

From foster child to IDF service



Becky Saka, a 22-year-old Israel Defense Forces sergeant and JAFCO foster child, was emotional when she received a surprise 2018 Nissan Versa Note by The Geneva Group in Deerfield Beach.

Jennifer Lett/South Florida Sun Sentinel/Sun Sentinel



By **SERGIO CARMONA**

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A foster child of the Sunrise-based Jewish Adoption and Foster Care Options who went through hardships in her childhood, is serving in the Israel Defense Forces.

Becky Saka came to live in JAFCO's Children's Village in Sunrise at the age of 12 after having endured trauma, abuse and abandonment. Now 22 years old, Saka put her college career on hold to give two years of her life to the IDF, where she is a sergeant in the Air Force.

Saka, who is currently staying at the Children's Village during her 30-day leave from the IDF, explained her inspiration for joining the Israeli military.

"As a kid, I had a very strong Jewish connection," she said. "To me, Judaism was something more than just the Torah and all its commandments; it was a little bit deeper. I really did believe that I would find a lot more of my connection in Israel."

Saka continued, "Growing up at JAFCO, they always made a point and were always very honest with Judaism."

"During Shabbat services on Friday nights, High Holiday services and any holiday, we were all together all the time," she said. "It really was like a family, an untraditional family, but it was still a beautiful thing and I felt very connected to my roots."

After graduating high school, Saka felt she had to dig a little deeper into her roots. She participated in a gap year program in Israel where she fell in love with the country, the idea on how it started and how it's developed more than anyone has imagined in a short period of time while appreciating how it deals with its daily battles. This sparked her interest in joining the IDF towards the end of the program.

Saka came back to South Florida, worked and went to college. She ended up moving back to Israel and joined the IDF. She praises JAFCO for supporting her.

Saka's service with the IDF ends in April, and she will return to live at JAFCO's Children's Village until she's 23. She will complete college while working full time at the organization's Children's Ability Center, which serves children diagnosed with developmental disabilities.

Saka is also JAFCO's annual gala co-emcee, has a passion for nonprofit event planning and is member of the organization's Alumni Circle.

Saka's story inspired Jarred Elmar, managing partner of The Geneva Group, a real estate investment and property services firm in Deerfield Beach. The firm surprised Saka with a new car – a white, 2018 Nissan Versa Note – in front of its office.

"Becky had so many challenges growing up," Elmar said. "Her story is similar to mine, and I felt an instant connection before I even met her. She embodies the idea that you inspire people through your grit and your grace."

Sarah Franco, JAFCO's executive director, said, "It has never been more important than now for each of us to take a moment and do something to change the world, one gesture and one person at a time."

"This generous gift of a car to Becky, one of our special JAFCO alumni who has had such a difficult life, was life-changing," Franco continued. "Jarred Elmar and The Geneva Group changed the world today with their generosity and the love that accompanied this gift."

Saka said she started tearing up when she received her surprise car.

"It was a surreal moment," she noted. "Any surprise is really fun and really nice, but something this big is not something you expect. Tears were coming out of my eyes because it was so emotional for me."

Saka continued, "It's like a newfound freedom, and it's a life-changing gift in which there's something you don't have to worry about."

"Every day, people make car payments to a car that they're leasing or they just bought and are paying it off, and this is one thing less for me to worry about," she said.

Visit jafco.org for more information on the organization, which provides services to abused and neglected children as well as those with developmental disabilities in South Florida, or genevagr.com on the firm.