



MAKE YOUR WARDROBE GREAT AGAIN!

KOL HaBira
Voice of the Capital

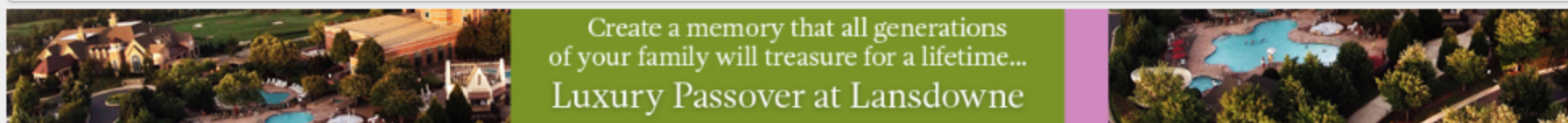


Connecting the
Jewish communities
of DC, MD and N. VA

- HOME
- ABOUT
- PARTNER WITH US
- SUBMIT AN ARTICLE
- SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES
- GIVE US FEEDBACK
- NEW PODCAST - "FIVE QUESTIONS WITH KAMI"
- COMMUNITY
- FEATURES
- ISRAEL/GLOBAL
- LETTERS TO EDITOR
- TOPICS OF INTEREST
- EDITORIAL
- POLLS & CONTESTS

Home > Features > Local Teen Combatting Addiction Needs Community Support

MONDAY, 20 MARCH 2017



LOCAL TEEN COMBATTING ADDICTION NEEDS COMMUNITY SUPPORT

WRITTEN BY NATASHA NADEL ON 16 MARCH 2017. POSTED IN FEATURES

Like 58 Share

More than just a brave plea for help, the Ross family's story sheds light on how the Jewish community addresses substance abuse, particularly among its youth.

SILVER SPRING (Md.) — Addiction, whether it is to food, gambling, shopping, drugs, or alcohol, exists in every community. Even Jewish ones. Even this one. One local family knows this all too well. Hedy Ross, with her son Perry's permission, shared her family's story with Kol HaBira in an effort to raise funds to cover her son's treatment. Their openness may help other families struggling silently with similar challenges. "My son was regularly doing drugs with other Jewish teens. and they were functioning, going to school, getting good grades," said Ms. Ross. "Perry on the other hand was just going down the hole of addiction and just couldn't do anything but look for his next drug to use." "Perry has other conditions that often feed into drug use: depression, anxiety, learning disabilities," she said. "These are all difficult things for a teenager to cope with. So many [kids] are dealing with these issues and they turn to drugs because at first they think it makes it all better...I understand why certain kids are drawn to drugs, but it's a very difficult addiction to overcome."



Perry's local Jewish day school made efforts to help, providing counseling and connecting the family with resources outside of school, but he was eventually expelled at age 15 due to his repeated substance abuse. Ms. Ross began a search for effective programs that would help Perry, consulting with a wide range of experts in the field.

She tried an experienced drug counselor, who concluded that Perry needed more help than she could provide. She then found a well-regarded local outpatient program that met four times per week, but the counselors there concluded that Perry needed more help than they could provide as well.

"It's very frustrating, because there are not really many resources available for a teenager with serious drug issues," said Ms. Ross. "If you have a kid that is really out of control, there is virtually nothing available to you."

After consulting with Amudim, a national Jewish organization dedicated to helping children like Perry, he entered and successfully completed a short-term residential treatment program in California. However, said Hedy, as soon as he came home to his neighborhood in Kemp Mill, he reverted back to his addictive behavior.



"Unfortunately, it's very hard for a kid to come back to the same environment where their drug use started," she said. "All the same kids, connections and supplies were there; the same pressures that led him the first time to abuse drugs. They were all there, so he actually got worse, not better."

Ms. Ross has observed that teens can use Orthodox observance of Shabbat as a way to hide drug use from their parents. "They know their parents can't use a phone or a car to track down their whereabouts," she said. According to Ms. Ross, there are certain locations in the community, such as the area behind the Spring Mill Field Office on Kemp Mill Road, that are gathering points for drinking and drug use. She said she's previously informed the police, hoping they would start surveilling the area.

Vaping was also prevalent among Perry's social circle, said Ms. Ross. "Teens think it's harmless. I threw out 10 vapes. I kept finding them in Perry's bedroom. What teens put in them is varied and not always legal."

"We can't be in denial about this being a community problem. It's not just a onekid problem."

Silver Spring's Rabbi Hirsh Chinn is a well-respected resource in the local recovery community. Rabbi Chinn has been involved in rehab work for over 30 years. In 1985, Dr. Abraham Twerski recruited him to assist Jewish recovering addicts. Rabbi Chinn received his MSW from Ohio State University in 1991 and later served as a Wexner Fellow. He trained at rehabilitation facilities in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

He keeps his Kemp Mill shul, Congregation Minchas Yitzchok, alcohol-free as a rule. "I wanted to provide a safe space to people visiting or living here, send a message and to model [alcohol-free] behavior. It's important for the Jewish community to provide that role model and to recognize publicly that alcohol is an issue in the Jewish community," he said.

Rabbi Chinn is the educational director of Zehayom, a local grassroots organization started after a young adult in the Maryland Orthodox community passed away from a drug overdose in 2006. Rabbi Chinn said that the community had to deal with a haunting question: "How come more wasn't done?" The informal network of help that had previously existed was no longer enough. Zehayom operates a 24-hour hotline (1-866-ZEHAYOM) to get people to meetings when necessary. They serve people all over the world.

Rabbi Chinn said he thinks the community has taken certain very positive steps in having local schools address the issue. He cited a recent program that the boys' Yeshiva of Greater Washington. The two 2-hour meetings, one for teens and one for parents, made a "tremendously bold and important statement," he said.

Roz Landy, Dean of Students at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School high school in Rockville, Maryland, said she's been at the school for 39 years and she "can count the issues they've had, related to drug and alcohol abuse, on not even one hand." She said they educate the students in a variety of ways.

"My head is not in the sand. I'm not saying children don't drink or smoke pot, but we try to be proactive by educating them and having a strong guidance program," said Landy. "Fortunately, we have not had a problem with alcohol and drug use at our school. The few times we have had an issue we dealt with it. We, luckily, have never had a child who has had to go into a treatment program."

"We are very good at identifying issues before things escalate. If one of our counselors see that a student is depressed, she calls the parents and suggests ways to help the student," Landy continued. "I think that is a reason that we have been so fortunate." Ruby Snyder is the high school guidance counselor at the Berman Hebrew Academy in Rockville, Maryland. She said they do random drug tests in the Upper School and conduct a prevention/intervention program for ninth graders, which is a graduation requirement.

She said this past year's program, just a few weeks ago, was particularly well received. In addition to a broader discussion, Michelle Day, a former Berman student that was expelled 20 years ago, spoke to the students about the many years she struggled with addiction. She's now nine years clean and sober.

In fact, Berman may bring Michelle back to talk to the 12th graders, as she went to Israel, like many of them will, and was involved in substances here. She grew up in the area and her parents are still in a local community. "She is very relatable and down to earth," Snyder said.

Berman also uses Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST), an evidence-based program that is shown to reduce substance use. According to the program's website, rather than merely teaching information about the dangers of drug abuse the program promotes "healthy alternatives to risky behavior" through activities designed to improve self-esteem, teach skills for resisting peer pressure and coping effectively with anxiety, and other mechanisms to foster healthy choices.

"We think our kids are safe and sheltered when they're in a Jewish school, but no one is sheltered from life," said Ms. Ross. Speaking from experience, she advocated a more proactive approach than substance abuse education and encouraging healthy behaviors alone. "I think every school should do more drug testing, because then you can get kids the help they need." Perry was first drug tested in tenth grade after someone called in an anonymous tip to his school, she said.

"Why didn't they test the whole class? It's naïve to think he was using alone," she said.

Today, Perry is doing well in a second residential treatment program, again recommended with the help of Amudim. With the clarity of mind that sobriety has given him, he wants to do whatever it takes to stay sober. Perry's treatment team has strongly recommended that he not return to Silver Spring because of the high likelihood of relapse. Their recommendation is that Perry enters a long-term rehabilitative treatment program that provides therapy and academic studies in a closed environment. This will ensure Perry's safety and enable him to work on successfully transitioning back to a normal life.

Even with financial aid, Ms. Ross said she needs to raise \$72,000 for this longterm treatment, far beyond the means of the family.

"Perry has given me his permission to use his name for the fundraising efforts. He thinks a lot more clearly when he hasn't been doing drugs and he realizes he needs this treatment; if he returns home he can't stay drug free," said Ms. Ross. "He's 100 percent behind me doing this fundraiser and using his name to get him the help he needs. It took Perry a long time to develop this self-awareness."

Amudim, which is based in New York, is guiding Hedy and Perry through this difficult time and acting as a tax-deductible conduit for the needed fundraising. Zvi Gluck, Amudim's founder and executive director, describes his organization as "crisis intervention and case management for individuals who have nowhere else to turn."

"We deal with the situation when it is hot," he said. "Our case managers are clinicians, but really they're here to guide families through the process. In crisis, a family is like a puzzle that breaks. We're the glue that keeps the pieces of the puzzle together." Amudim regularly deals with hundreds of cases just like this Perry's, working with all of the pieces and players to make it work. Susie Shtundel, a social worker and Amudim's case manager for the Ross family, said 100 percent of donations made through Amudim for Perry's post-treatment care will go directly to cover the cost of his treatment.

Shtundel describes Amudim's case management as different from the usual single phone call and referral. They consider what they do "comprehensive case management." She said that this means advocacy, support, referrals, developing a relationship with and genuinely caring about the client and family unit; the client trusts that they can call with anything they need. Sometimes they just need support from knowledgeable people in the field.

Shtundel said it took a lot of advocacy on their part to get the insurance company to cover Perry's residential treatment program for more than the usual twomonth limit and the insurance is not covering the next step. As Ms. Ross said, they strongly believe he needs to be in a therapeutic school (i.e. a long-term treatment facility) for the next year.

"I think it's important that parents are aware that drug use among teens in our community is common, and to look for signs of drug use by their children," said Ms. Ross, "And, if it turns out their child is using drugs, [they need] to address the problem."

"Perry had dreams of doing well in school, getting a baseball scholarship to college, enjoying social time with his friends, having a normal life," she said. "These dreams have been replaced by the dream of staying drug-free."

Those who want to donate to Perry's continued recovery can donate through Amudim at www.amudim.org. If donors write "Perry Ross" in the online notes or check memo, 100 percent of the donation will go to his treatment fund.

Join the Conversation

Baltimore's Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School is facing the subject of substance abuse head on across all of our divisions. "A child has a better chance of not using drugs and alcohol if we teach them at a young age about healthy decision making and coping strategies. Parents and educators cannot wait until high school to begin having this conversation." says

Rochelle Sullivan, School Counselor in BT's high school. On March 29 at 7:00 p.m., Beth Tfiloh invites parents to an honest conversation about substance abuse in the Jewish community, called "Not in MY Family: Substance Abuse in the Jewish Community."

This two-part program begins with a presentation about the science of addiction by Beth Kane Davidson, LCPC, LCADC, director of the Addiction Treatment Center at Johns Hopkins Medicine's Suburban Hospital. Next, friends and family members will reflect on those they've lost to drug addiction, while others in recovery will share their struggles and successes in this candid panel discussion.

"It's important for our community to hear these personal and painful stories of how substance abuse has impacted these community members' lives to help to remove the stigma associated with addiction, especially in the Jewish community," said Sullivan.

View complete program details online at www.bethfiloh.com/notinmyfamily or call 410-413-2424. All are welcome.

 Like 58  Share

