

Free loans for Soviet emigres in Israel

By STEVE LIPMAN

A CLEVELAND NATIVE who settled in Israel three decades ago has established a free loan fund for the country's newest group of immigrants — Soviet olim.

Eliezer Jaffe is founder and chairman of The Israel Free Loan Association, an independent, non-profit organization that offers interest-free loans to Soviet immigrants for miscellaneous expenses. Since its founding in April, the association has loaned about \$50,000. Three-fourths of its funds have come from foundations and private donations outside of Israel, though a campaign is now under way for contributions from Israelis.

"I like the free loan idea," says Jaffe, a Yeshiva University graduate who serves as an adviser to immigrant self-help groups. "The money will go around forever. It will help thousands and thousands of people."

While the organization has met the needs of applicants so far, it will be hard-pressed as the number of Soviet immigrants increases, he says.

The association's eventual goal is \$1 million, says Jaffe, a social work professor at Hebrew University. "We hope to ... get to the point where we can administer

interest-free small business loans as well."

The association, which Jaffe calls the only one in Israel that helps Soviet newcomers pay "day-to-day" expenses, offers a maximum of \$700 to an applicant. Funds are used for such requirements as dental care, household repairs, college tuition and apartment mortgages.

Jaffe says the association supplements the larger grants and loans offered by the Israeli government and Jewish Agency. Most applications come from immigrants whose initial funds have run low after their first year in Israel. Two co-signers are required for a loan.

Jaffe says the association is "terribly appreciated by the Russians."

According to Jaffe, the association's 20 volunteers spent much of their time explaining the principle of a free loan association to the Soviet immigrants, who are unfamiliar with the workings of a bank, let alone a traditional Jewish loaning group.

Those who contribute at least \$5,000 can have an earmarked fund named for them. For information, contact P.E.F. Israel Endowment Funds, Inc., Suite 607, 41 E. 42nd St., New York, NY 10017; call (212) 599-1290.