultural bodies, welfare services, and diaspora institutions responding to collective disruption. The purpose of the research is analytical and generative: to transform tacit field knowledge and accumulated experience into a transferable framework that can guide organizational action, learning, and future research. Existing scholarship on collective trauma has generally examined cultural meaning-making, community resilience, and professional supervision within distinct theoretical and empirical traditions. These perspectives are less often integrated into a single applied framework for organizations responding to an ongoing national crisis. The present study addresses this gap by examining how these three mechanisms interact in practice and by translating their interdependence into a framework for organizational action.

The contribution of the present framework therefore lies not in proposing cultural meaning-making, community belonging, or professional support as individually new mechanisms. Rather, it lies in bringing these three established areas of knowledge into a single applied framework and, importantly, in conceptualizing them as interdependent capacities. From this perspective, cultural resources become meaningful through relationships of trust and belonging; community capacity depends partly on supported local leadership; and the ability of practitioners and community leaders to sustain others is shaped by the professional and organizational structures that support them. The framework thus shifts attention from individual

intervention components to the relationships among the conditions that enable community-based responses to be sustained during prolonged collective crisis.

What Was Studied and How

Research settings

Setting / project	Primary population	Immediate challenge	Forms of practice examined
“Heart Spaces”	Young Israelis travelling in India and the Far East	Distance from home and family during a national crisis	Community gatherings, writing and creative workshops, Shabbat and holiday meals, emotional support, and professional referral links
“Growing Again”	Displaced and affected communities from southern and northern Israel	Rebuilding communal identity, leadership, and a shared future after rupture.	Local leadership development, renewal of community narratives, culturally grounded gatherings, and partnerships with municipalities.
Reservist processing groups	Reservists and former combatants returning from operational service	Processing combat experience and the transition back to civilian roles	Facilitated group dialogue, creative and projective tools, and Israeli and Jewish texts and narratives

Table 1. Overview of the Three Initiatives Examined in the Study

Data and analytic strategy

The source material records 23 in-depth interviews across professional and community roles, including program managers and group facilitators. Interviews explored working experience, decision-making under uncertainty, challenges encountered in the field, moments understood as professionally successful, and the tools that appeared to support belonging, meaning-making, and community rebuilding.

The study adopted a qualitative, practice-based approach aimed at extracting knowledge embedded in practitioners' accounts of experience, action, and professional judgment. The analysis proceeded through inductive thematic analysis across interviews and program settings, followed by theoretically informed interpretation of the emerging themes. First, recurring patterns and principles of action were identified inductively across the interviews. Second, patterns were compared across the three settings to distinguish program-specific activities and contextual variations from mechanisms and principles recurring across settings. Third, the emerging themes were brought into dialogue with relevant theoretical and empirical scholarship on meaning-making, narrative and ritual, social identity, community resilience, post-traumatic growth, secondary trauma, supervision, and holding environments. At this final stage, the literature was used to interpret, contextualize, and refine themes derived from the data, rather than to provide an a-priori analytical framework or predetermined categories. This approach is particularly suited to the study of professional practice in a rapidly evolving crisis, where important forms of experiential and tacit knowledge may not yet be captured in formal protocols or established models. Further, the study remains exploratory and qualitative: recurrence across accounts can support the identification of potentially transferable conceptual principles but does not establish causal relationships or statistical generalizability. The methodology is described in detail in the appendix.

The Three-Dimensional Framework

The framework describes three capacities that appeared repeatedly across different programs and populations. The cultural-narrative dimension gives participants a language through which difficult experiences can become speakable and meaningful. The community dimension turns that meaning into belonging, mutual responsibility, and local agency. 'Holding the holders' creates the professional and organizational conditions required to sustain both processes. Each dimension can be observed separately, but the field evidence indicates that their value is relational: cultural tools become meaningful within trusted human relationships; community ownership requires supported local leaders; and staff support is purposeful when it improves the

quality and continuity of the space offered to participant. Figure 1 presents the mutual interactions between the three dimensions.

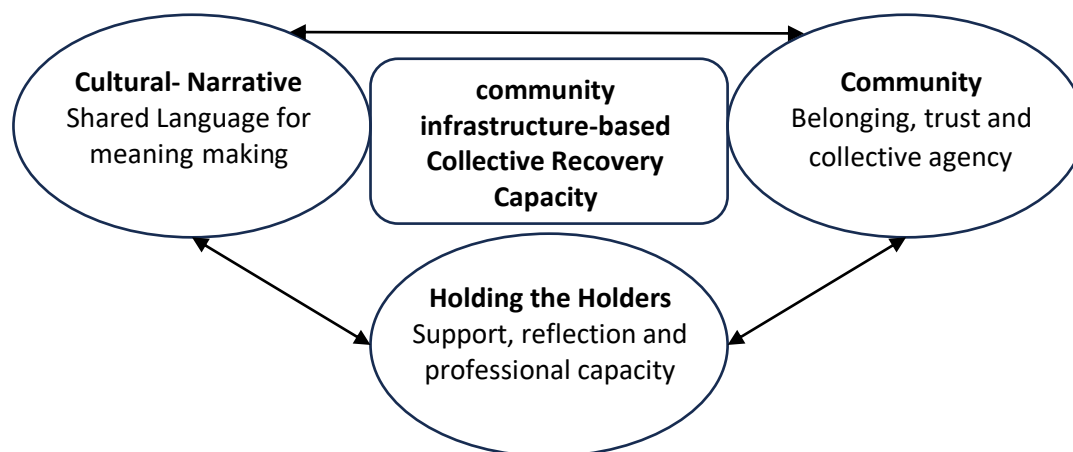


Figure 1. The three dimensions operate as a mutually reinforcing system rather than a sequence of stages

Dimension One: The Cultural and Narrative Dimension

One of the most consistent findings to emerge from the interviews was that cultural content, including texts from Jewish sources, rituals, holidays, music, creative expression, writing, and shared symbols, was generally not described as the objective of the intervention. Rather, it functioned as a language through which participants could process experiences, construct meaning, and connect with themselves and with others. Interviewees rarely described the work as "studying Judaism" or transmitting knowledge. Instead, they repeatedly emphasized that culture provided a safe space for engaging with issues that are often difficult to address directly: trauma, loss, identity, guilt, hope, and leadership. Cultural language enabled a shift from factual or therapeutic discourse to a personal, emotional, and shared conversation, without requiring participants to speak explicitly about themselves at the outset of the process. This principle appeared across a wide range of contexts: in work with Israeli travelers in the Far East, in processes with evacuated communities, and in workshops for reserve soldiers. Despite the considerable differences between these populations, the consistency of this finding suggests that the use of culture is not a project-specific

technique, but a crosscutting principle identified across the three initiatives examined. Its recurrence among different populations also indicates its potential relevance beyond the organizational setting in which it emerged. One of the social workers involved in establishing 'Heart Spaces' project explained that, alongside sessions on trauma and facilitated group circles, the program consistently incorporated yoga, creative activities, music, and writing. Writing, she noted, was chosen because of its therapeutic value and its capacity to facilitate emotional processing. It was therefore perceived as an integral part of the space rather than an ancillary activity.

A similar idea emerged in interviews with facilitators from 'Growing Again' project. One facilitator described using the figure of Moses as a metaphor for leadership in times of uncertainty, alongside the Midrash depicting the Messiah unbinding and rebinding his wounds, as a way of opening conversations about injury, recovery, and communal responsibility. These metaphors became part of the participants' shared language, allowing them to engage with their present reality without remaining solely at the operational level. Group facilitators mentioned that even participants who had little previous experience studying Jewish texts described how the encounter with Jewish texts generated curiosity and offered new perspectives. One facilitator recalled that participants initially experienced the texts as unfamiliar, yet through guided reading and discussion, they gradually became a resource through which they could connect ancient narratives with their own lives. As he put it, *"They realized there was real depth there, and that they could take something from it"*.

The findings also clarify that cultural resources are not effective on their own. Several interviewees described the most meaningful moments as those in which one participant shared a personal experience, others recognized something of themselves in it, and the group became able to engage in a deeper conversation. Texts, rituals, and creative activities often provided a shared language that made such disclosure more accessible, but their value depended on the relationships and trust surrounding them. As one facilitator explained: *"The moment someone shared something deeply personal, others joined in"*.

Cultural resources may therefore open the door to personal expression, while a safe and well-facilitated group environment allows that expression to develop into a shared process of meaning-making.

The findings emerging from the knowledge extraction process resonate with a broad body of research emphasizing the role of narratives, rituals, symbols, and cultural resources in meaning-making following trauma. The literature indicates that coping with crisis occurs not only through direct emotional processing, but also through cultural frameworks that enable individuals to situate their own stories within a broader context of identity, community, and continuity. In this context, texts, rituals, and creative practices are not regarded as additions to therapeutic or community work, but as resources that help create a shared language, strengthen a sense of belonging, and construct meaning. The narrative approach forms the foundation of this dimension. A central component of the narrative approach is the creation of rituals. Rituals and rites of passage create an intermediate space in which an old identity can break down and a new identity can be constructed. The rituals used by BINA, from Shabbat gatherings to processing workshops, constitute such transitional spaces, enabling participants to process trauma and reconstruct identity. As noted above, this dimension refers to the use of cultural anchors, including holidays, texts and stories, language, and rituals of mourning and celebration, as tools for processing, grounding, and meaning-making in situations of trauma and crisis. These are healing tools and can be drawn from a variety of cultural and religious traditions according to the target population of each project.

Further, A substantial body of research has examined the relationship between culture, religion, spirituality, and psychological well-being, particularly in coping with trauma. Azoulay (2024) argues that meaning is the force that connects the individual to the community and provides a sense of purpose. This understanding builds on Frankl's (1963) development of Logotherapy, which identifies the search for meaning as a fundamental human motivation. According to Frankl, suffering remains suffering, yet meaning provides the framework through which it can be endured. Subsequent research likewise demonstrates that constructing meaning following trauma contributes to better long-term psychological adjustment (Park, 2010). Symbols, texts, and cultural traditions may therefore provide resources for constructing meaning and supporting adjustment. Research conducted following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita found that religiousness was prospectively associated with psychological distress among female survivors, illustrating the potential relevance of religious and spiritual

resources in coping with disaster (Chan, Rhodes, & Pérez, 2012). More broadly, participation in collective gatherings, whether secular, cultural, or spiritual, constitutes an important resource for coping with stressful circumstances in general and trauma in particular. Beyond the broader relationship between culture and healing, research also highlights the unique role of Jewish mourning rituals as mechanisms of recovery. An Israeli study examining the practices of 'Shiv'a', 'Shloshim', and the first year of mourning found that these rituals yield continued functioning while maintaining an ongoing relationship with loss, gradually accompanying mourners back into everyday life (Rubin, 2014). The principle of structuring mourning and recovery through stable, meaningful cultural anchors extends well beyond Jewish tradition and applies across many cultural and religious contexts.

Cultural and narrative anchors, however, do not operate in isolation. They derive their power from the human relationships and sense of belonging within which they are embedded. Having examined the role of culture in the creation of meaning, the discussion now turns to the community itself - the setting in which meaning becomes a shared experience and a resource for recovery.

Dimension Two: Community Belonging and the Reconstruction of Identity

If the cultural dimension demonstrates how culture provides a language for processing experience, the central finding of the community dimension is that recovery does not occur solely within the individual: it takes place within relationships and within the community to which the individual belongs. Across the interviews, regardless of the specific project, a specific theme emerged repeatedly: the primary task is not simply to provide services to people experiencing crisis, trauma, or distress, but to create a space in which they can feel that they belong, that they are seen, and that others hold them. From this perspective, the community is not merely the setting in which the intervention takes place; it is an integral part of the intervention itself. Interviewees described their work less in terms of implementing programs and more in terms of building relationships, cultivating trust, supporting local leadership, and fostering a sense of home. Repeatedly they emphasized that, particularly during periods of trauma and uncertainty, the experience of not being alone becomes one of the most

significant resources in the recovery process. This idea was particularly evident in interviews conducted within the 'Heart Spaces' project. One of the program directors described its space's purpose as follows: *"to provide a sense of security, knowing that there are people here who care about me... that I'm not alone...and that even if I leave Goa, there are still people I can turn to"*. Her words illustrate that resilience derives not only from the encounter itself but also from knowing that a human network continues to exist beyond it. The physical gathering thus becomes the starting point for an enduring community rather than merely the location in which an activity takes place. A similar insight emerged from 'Growing Again' project, where one of the project's central tasks was to accompany communities rebuilding themselves after crisis and profound disruption. One community leader described the process's beginning: *"they needed some direction...someone to help them stop for a moment, make sense of things, and ask: how do we begin again?"*

This statement reflects an important reality: in times of crisis, a community's first need is not necessarily additional activities, but someone who can help reorganize relationships, roles, and shared meaning. Accordingly, interviewees repeatedly described themselves as accompanying a process rather than producing events.

Another finding that appeared consistently throughout the interviews was the importance of adapting each intervention to the unique identity of the community. Interviewees stressed that there was no uniform model that could simply be replicated from one setting to another. On the contrary, the work required sustained listening, familiarity with the local culture, an understanding of community leadership, and ongoing responsiveness to changing needs. One program director described this as: *"it was a delicate dance of adapting the content to the community"*. Another interviewee observed: *"what still amazes me is their (the group facilitators') ability to adjust the program from one community to another, because every community is different in its identity and in its character"*. These reflections suggest that flexibility is not a compromise in professional practice but one of its defining principles. Interviewees associated the development of trust and a sense of community with the combination of stable professional principles and careful adaptation to the local context.

Another important finding concerns the gradual transfer of responsibility to the community itself. The objective is not merely to strengthen participants but to enable

communities to assume ownership of the process. Interviewees repeatedly described how, after receiving initial support, community members began organizing activities, initiating gatherings, sustaining local traditions, and supporting one another. Interviews described success not primarily in terms of the number of events conducted but by the community's growing capacity to become an active partner in creating its own resilience. One community leader explained that the accompaniment was never limited to organizing activities; rather, it focused on developing residents' ability to lead processes independently and to regard the community itself as a shared resource. In summary, the interviews indicate that, across the initiatives examined, community was treated not simply as the setting of the intervention but as an emotional and social resource in its own right. Creating belonging, nurturing trust, strengthening local leadership, and cultivating mutual responsibility are not secondary outcomes of the intervention - they are its very core.

These findings are consistent with research on community resilience, social capital, and post-crisis community building. Research literature demonstrates that recovery from collective trauma depends not only on individual psychological resources but also on the quality of social relationships, the sense of belonging, mutual trust, and the community's ability to organize and act collectively. Communities characterized by strong relationships, active leadership, and opportunities for participation are better equipped to respond to crises and to support their members over time. The findings emerging from BINA's knowledge capture process can therefore be understood within a broader conceptual framework that views the community itself as an active agent in the creation of resilience rather than merely the setting in which interventions occur. Accordingly, most of the interventions described in the interviews are directed not toward delivering services to communities but toward creating the conditions that enable communities to become sources of meaning, support, and growth.

Professional literature likewise reinforces these findings by describing community as a healing force. Shared identity and group belonging provide important protection against trauma while facilitating recovery. Community is not simply a collection of individuals but a living system of relationships, identities, and narratives (Brachman, 2025). Social Identity Theory argues that a substantial part of an individual's self-identity derives from membership in social groups, a form of belonging that

strengthens the individual and provides psychological resources (Haslam et al., 2018). The relationship between the individual and the community to which they belong is bidirectional: when a community experiences trauma, a shared social identity, emerging from a sense of shared fate, generates mutual support and collective resilience. As individuals identify with the community and become stronger, they in turn contribute to its resilience (Drury, 2012). Studies have found that group membership and a supportive social identity are associated with reduced depression and anxiety and with a stronger sense of self-efficacy (Kellezi & Reicher, 2012). Research indicates that a sense of group belonging is not only a basic psychological need but also a resilience mechanism in its own right. Following a traumatic event, an individual's experience of having a place where their voice is heard is associated with reduced loneliness, lower psychological distress, and a greater capacity to cope with loss and uncertainty (Haslam et al., 2018).

McMillan and Chavis (1986) describe four central components of a sense of community: membership, mutual influence, fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional history. Communities that have experienced disaster together often develop especially strong bonds, and processing their shared story within a communal framework reinforces that sense of community. Numerous studies have shown that communities characterized by high levels of trust and dense social networks recover more rapidly following disaster (Norris et al., 2008). Community, therefore, is not simply a backdrop to recovery but a "second skin" that provides its members with a fundamental sense of security (Ashkenazi, 2025). Strengthening social capital and informal support networks is important for community resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). Community-building practices, including identity-based groups, communal celebrations, and the development of local leadership, are directed toward strengthening precisely these networks.

Research also indicates that collectivist cultures, which emphasize social cohesion and interpersonal relationships, demonstrate higher levels of post-traumatic growth than more individualistic societies (Wlodarczyk et al., 2017). Similarly, the strength of social connectedness has been identified as a significant predictor of post-traumatic growth (Matos et al., 2021). The events of October 7 left many communities with what may be described as a fractured ethos. Ashkenazi (2025) argues that recovery begins with

acknowledging this rupture and then constructing a renewed communal ethos. He refers to this process as 'community Kintsugi', drawing on the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold lacquer. In this model, the fracture is not treated as a flaw but as an integral part of the community's story. Recovery requires recognizing the rupture and transforming it into a source of strength and renewed identity. A "Kintsugi community" understands that resilience does not require restoring the community's former ethos unchanged but developing a renewed one that acknowledges the rupture and responds to the community's altered circumstances. Azoulay (2024) introduces the concept of communities of meaning, as part of his work on "the value of meaning", arguing that genuine belonging is rooted not in institutional affiliation but in shared values and a shared narrative. A community, he suggests, is defined not by the people who live within it but by the meaning they create together. Community recovery is therefore fundamentally a process of restoring shared meaning. Within this process, each individual's sense of belonging remains essential. At times, collective recovery efforts may unintentionally overshadow personal experiences of grief because of the community's desire to demonstrate resilience and growth (Tzfonl & Sarig, 2025). The field accounts suggest that professional accompaniment can help communities balance these two needs: rebuilding a shared sense of purpose while preserving space for individual experiences of grief and loss. Within the initiatives examined, facilitators sought to create conditions in which individuals could experience recognition, participate in communal life, and develop a sense that they had a meaningful role within the community.

Recovery, therefore, takes place simultaneously at the level of both the community and the individual. A recovering community is one that succeeds in holding a shared narrative while also making room for the personal stories that compose it. As individuals experience recognition, participation, and meaning within the communal space, their sense of belonging deepens, strengthening the resilience of the community as a whole.

Dimension Three: Holding the Holders

The first two dimensions described how meaning and belonging are created for participants and communities, however, analysis revealed a third dominant principle:

communities cannot be sustained over time unless those who sustain them are themselves supported. Rather than viewing supervision or professional accompaniment as an additional service, interviewees consistently described it as an integral component of the intervention itself. Supporting the supporters took the form of shared reflection, teamwork, professional consultation, flexibility, trust, and the ability to pause, learn, and adjust while the work was unfolding. In other words, the organizational system does not merely enable the intervention - it is itself part of the intervention.

One of the strongest themes emerging from the interviews was the understanding that professionals went through an ongoing process of learning and adaptation. The social worker who led 'Heart Spaces' project, described a role that simultaneously involved designing workshops, providing individual support, coordinating logistics, recruiting participants, and holding together a multidisciplinary team. These responsibilities could not be separated because they all contributed to creating a safe environment for participants. One of the 'Heart Spaces' directors likewise emphasized that the success of the initiative rested first and foremost on teamwork: *"it simply worked. The collaboration between 'Heart Spaces', the house management ...and the communication among everyone involved - that's what made it possible"*. Asked how professional decisions were made, she explained that the team met every week to review what was working, identify what required adjustment, and allow each professional to contribute according to their expertise: *"every week we sat together, planned the week ahead, consulted with one another, looked at what was working and what wasn't ... let the professionals do what they do best"*.

A similar pattern of holding emerged in the work with communities. One community leader described how BINA's facilitator contributed not only activities and content but also served as a source of professional reflection and personal growth: *"the program director became my personal professional mentor. She helped me understand my role, notice things I hadn't seen before, opened my eyes, and brought enormous patience"*. These accounts illustrate that professional accompaniment extends far beyond technical supervision. It creates psychological safety, strengthens practitioners' confidence, and develops their capacity to lead communities independently. Even when facilitators changed, interviewees did not describe this as replacing one provider

with another but as the continuation of an ongoing professional process. As one participant explained: *"each person brings her own world. There is a shared core to 'Growing Again', but every branch grows in its own way"*. This observation captures an important balance between a common professional language and the autonomy of individual facilitators - a theme that appeared repeatedly throughout several interviews.

The interviews further showed that supporting the supporters extends beyond BINA's own staff to include community partners themselves. Community leaders described facilitators as people who enabled them to think more clearly, refine their practice, and act with greater confidence. One participant recalled: *"suddenly I had the courage to do things. There was someone beside me saying, 'Yes, go ahead'"*. Another explained: *"the program directors understand the fabric of the community. They know how to recognize it, and that helps me see things differently"*.

These findings broaden the meaning of this third dimension - supporting the supporters is not limited to BINA staff and activities; it encompasses everyone responsible for leading the process: community directors, local leaders, facilitators, and professional partners. Through sustained relationships, shared reflection, learning, and trust, those who carry responsibility themselves become an enduring resource for the community.

The knowledge extraction process identified holding the holders as an organizing principle, rather than a strategy for preventing burnout. The field accounts suggest that professional, emotional, and organizational support strengthens practitioners' capacity to create and sustain spaces of meaning, belonging, and resilience for others. This finding is consistent with trauma-informed approaches to community accompaniment, which emphasize that practitioners who are themselves exposed to collective trauma require systematic support as an integral component of professional practice rather than as an occasional or ad hoc intervention (Mittelman, 2025). Further, the concept of secondary trauma refers to the emotional and behavioral consequences that may result from repeated exposure to other people's traumatic experiences (Hadar & Zeidner, 2012). Professionals working with trauma encounter such exposure as part of their daily work. Over time, repeated engagement with human suffering may contribute to compassion fatigue and diminish a practitioner's

capacity to provide sustained empathic support (Figley, 1995; Pardes & Ben-Nun, 2014). In the aftermath of 7 October, this challenge was particularly complex because community practitioners were supporting others while living within the same broader national crisis and operating in circumstances for which few established protocols were available (Ashkenazi, 2025).

Two concepts from psychoanalytic theory further illuminate the importance of supporting practitioners. Winnicott's (1960) concept of the holding environment describes a relational space characterized by reliable, consistent, and nonjudgmental presence, which allows individuals to feel sufficiently secure to develop and engage with difficult experience. Bion's (1962) concept of containment refers to a process in which another person's anxieties are received, processed, and returned in a more manageable and meaningful form. Applied to the present context, these concepts suggest that facilitators' ability to provide stable and containing spaces for participants may depend, in part, on whether they themselves have access to reliable professional and organizational support.

Parallel Process

Psychotherapeutic literature uses the term 'parallel process' to describe how dynamics emerging between therapist and client may be reflected in the relationship between supervisor and therapist (Searles, 1955; Ekstein & Wallerstein, 1958). Applied to community interventions, similar dynamics may arise across the relationships among participants, facilitators, supervisors, and organizational leaders. What occurs at one level of the system may therefore affect interactions at other levels. This relationship is sometimes represented as a pyramid. Participants or community members form its base; facilitators and practitioners occupy the next level; and supervisors and organizational leaders form the level above them. Each layer is expected to support the one below it, while also requiring appropriate support from the level above. The model does not imply a rigid hierarchy of value, but illustrates the interdependence of support across the organizational system. In practical terms, supervision and peer consultation may shape the emotional presence and professional judgment that facilitators bring to their work. Practitioners who have regular opportunities for reflection, consultation, and emotional processing may be better able to maintain

appropriate boundaries, respond thoughtfully to changing needs, and sustain stable community spaces. When such opportunities are absent, accumulated strain and unresolved concerns may affect decision-making and interactions with participants. Holding the holders should therefore be understood as part of the intervention's professional infrastructure. Regular supervision, peer consultation, reflective team meetings, and opportunities to process the emotional demands of the work can support both practitioner well-being and the quality and continuity of community accompaniment. These structures also allow teams to convert field experience into shared organizational knowledge, identify emerging difficulties, and adapt their practice over time.

Distinctive Empirical Findings

Three findings are particularly distinctive. First, cultural resources generally functioned not as content to be taught or as markers of religious observance, but as a mediating language for approaching experiences that were difficult to discuss directly. Jewish texts, rituals, stories, music, writing, and creative practices created symbolic distance, invited multiple interpretations, and opened shared conversations about loss, identity, responsibility, and hope. Their value did not necessarily depend on prior textual knowledge or religious identification, but on how they were introduced and embedded within relationships of trust. Second, holding the holders emerged not merely as a staff-well-being measure or a strategy for preventing burnout, but as part of the intervention mechanism itself. Unlike many professional settings in which practitioners provide support from outside the crisis affecting their clients, the collective trauma following 7 October also encompassed the social world of the practitioners, facilitators, and community leaders responsible for supporting others. They were required to hold communities while confronting the same prolonged uncertainty, threat, loss, and disruption. Under these conditions, professional, emotional, and organizational support became essential to their ability to remain attentive, exercise sound judgment, adapt their work, maintain appropriate boundaries, and sustain meaningful community spaces. The category of "holders" also extended beyond BINA's professional staff to include local leaders, volunteers,

facilitators, and organizational partners who carried continuing responsibility for community processes. The distinctive finding is therefore that, under conditions of collective trauma, supporting this wider network is not external to the intervention; it is one of the conditions through which the intervention becomes possible and sustainable. Third, coherence across the three initiatives did not depend on delivering the same program or activities in each setting. The populations, needs, texts, group formats, and forms of accompaniment differed substantially. What remained consistent were the underlying principles: creating culturally meaningful entry points, strengthening relationships and local ownership, and supporting those responsible for carrying the process. The findings therefore distinguish transferability from replication. What may travel across contexts is not a standardized package of activities, but an integrated set of principles whose practical expression must be adapted to local identity, needs, and capacity.

Broader Organizational Implications

The findings offer several implications for organizations developing community-based responses and interventions to collective trauma and prolonged crises. The three-dimensional framework directs attention beyond the content of individual activities to the organizational conditions that allow those activities to become meaningful, adaptive, and sustainable. Applying the framework does not require replicating BINA's programs; it suggests examining how the three dimensions are expressed within an organization's own context and practices.

Recognizing the Infrastructure Behind Visible Activities

Workshops, ceremonies, group meetings, and community events are the most visible components of an intervention, but the findings suggest that their value depends on a less visible organizational infrastructure. This includes the relationships established before and after an activity, familiarity with the community's history and internal dynamics, coordination among professional and local actors, opportunities for reflection, and the availability of continued support.

Organizations developing community interventions may therefore benefit from examining not only what activities they provide, but also what makes those activities possible and how existing community infrastructure can be utilized. A culturally meaningful workshop, for example, is unlikely to have the same effect when delivered without prior trust, appropriate facilitation, or a pathway for continued engagement. Similarly, a community event may create a temporary sense of connection without necessarily strengthening relationships or collective capacity over time. The framework accordingly suggests a broader understanding of implementation. Preparation, relationship-building, professional consultation, follow-up, and adaptation are not secondary tasks surrounding the intervention. They are part of the intervention itself.

Balancing Coherence with Local Adaptation

The recurrence of the dimensions across different settings indicates that organizations can maintain a coherent professional approach without using an identical program in every community. The field accounts repeatedly emphasized that communities differed in their histories, identities, leadership structures, experiences of loss, religious orientations, and readiness to engage. Effective practice depended on preserving common principles while adapting their expression to the local context. For organizations implementing interventions, this requires distinguishing between the elements of a model that should remain stable and those that should remain flexible. The commitment to meaning-making, belonging, local participation, professional support, and ethical boundaries may remain consistent. The specific texts, rituals, activities, language, duration, and form of facilitation may need to change. Adaptation should not be understood as improvisation without structure. It requires systematic listening, professional judgment, familiarity with the community, and opportunities to review what is and is not working. A learning-oriented organization creates regular spaces in which practitioners and community partners can interpret emerging needs and modify the response accordingly.

Developing Local Ownership and Capacity

The community dimension of the framework suggests that organizational success should not be assessed only through participation rates or the number of activities delivered. An equally important question is whether the intervention strengthens the community's ability to recognize its own resources, make collective decisions, initiate activity, and sustain supportive relationships. This shifts the role of the external organization. Rather than remaining the sole provider of content and leadership, it gradually becomes a facilitator of local capacity. This may involve identifying and supporting formal and informal leaders, establishing a local steering group, including community members in the design of activities, and transferring knowledge and responsibility over time. Local ownership does not mean withdrawing support prematurely or assuming that every community has equal internal capacity. Communities affected by displacement, bereavement, conflict, or prolonged uncertainty may require sustained accompaniment. The aim is therefore not rapid organizational exit, but a gradual change in the relationship: from doing for the community toward thinking, deciding, and acting with it. Evidence of emerging capacity may include locally initiated activities, wider participation in decision-making, renewed communal traditions, stronger connections among residents, and the ability to maintain meaningful practices when external staff are less present. These indicators complement conventional measures of program reach and participant satisfaction.

Supporting Those Who Sustain the Response

The dimension of 'holding the holders' has direct implications for organizational design. Staff members, facilitators, volunteers, and local leaders working in conditions of collective trauma frequently carry both emotional and operational responsibilities. They may be expected to respond quickly, contain the distress of others, coordinate multiple actors, make decisions under uncertainty, and remain continuously available - all while living within the same broader crisis. Community organizations cannot assume that professional commitment alone will sustain this work. The findings indicate the value of regular supervision, peer consultation, reflective team meetings, role clarification, manageable workloads, and clear referral pathways. These

structures enable practitioners to process difficult experiences, recognize the limits of their role, learn from one another, and adapt their work without becoming isolated.

Connecting Cultural Resources with Professional Boundaries

The cultural-narrative dimension creates possibilities for expression and meaning-making, but it also requires clear professional boundaries. Texts, rituals, stories, and creative practices may evoke grief, fear, guilt, or traumatic memories. Organizations should therefore consider who facilitates these encounters, what preparation facilitators receive, how emotional responses are handled, and when participants should be referred to specialized care. Cultural and community interventions are not substitutes for clinical treatment. Their value lies in providing shared languages, relationships, and spaces of belonging that may complement other forms of assistance. Clear distinctions between community support, educational facilitation, emotional processing, and therapy protect both participants and practitioners. Organizations should also remain attentive to internal diversity. A cultural resource that creates recognition for some participants may feel unfamiliar, politically charged, religiously prescriptive, or exclusionary to others. Facilitators should invite multiple interpretations and allow participants to decline engagement without being positioned outside the community. The purpose is not to impose a single collective narrative, but to create a shared space in which different experiences can be expressed and held.

Building Organizational Learning into the Response

Because prolonged crises change over time, organizations need mechanisms that allow field experience to become cumulative knowledge. Regular team reflection, documentation of adaptation decisions, participant feedback, and dialogue with local partners can help distinguish isolated successes from recurring principles.

The practice-based approach used in this study offers one possible way of making such experiential knowledge more explicit. It encourages organizations to ask not only what was done, but how decisions were made, why particular practices appeared meaningful, under what conditions they worked, and where they encountered limitations. This form of organizational learning can support continuity across staff

changes and reduce dependence on the tacit knowledge of a small number of experienced individuals. Documentation should nevertheless remain flexible enough to preserve professional judgment. The objective is not to convert the framework into a rigid manual, but to establish a shared language through which teams can examine their work. The three dimensions can serve as such a language: are participants being offered meaningful ways to approach their experiences? are relationships, belonging, and local agency being strengthened? are the people carrying out the process receiving sufficient professional and organizational support?

Extending Learning Across Organizations and Jewish Communities

The framework emerged from Israeli settings shaped by a particular national emergency. Its broader relevance should therefore be examined through careful adaptation rather than assumed in advance. Nevertheless, the organizational questions it raises may also be pertinent to Jewish communities outside Israel confronting insecurity, polarization, grief, tensions surrounding Jewish and Israeli identity, or increased demands on communal professionals and volunteer leaders. Cross-organizational learning could explore how the three dimensions take different forms across cultural, religious, national, and institutional settings. Jewish texts and rituals may provide a shared cultural repertoire, but their meanings and uses will vary considerably. Community structures, relationships with Israel, professional resources, and understandings of collective responsibility will also differ.

The framework offers a basis for comparative inquiry without requiring uniformity. Organizations holding interventions can exchange knowledge about the mechanisms that support meaning, belonging, and sustained leadership while retaining sensitivity to local context. Such learning may contribute not only to improved organizational practice, but also to a more nuanced dialogue among Israeli and diaspora communities about how Jewish cultural resources and communal relationships can support people during periods of collective disruption.

Using the Framework for Organizational Reflection

The framework can be used at different points in the life of an intervention: when designing a new response, while implementation is underway, and after a period of activity to support review and organizational learning. Rather than functioning as a fixed checklist, the questions below (table 2) are intended to support a recurring process of design, observation, reflection, and adaptation. They can help organizations identify where capacity is emerging, where it remains fragile, and what may need to be strengthened or adjusted as conditions change.

Dimension	Questions for design	Signs of capacity (what to look for?)	Warning signs
Cultural-narrative	Which shared languages can help people approach experience without forced disclosure? Who decides what is culturally appropriate? Whose narratives are being expressed, and whose may be missing or harder to express?	Participants interpret, connect personal and collective stories, and generate their own forms of expression.	Content feels imposed, didactic, inaccessible, or detached from relationships, single narrative replacing plurality
Community	Who is connected, who is absent, and where does trust already exist? How will local actors shape decisions?	New or renewed relationships, shared responsibility, local initiatives, and sustained participation.	Repeated activities without ownership, dependency on outsiders, or exclusion of less visible groups, participation without influence
Holding the holders	Who carries emotional and operational responsibility? What supervision, peer support, boundaries, and referrals exist? What organizational conditions allow staff and local leaders to reflect, adapt, set boundaries and	Reflective adaptation, clearer judgment, continuity, staff retention, and supported local leadership.	Isolation, reactive decisions, blurred roles, turnover, exhaustion, or delayed referral, constant adaptation

	make sound decisions under pressure?		without reflection
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Table 2. Diagnostic questions and indicators across the three dimensions

The three dimensions should not be considered in isolation. Because they operate as an interdependent system, organizations should also examine how they reinforce, or constrain, one another in practice. The following questions can help make these relationships visible:

- Where is weakness in one dimension currently limiting the others?
- Are cultural and narrative practices strengthening relationships, belonging, and local agency, or primarily generating activities?
- Are facilitators and local leaders sufficiently supported to build trust, enable participation, and adapt the intervention?
- When one dimension is strengthened, does this increase capacity in the other two?

Across all three dimensions, organizations should begin by identifying what already exists: trusted relationships, local leadership, cultural practices, informal networks, professional knowledge, community groups, and existing mechanisms of mutual support. The aim is not simply to deliver support into a community, but to strengthen the community's own capacity to generate meaning, belonging, agency, and support over time. Here we can ask:

- What capacities, relationships, practices, and structures already exist that can be strengthened rather than replaced?
- Who already holds trust, knowledge, relationships, or responsibility within the community?
- Is the intervention increasing the community's capacity to sustain recovery, or creating continuing dependence on external actors?

The purpose of the framework is not to determine whether an intervention "has" or "does not have" each dimension. Rather, it is to help organizations identify where capacity is strong, where it is fragile, and where the relationships among the dimensions require attention. Used in this way, the framework provides a shared

language for ongoing reflection, learning, and adaptation rather than a fixed model of intervention.

Limitations and Boundaries of the Evidence

The study has several limitations that define how the framework should be used. First, the sample is purposive and primarily reflects the perspectives of practitioners, managers and community leaders. Participant voices are therefore unevenly represented across the three settings. Future studies should include systematic sampling of participants, nonparticipants, partner organizations, and community members with critical or negative experiences. Second, the analysis identifies perceived mechanisms and recurring practices; it does not measure clinical recovery, compare outcomes with a control group, or establish causality. References to healing, resilience, or growth should be understood as participants' and practitioners' accounts and as conceptual interpretations, not as demonstrated treatment effects. Third, the interventions unfolded during an ongoing crisis. What communities need may change across emergencies, displacement, return, commemoration, and long-term rebuilding. Longitudinal research is needed to examine whether the three dimensions remain equally salient and how their interaction changes over time.

Conclusion

The experience of collective trauma after 7 October has required organizations to respond while the social world around them remains unsettled. The findings suggest that durable community practice cannot be understood solely in terms of a workshop, a therapeutic technique, or an event calendar. It depends on the interaction of three capacities: culturally meaningful ways to approach experience, relationships that transform isolation into belonging and participation, and organizational structures that sustain the people responsible for sustaining others.

The framework's contribution is both conceptual and practical. It helps explain why the same visible activity may become meaningful in one setting yet remain superficial in another: the difference may lie in the degree of local ownership or the support available to facilitators and leaders. For community organizations facing collective

trauma, the framework provides a structured way to design, observe, reflect on, and adapt interventions while building on existing local capacities, relationships, and structures. In this sense, effective intervention involves not only providing support during crisis, but strengthening the community's own capacity to generate meaning, belonging, agency, and support over time. For researchers, the framework offers propositions that can be examined comparatively and longitudinally in Israel and across diverse Jewish communities.

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Methodological Appendix

Study purpose and orientation

The study adopted a qualitative, practice-based ("knowledge extraction") approach aimed at making explicit the situated knowledge embedded in practitioners' accounts of experience, action, and professional judgment. The approach assumes that practitioners develop situated knowledge through repeated judgment under real-world constraints, but that this knowledge often remains implicit. Research therefore seeks not merely to document activities but to reconstruct how practitioners interpreted situations, why they selected particular actions, and which principles recurred across contexts.

Corpus

The corpus included 23 in-depth interviews with people occupying multiple roles across the three programs. Roles included managers and facilitators (social workers and local community leaders). The three settings differed in geography, population, institutional partnerships, and immediate purpose, creating an opportunity for analytic comparison. The qualitative interviews followed a semi-structured protocol designed to capture both shared patterns across the three projects and role-specific perspectives on their implementation. A common interview guide explored five interrelated domains: participants' roles and personal engagement with the initiative; perceived principles of action and markers of successful practice; the role of Jewish and Israeli identity in processes of coping and healing; the emergence of community, belonging, and psychological safety; and broader reflections on trauma, community, and lessons for future practice. This common framework enabled systematic comparison across interviews while allowing participants to elaborate on experiences and processes they considered particularly significant. Additional questions were tailored to participants' professional roles. Social workers were asked to reflect more specifically on the creation of meaningful emotional spaces, manifestations of trauma processing and resilience, and emotional, interpersonal, and cultural challenges encountered in practice. Project managers working abroad were asked about implementation and decision-making, the integration of emotional support, Jewish content, and community-building, the management of therapeutic, logistical, and cultural considerations, external partnerships, perceived indicators of change, and conditions necessary for adapting the model to other settings. This layered interview structure was intended to generate a multidimensional understanding of both the experiential and organizational processes underlying the intervention, while preserving sufficient consistency to identify recurring themes across sites and professional roles.

Data collection: facilitators and project managers, social workers and community managers, involved in the three programs were approached and invited to participate in the study. Interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes and were conducted in Hebrew using the semi-structured interview protocol described above. All interviews

were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed in Hebrew for analysis. Prior to each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were asked to consent to both participation and audio recording. Participants were assured that their confidentiality would be protected throughout the research process.

Analytic procedure

Analysis followed an iterative thematic approach. Each interview was first read in full and examined individually to identify salient ideas, recurring descriptions of action and decision-making, and meaningful experiences and processes. The analysis then moved across interviews and program settings to identify recurring patterns as well as relevant differences and to consolidate related patterns into broader themes. Particular attention was paid to moments described as meaningful or transformative, perceived mechanisms that enabled such moments, obstacles and adaptation decisions, relationships among actors, and organizational and contextual conditions shaping implementation. The emerging themes were compared across the three programs to distinguish context-specific experiences and practices from patterns recurring across settings. As the analysis progressed, conceptually related themes were clustered into broader dimensions capturing recurring principles of practice. Emerging themes, dimensions, and their interpretation were discussed among the researchers. In a final interpretive stage, the resulting dimensions were examined in relation to relevant theoretical and empirical literature on trauma and recovery, identity, community, belonging, and resilience. The literature was used to contextualize and refine the interpretation of the empirically derived themes rather than to define an a priori analytical framework.

Trustworthiness

Analytic rigor was supported through several complementary strategies. Emerging themes and higher-order dimensions were checked against the original interview material, and interpretations were discussed among the researchers to reach agreement on the developing thematic structure. Also, comparison across the three

different program settings provided an additional basis for distinguishing recurring principles from context-specific experiences. Finally, the empirically derived themes were examined in relation to relevant theoretical and empirical literature as a means of contextualizing and refining their interpretation. Given the exploratory qualitative design, these procedures support the conceptual credibility and potential transferability of the findings, but do not imply statistical generalizability or causal inference.

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