

HASC Center Opens NY's First *Frum* Respite Home for Special-Needs Children

By Mr. Stein

In our high-tech world, it gets harder and harder to impress people with new gadgets, profound ideas and fresh concepts. Yet, today in Brooklyn, a low-tech initiative has created a spectacular benchmark for *chesed*.

At today's grand opening for HASC Center's Lev Tova, New York's only *frum* overnight respite home for children with special needs, there were parents, neighbors, volunteers, friends, and government officials who came to learn about this remarkable new service. But, even with the clowns, the cotton candy, the face-painting, and the carnival atmosphere, they didn't get to see the real story. That took place accompanied by the sound of giggles, singing, and full-blown laughter last Shabbos when seven families turned to HASC Center for the specialized care and love that has been its trademark for nearly five decades.

Just a few weeks ago, Chaim's parents would have had no options for the first Shabbos with their new twin boys. Preparations for a *shalom zachor*, a double *bris*, accommodating visiting relatives as Chaim's mother recovered from



L-R: Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz; Assembly Member Steven Cymbrowitz; Abe Eisner, President, Board of Directors, HASC Center; Shmiel Kahn, Executive Director, HASC Center; Dr. Chaim Wakslak, Clinical Director, HASC Center; NYS Senate Finance Chair Carl Kruger; Warren Cohn, Special Assistant to Congressman Ed Towns; Councilman Mathieu Eugene; Rabbi Yechezkel Pikus, Executive Director, COJO of Flatbush

a difficult birth, created a level of excitement and activity with which Chaim would have found it difficult to cope. Lev Tova's expert staff made it possible for Chaim to celebrate Shabbos in a safe and warm environment as they helped him adjust to the new situation he would find at home.

It is a measure of the value of this pioneering service that an array of agencies were represented at the grand opening, with the expectation that the

children being served by the home will have the opportunity to benefit from Lev Tova's respite program. Not only the professionals but also parents of children with special needs toured the home and met the staff that would be caring for their children.

Lev Tova's rooms are spacious and welcoming. With six large bedrooms, up to eight children can be accommodated at a time. Lev Tova even provides a *Snoezelen Room* that

Gedolei Torah Support Busing to Kiruv Schools

An emergency situation created a few years ago in Eretz Yisrael, which threatens to cut off Torah *chinuch*, *chas v'shalom*, for 22,000 boys and girls who must travel to *kiruv* schools, as well as posing a threat to schools having to close if there is a major drop in enrollment, still exists, and requires continued support from the worldwide Torah community, according to *Gedolei Yisrael* who closely follow the situation. What is remarkable, they say, is that Torah supporters have rallied to the cause, and have made it possible for the children and the schools to continue.

What is unusual about the crisis is that it did not come as an attack on the classroom, or on the school, or on the teacher, but on the buses that bring the children to their schools. These 22,000 children are from families that are *chozrim b'teshuvah* in 249 communities, and do not have local Torah schools, requiring them to seek transportation to the 115 *kiruv* schools of the

Chinuch Atzmai-Torah Schools network.

The costs for this transportation were traditionally carried by the government, until it put changes into the regulations that guide student busing. These changes resulted in the costs having to be carried by the network, above its normal budget for special educational programs. The *Gedolim* issued a proclamation, which stated: "...we therefore call to everyone to whom the honor of Heaven is dear in his eyes that this pillar of *chinuch* not collapse," and appointed a committee to coordinate the efforts. Currently, the committee is seeking \$11.5 million for busing for the end of the current school year and the next one, beginning in Elul.

Chinuch Atzmai-Torah Schools for Israel is a network of 258 schools and 452 kindergartens with an enrollment of 93,673 boys and girls and a staff of 6,460, offering quality elementary religious and secular education through the country.

offers a wide range of sensory experiences for the children to enjoy. Many parents commented on the range of features intended to meet the highest standards of safety.

As she reserved a place at

Lev Tova for an upcoming Shabbos, one mother expressed her gratitude: "...Finally, there's a place to send our children for Shabbos, where Shabbos is an adventure for them and a respite for us."

Joint OHEL and Task Force Lecture on Children of Divorce Draws Crowd

By Derek Saker

Over 300 people joined together on Wednesday evening, April 28th for a workshop entitled "Caught in the Middle: Helping Children Cope with Divorce." The presentation, a joint effort of OHEL and the Task Force on Children and Families at Risk in the Orthodox Jewish Community, was a free community awareness event.

The presenters included a distinguished panel, Rabbi Paysach Krohn, *mohel*, author and lecturer, and Dr. David Pelcovitz, Strauss Chair in Psychology and Education at the Azrieli Graduate School of Yeshiva University. Introductory remarks were by David Mandel, CEO of OHEL and Dr. Marcel Biberfeld, Co-Chair of the Task Force and Vice President of Maimonides Medical Center. The event was organized by Dr. Hindie M. Klein, Director of Marvin Kaylie Center-Tikvah at OHEL and Executive Committee member of the Task Force. She was assisted by Dr. Faye Zakheim, Co-Chair of the Task Force. The committee included Henna White, Project Kol Tzedek, Rebbetzin Judi Steining, National Council of Young Israel, Shaindy Shain, Sister to Sister, Phyllis Mayer, LCSW, Nefesh International, Rabbi Laibish Becker, Agudath



Dr. David Pelcovitz

Israel, and Rabbi Dr. Joel S. Rosenshein, P'tach.

Rabbi Krohn and Dr. Pelcovitz each brought a unique message based on their backgrounds and expertise.

Rabbi Krohn offered six suggestions to help children caught in the middle:

Advise Against Anger
Shabbos Seudos Stabilize — invite the parent and children for a meal and make them feel included

Create Rayim Ahuvim learning programs

Insist on LIP service — Life Insurance Policies

Relieve, Request and Respect

Accompany an independent child to shul — he only looks independent.

Dr. David Pelcovitz spoke about the clinical research that addresses the effects of divorce on children. Depending on a variety of factors, some children tend to be more resilient than others. He noted that it is important to help build their resilience, and that many children still function well, even when caught in the middle of their parents' divorce.

There was a question-and-answer session after the presentations. Despite the late hour, many stayed to listen and participate.

The evening was motivational and moving, something difficult to accomplish when the audience included men and women of all ages and backgrounds: mental health professionals,

Relief Resources on Caring for Elderly

By Meir Brody

On Monday, May 10, Relief Resources hosted an inspirational event titled "Ad Meah V'Esrim: Understanding and Addressing the Emotional Changes of our Aging Parents." Almost 200 people attended the lectures at Paradise Manor in Brooklyn, New York. The participants were treated to an informative and practical lecture on the unique mental health issues that affect the elderly.

The evening began with opening remarks from Rabbi Yisroel Reisman, *maggid shiur*, Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and Rav, Agudath Israel of Madison. Rabbi Reisman spoke about some of the *halachic* and *hashkafic* issues involved in caring for elderly parents.

The next speaker was Dr. Fred Moskovitz, Psy. D., gerontologist and geriatric care manager. He spoke about many difficulties that caregivers face while dealing with an elderly parent or spouse with a medical illness or emotional disorder. Dr. Moskovitz enumerated several warning signs to be alert for,

which might indicate caregiver burnout. He also listed strategies to help ameliorate some of the inherent stresses of effectively dealing with the daily challenges of aging parents.

The next part of the lecture was given by noted psychiatrist Dr. Martin Drooker, Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Mount Sinai School of Medicine. Dr. Drooker addressed the symptoms of dementia and explained many recent improvements in treatment options. He then spoke about the issue of depression in elderly patients, explaining its prevalence, its positive response to treatment and the fact that, if left untreated, there are lingering ripple effects on the patients' quality of life.

The evening was chaired by Rabbi Binyomin Babad, director of Relief Resources. Rabbi Babad made the audience aware of the services Relief provides. With a database of more than 3,000 mental health professionals, Relief works tirelessly to partner those in need with the most appropriate care available.

teachers, lay leaders, rabbis and community members dealing with divorce and its effects on children.

OHEL is planning workshops for divorcing/divorced parents

that will address how to help children cope. There will be separate workshops for men and women. For more information, please call Dr. Hindie Klein at 718-382-0045.