

SHALVAT CHAYIM

PROVIDING A HOME FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER BEEN AT HOME WITH THEMSELVES

Those suffering from mental illness are never at peace. They are forever trapped within the confines of their own minds, without anyone who understands their pain. **Mishpacha** visited a unique organization in Israel, focused on easing the pain of these tortured souls and showing them that they are not alone.

by Gavriel Horan

The family of a young adult suffering from mental illness often finds the challenges overwhelming. This burden can have disastrous effects on the entire family structure.

In many cases, the only option is hospitalization or institutionalization in an environment where the patient has little or no contact with the heritage of his youth.

Since 1978, Shalvat Chayim, a non-profit group home based in Israel, has been helping to lighten the burden and literally save the lives of patients from both Israel and abroad. Shalvat Chayim provides a bright future for those who were told they had none.

I recently visited Shalvat Chayim's newest facility, a beautiful group home in Ramot, overlooking the pristine Jerusalem hills. The facility houses fifteen men ages 18 to 40. They suffer from a variety of mental illnesses including schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), paranoia, bipolar disorder, clinical depression, disabling anxiety and personality disorders. The home, which is open 365 days a year with round-the-clock supervision, provides a warm and nurturing environment where the residents thrive. The staff is comprised of a team of psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, a head nurse, a chef and other professional counselors who assist the patients in their recovery.

PIONEERED HOMES FOR SOLDIERS

Shalvat Chayim manages an additional number of group homes, as well as assisted living apartments and foster homes throughout Israel. An apartment was recently opened in Jerusalem to help teenage substance abusers and youth at-risk take control of their lives and return to their roots.

Shalvat Chayim was founded by Rabbi Nissim Eder, an IDF army officer and professor at Bar Ilan University, to help soldiers injured in the Yom Kippur War. Many of these soldiers were suffering from severe Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and were languishing in mental hospitals. Rabbi Eder pioneered the concept of removing the soldiers from the hospital and placing them in a residential environment. The program enjoyed great success, as the soldiers healed in the warm, therapeutic setting.

UNIQUE INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM

Rav Yossi Eder, his son, is the current director of Shalvat Chayim. He assumed this position after returning from Toulouse, France, where he served for six years as a rabbinical judge.



The soft-spoken, compassionate and insightful Rav Eder believes that, "Every individual is an entire world. We believe that every soul comes to the world on a mission to fix something, even if he is not blessed with health. Therefore, we need to help each client as much as we can to fulfill Torah and the commandments, to go to work and to the synagogue. If not for the work we do with our clients, they would languish in a locked hospital ward. They would not be in a nurturing and God-fearing environment. Additionally, the patients' conditions often worsen in a hospital setting because they lack personal attention, especially to their spiritual wellbeing."

For years, Moshe suffered from severe OCD, accompanied by violent outbursts. Today, after two years at Shalvat Chayim, he is functioning at maximum capacity. He attributes his success to Shalvat Chayim's personal caring, "The environment here is one of freedom. No one is pushy. They give you the space to be who you are."

With a staff of highly trained professionals, Shalvat Chayim has developed a unique program to return dignity to people who have been written off by society. They achieve levels of independence they could never have imagined possible.

Each patient is treated with a personally tailored program under the expert guidance of Tamir Shefer, Chief Resident Psychologist. "Many of these men have been in and out of hospital. We give them a life in the community, each according to his abilities. We create a personal plan suited to their needs. The uniqueness of our organization is that we

ANSWERING THE CALL FROM ABROAD

Since 1996, Shalvat Chayim has been the only program of its kind providing group homes and supportive apartments for Israelis and for those from abroad who otherwise may have been placed in state run institutions completely cut off from their roots and heritage.

In the largest of Shalvat Chayim's group homes, a majority of the residents are from overseas. Virtually the entire staff speaks English. Individual therapy sessions are conducted in English and group therapy sessions are in both English and Hebrew.

According to Tamir Shefer, chief psychologist, "We are constantly receiving calls from abroad, primarily from the New York-New Jersey area where there are waiting lists of 6-7 years for similar facilities. Families are falling apart, their children's situations are deteriorating and they have no alternatives. They are looking to us for answers. I can proudly say that we are the only program bringing these men and women to Israel."

Step by step, Mr. Shefer helps families make the necessary preparations to bring their son or daughter to Israel. In some cases, Mr. Shefer personally flies to the U.S. to escort them to their new home in Israel.

While some aid is available for Israeli citizens, overseas patients receive little or no government assistance. Shalvat Chayim must raise the funds to provide the desperately needed care these men, women, and teens cannot get anywhere else so that they and their families have a chance for a better and brighter future. Your contribution would be very much appreciated.

mold a program for them, rather than trying to fit them into a pre-existing framework, which means that our staff has to be very flexible and creative in their thinking."

LOVING CARE FOR CHILDREN

In 1978, at approximately the same time that Shalvat Chayim warmly tended their first soldier, a noted psychologist and special education expert, Dr. Herschel Fried, came to Israel on an unusual mission - to seek a loving home and establish a school for Simcha, a three-year-old child suffering from complex physical and emotional disabilities.

Dr. Fried was eventually introduced to Naomi Rubinstein, who took Simcha and provided him with a home until he was 18 years old. At that point, he was transferred to a facility appropriate for his age. In the meantime, Mrs. Rubinstein's reputation spread, and other families sought her assistance. The children suffer from a combination of developmental disabilities such as autism, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome and severe emotional disorders. "I treat every child individually and uniquely," she says, "I became a mother to them. They know I love them and it makes a difference."

As the number of children grew, Mrs. Rubinstein needed to move into a larger facility. Approximately fifteen years ago, she met Rabbi Yossi Eder who agreed to help fund her group home and assume many time consuming bureaucratic tasks. This gave Mrs. Rubinstein the extra valuable time to devote to her "children." With love, she bears the responsibility of interacting with each principal, teacher, social worker, and doctor of her children.

REHABILITATING YOUTH AT-RISK

Shalvat Chayim recently opened a unique program for young men and women struggling with emotional issues leading them to self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse. They offer a work/study program, group sessions, one-on-one therapy, family counseling, and recreational activities such as gymnastics, swimming and trips.

The young adults are housed in supportive apartments and foster homes in both the city and rural locations. Several of the teens live on a farm situated in the Jerusalem Forest where they care for animals and are responsible for the upkeep of the farm.

Rabbi Israel Ettinger, executive director of Shalvat Chayim, is instrumental in bringing some of these youngsters to Israel

to receive the care they desperately need. "The Almighty arranges that our message reaches the families that need us the most."

Twenty-two year old Shlomie describes his experience at Shalvat Chayim: "I was sure that I didn't have any hope; I saw all the gates being locked in front of me. Here I have a father and a mother, who not only warmly and truly take care of all my needs with dignity, but also make sure that I will reach the stage in which I will be independent, to implement all the hidden strength within me. Although I have not yet reached this goal, it is my joy to look forward to that day." May it come soon for him and for the whole world.

EMERGENCY AND LONG TERM CARE

Shalvat Chayim offers temporary quarters to individuals in need of respite and emergency care as well as a warm home for those who need long term care. They recently took in an American teen who had become homeless while alone in Israel. Call to discuss your personal situation.

Endorsed by HaRav HaGaon Moshe Sternbuch and HaRav HaGaon Yitzchok Tuvia Weiss, Av Beth Din Eida Chareidis, prominent Rabbanim, and professionals worldwide.



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