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Magazine



The apartment of the 91-year-old Holocaust survivor

Holocaust survivor found living in 'shocking' squalor

After family of 91-year-old Auschwitz survivor perished, he immigrated to Israel alone and fell into terrible neglect, living in a musty apartment without running water; now, a nonprofit has taken it upon itself to remodel his home

Hadar Gil-Ad | Published: 01.06.22, 13:43



For many years, Israel has repeatedly promised to address the poor living conditions of some elderly Holocaust survivors, but a solution has not been forthcoming.

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Yaakov (alias), a 91-year-old Holocaust survivor whose entire family was murdered by the Nazis in the Auschwitz concentration camp, has struggled to build a proper life since arriving in Israel.



Yaakov's apartment

Yaakov was always embarrassed to ask for help. He felt ashamed of telling anyone he was living in squalor and kept his living conditions secret from his neighbors and acquaintances.

Recently, Yaakov's neighbors grew increasingly worried the friendly old man next door may be living in difficult conditions and called in the Department of Social Services in the Jerusalem Municipality.

Soon after, a social worker arrived at Yakkov's tiny 200-square-foot apartment and found it to be in a state of extreme neglect. The crumbling walls and furniture of the freezing quarters were covered with mold and rot and spiderwebs could be seen hanging everywhere.





The apartment of the 91-year-old Holocaust survivor

The only toilet was clogged, the kitchen cabinets were rotted through and electrical wires were dangerously exposed. There was no running water and the house's small windows were broken.

The stunned social worker notified authorities of his findings, as well as Tenufa Bakehila — a nonprofit which aims to help people living in the most desperate housing situations — which took it upon itself to refurbish Yaakov's apartment.

The head of the group's Jerusalem branch Israel Keenan said he had never seen such neglect before.



The apartment of the 91-year-old Holocaust survivor

"I've seen quite a few decrepit homes, but nothing prepared me for what I felt this time," he said. "Destitution, despair, constant distress, the smell of decay, the freezing cold and terrible neglect in every corner."

Group founder and director Gabi Nachmani said that although Yaakov was one of more than one hundred Holocaust survivors who have enjoyed its services over the past year, it was incumbent on the entire Israeli society to ensure that Holocaust survivors could see out their golden years with dignity.