

## Community Support Still Urgently Needed for OUR PLACE™ to Survive!

HADASSAH LEHRFELD

The Jewish Community has been extremely generous in their support of Our Place over the last few months and we want to express a most heartfelt thank you to our growing list of supporters. We are able to continue doing our best to keep Jewish teenagers safe, off the streets, and in rehab, only because of your generosity. No words can express our appreciation, and no measure can be given to the *zechus* earned by those who join with us in this tremendous *mitzvah* of *hatzalas nefashos*.

Avi Fishof, who has assumed the mantle of leadership, has been working tirelessly to raise the funds needed to sustain this network of teenage drop-in centers in its current emergency situation. Avi, together with his wife Zisi, hosted an emergency Melave Malka/parlor meeting at his home in Flatbush with hundreds of community activists, lay leaders, Rabbonim, and politicians in attendance. Another parlor meeting took place at the home of Dr. Ari Wal-fish in Queens; coordinated by Mr. Moshe Engel, because their caring community was moved to take action when they learned of our plight. Many prominent Rabbonim and askonim were also present at that meeting and the response at both meetings was overwhelming. Mr. Fishof's fiery speeches at these meetings, and at the appeals he made in the community shuls, called on all of us to act and really moved the crowd. The appeals culminated in an outpouring of generosity that proves "*mi kamcha Yisrael.*" There is no nation like *Am Yisrael* whose hearts bleed for a fellow Jew in distress. The way so many of you show your caring by continually giving *tzedakah* in these economic times, is truly heartwarming.

The financial status of this community service organization has changed drastically in the last year. Government funding was abruptly slashed, and we suddenly find ourselves in the precarious position of having to raise over a million dollars in private funds to account for the shortfall. So far, all our efforts to secure a new government grant under the 'member items' statute have fallen on deaf ears. This is a foolhardy strategy because, as the saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The teenagers we service who are using and abusing illegal drugs and/or alcohol are heading down a treacherous path and are in dire need of intervention. For these individuals Our Place is heaven-sent. There are hot kosher dinners, fun activities, a group of friends, and empathetic professional staff members available to the many boys for whom Our Place is a second, or in some cases only, home.

Sadly, Our Place and its affiliates may still be unable to remain operational if our budget needs are not met. There is no doubt



about the need for this kind of organization to be available for the huge number of kids at risk of falling between the cracks. In addition to our boys drop-in-center we run Our Place II (for girls), The Living Room for ongoing treatment and meetings for those struggling with addiction, and Yeshiva Simchas Chaim for boys who need a more personal approach. The dedication of our Program Directors, Chaim Glantz and Sony Perlman, is unparalleled.

The way they managed to keep Our Place running as usual in the midst of a blizzard that strangled New York City is just one example of their devotion. They know from first-hand experience that if the boys do not have therapists available to assist them at the right time it would be disastrous on so many levels. This is what could happen if we are not able to pay them due to the budget shortfall. The boys would then be on the streets without help for their addiction, and exacerbating the problem in our community by introducing other boys into the same disastrous lifestyle.

Aside from the more familiar scenario of teenagers who rebel or who cannot do well in school, the need for a safe haven is a far more serious matter for a whole other subset of our population. For more boys than you can imagine, their own homes are a terrible environment of abuse or neglect in which there is little chance for them to thrive, and they would have nowhere to turn if not for Our Place. The reality of these teenagers' lives is one we would not wish on our worst enemy. Unfortunately it can be a quicker transition than you might think, from troubled teenager to addict. Obtaining and using illegal drugs today is nearly as common and accepted, in certain elements of society, as smoking cigarettes used to be. In the larger American society it is almost a rite of passage to have "experimented" with drugs as a teenager. Not so by us. Therefore the danger of misuse and abuse is even greater, and the risk of our teenagers subsequently overdosing and dying is a horrifying reality that those in this line of work have been forced to face.

Anyone who has attended these *levayahs*, and witnessed these tragic burials, is driven to do their utmost for the cause. Donations to Our Place, **your donation**, of any amount you can give, are necessary to literally save the lives of these precious *neshamos* in *Klal Yisroel*. In the *zechus* of the efforts to rescue these *yiddishe neshamos* and allow them to reach their potential, may Hashem *bentch* us all with true *nachas* from our children.

Donations can be sent to Our Place, 44 Wall Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10005. **TIZKU L'MITZVOS!**

## Local Meeting of the Agudath Israel Special Education Advisory Committee



Included in the agenda was a report on Agudath Israel's efforts to maintain the level of services for students with special needs in New York State, possible changes to the New York City Department of Education policies, and issues concerning Special Education Teacher Support Services (P3) delivery. The meeting was chaired by Mrs. Leah Steinberg, director of Special Education Affairs for Agudath Israel of America.

## SHUVU Marine Park Dinner Reception

AVROM YOUNGER

When Hagaon Harav Avrohom Pam, zt"l, founded Shuvu Chazon Avrohom some 20 years ago, he was motivated by the stark reality that tens of thousands of Russian immigrants were arriving to Eretz Yisroel, but these *Yidden* had no connection to Yiddishkeit.

The Rosh Hayeshivah was tormented by the thought of these precious *neshamos*, many the children and grandchildren of Tamidei Chachamim and Gedolei Yisroel, going through life with no knowledge of their heritage. He was haunted by the knowledge that Eretz Yisroel, our Holy Land, was being turned into an ever greater spiritual wasteland. And he was horrified that despite the fall of Communism, the Communists continued winning their war against religion because of our apathy.

So the kind, quiet, soft-spoken Rosh Hayeshiva decided to lead a battle to transform the face of Eretz Yisroel; to return the children of Hashem to their Father in Heaven.

And 20 years later, we have the *zechus* to be witness to the great success story of Shuvu. Thousands of children in 67 schools on 25 campuses, with a staff of over 1,200 teachers. Kindergartens, Elementary schools, high schools, and even a Kolell.

With *siyata Dishmaya*, thousands of students have passed through our system. Families and communities are being transformed. Hashem's children



are coming home. Parents in other areas are begging for new schools. Secular Israelis have begun sending their children to Shuvu.

With Hashem's help and *Klal Yisroel's* support, we've accomplished much over the past 2 decades. What we can do in the next 2 decades is, in a great measure, in your hands.

Please join us Tuesday evening, June 14<sup>th</sup> @ 7:30 at the home of Yossi and Rivky Sharf, 1843 Ryder Street (between Avenues R and Fillmore) for a reception to benefit the children of SHUVU. The guest speaker will be the noted author and speaker, Rabbi Paysach Krohn. For more information, please contact the Shuvu office at 718-692-3434.