

Exciting Day at HASC Center's Yeshivah Day Hab

By Yochanon Donn

This past Thursday, Harav Mattisyahu Salomon, *shlita*, *Mashgiach* in Bais Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, found the opportunity to fulfill a wish he had expressed last summer: to see HASC Center's Yeshivah Day Hab in Boro Park and visit with the special men and boys who spend each day learning and growing there. The *Mashgiach* also affixed a *mezuzah* on the front door of the Day Hab building, located at 16th Avenue and 63rd Street.

As the *Mashgiach* was accompanied into the building, I met Abe Eisner, president of the Board of Directors of HASC Center and the person responsible for introducing Rav Mattisyahu to HASC Center.

"Why do you think the *Mashgiach* came here today?" I asked him.

"To give *chizuk* to the staff — and to get *chizuk* for himself," he stated firmly.

In response to my questioning look, he referred me to the *Mashgiach's* statements of several minutes earlier.

"The *Mashgiach* takes *chizuk* from coming here," Mr. Eisner told me. "He said so himself!"

Mr. Eisner related that when he had requested that the *Mashgiach* give the boys and staff a *brachah*, the *Mashgiach* responded incredulously, "I should give you a *brachah*? You have to give me a *brachah*! I am honored to be in your company!"

In a spirited and joyous ceremony after *Shacharis*, the *Mashgiach* told the boys and staff gathered in the building's *beis medrash* that when Moshiach will come, their exceptional work will be recognized by all.

"When Moshiach comes, you will be there up front to greet him!" said the Harav Salomon. "Please tell him that I'm a good friend!"

The room was filled with many staff and family members of the boys, where the walls are adorned with pictures of *Gedolim* from all sectors of Jewish life: the Steipler and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Baba Sali and the Ben Ish Chai, Harav Moshe Feinstein, Harav Yaakov Kamenetsky and Harav Aharon Kotler, *zecher tzaddikim livrachah*.

The *Mashgiach* was introduced to the approximately 50 people in attendance by Mendy G., who lives at HASC Center's Crown Heights residence.

Carefully enunciating every word, Mendy formally welcomed the *Mashgiach* to HASC Center.

"I would like to thank the *Mashgiach* in the name of everyone here for taking of his time to be *mehaneh* everyone," said Mendy, to a round of applause.

In his short address, the *Mashgiach* extolled the work done by HASC Center and blessed the people for their future accomplishments.

"Hashem is surely looking after you and giving you much



L-R: Shmuel Kahn, executive director HASC Center; Abe Eisner, president, HASC Center; Harav Mattisyahu Solomon, *Mashgiach*, Bais Medrash Govoha; Rabbi Dr. Chaim Wakslak, clinical director, HASC Center.

success," he said. "He should continue to give you much success."

Referring to the *mezuzah* he had just affixed on the front door, he stated that he had only put it up because it is a *mitzvah*, for in reality, the people that use the building are already *bentched* with a special *shmirah* and therefore do not need the protection of a *mezuzah*.

Rabbi Meir Fogel, Yeshivah Day Hab's supervisor, thanked the *Mashgiach* for the light he had brought into their building.

"Does anybody know what is going to be in 30 days?" he asked the boys.

"Chanukah!" came the excited reply from the boys in the room.

"As we know," said Rabbi Fogel, "there is a *minhag* to start learning about a Yom Tov 30 days before. And it is surely *hashgachah* that the *Mashgiach* came 30 days before Chanukah to bring light into our building!"

As Rabbi Fogel sang traditional songs, the *Mashgiach*, obviously emotionally moved by the scene surrounding him, gave out small *siddurim* to all the boys and staff members. Some boys shook his hand or received a kiss from him.

On the inside cover of every *siddur* was inscribed, "Presented to commemorate the visit to Yeshivah Day Hab by Rav Mattisyahu Salomon, Distinguished *Mashgiach*, Bais Medrash Govoha."

The boys, some of whom still had not removed their *tallis* and *tefillin* from *Shacharis*, were clearly thrilled with the encounter.

"He loves me! He loves me!" yelled one boy elatedly as he jumped up and down in excitement.

"So, he loves me too," replied one staff member.

"But he loves me more, he gave me a kiss! He's the *Mashgiach* of Lakewood!" he boasted.

Another boy told the *Mashgiach* that his father was a renowned *Rosh Yeshivah*. A third boy held up his *siddur* in a pose so that he could get a pic-

ture of himself together with the *Mashgiach*, while a fourth one held the *Mashgiach's* hand in awe as they started dancing.

The *Mashgiach's* bond with HASC Center was evident in his remarks at the event.

"They are taking care of *Klal Yisrael's* children for us," he told me on his way out.

Indeed, even after the singing had subsided, the *Mashgiach* still gripped the hands of those near him and continued dancing. Shmiel Kahn, HASC Center's executive director, told me later that the *Mashgiach* would have stayed even longer if not for a *vaad* he was to conduct in Bensonhurst that morning.

As I stood in the building's lobby as people slowly filed out, Rabbi Dr. Chaim Wakslak, clinical director of HASC Center as well as Rav of the Young Israel of Long Beach, described to me the myriad services that HASC Center's dedicated staff members provide for the approximately 500 individuals they serve on a daily basis.

Dr. Wakslak detailed the comprehensiveness of the day services provided by HASC Center, pointing out that there are currently separate divisions for men and women in Williamsburg and Boro Park, in addition to a facility in Flatbush for those individuals who need extra supervision.

HASC Center recently started an innovative pilot day habilitation program for adults with autism.

The agency also takes pride in its vocational track, where job training takes place in various venues, including the prevocational training center, work-readiness program and the supportive work initiative.

As we were speaking, Rabbi Yehoshua Kuperman, a counselor from the Yeshivah Day Hab group that teaches the boys and helps organize volunteer work for them, passed by.

A lively *yungerman*, Rabbi Kuperman was on his way out to his van, where 10 young men awaited him. He was about to take them to Williamsburg, where some of them have supervised jobs, while others



The *Mashgiach* with a HASC Center consumer with his inscribed *siddur*.

do volunteer work such as putting away the *sefarim* in shuls or putting together Tomchei Shabbos packages.

Rabbi Kuperman told me about the *shiur* in *Chumash* and *Rashi* that he gives every day — and the weekly tests he gives the boys on the entire *parashah*.

"Most of them pass every week!" he tells me.

He asks one of the boys waiting for transport to come over and talk to us. "Where are we going now?"

"To Williamsburg," answered the *bachur*, dressed in full *chassidische* attire, who seemed to be in his mid-30s.

"What are you going to do there?" asked Rabbi Kuperman.

"Learn *Chumash-Rashi*," he answered proudly.

"And then?" persisted Rabbi Kuperman.

"Packing pizza boxes," answered Aaron, who lives in one of HASC Center's Flatbush residences.

Rabbi Kuperman explained that Aaron had just started a job the previous week preparing boxes for a frozen pizza factory. He works together with Aryeh Leib Kramer, a HASC Center job coach, as he is initiated into the first paid employment he has ever had.

Aaron tells us that he *davens* in a Flatbush shul in the morning, where he attends a *Daf Yomi shiur*, then goes to his job in the pizza factory, and, after that, heads to a shul to put away the *sefarim* together with the other boys.

"They go into a packed shul [full of *sefarim*]," says Rabbi Kuperman, "and within a few hours, the entire shul is neat and organized, with all the *sefarim* put away."

Rabbi Kuperman also takes the boys on a trip to a different destination every week. And every Thursday, the boys bake *challo*s together for Shabbos.

Back in the 63rd Street Yeshivah Day Hab building, some 30 boys will learn how to integrate into the community at large. Trips to the store to buy everyday items, structured days of *davening* and learning, baking and cleaning — these and other chores occupy the

time of those boys who are able to prepare for life beyond the walls of HASC Center. Some even get married — and continue to be unobtrusively supervised by HASC Center's staff.

Rabbi Mendy Salgo, HASC's *mara d'asra*, is in charge of all the *ruchniyus* aspects of the residences, giving a host of *shiuirm* throughout the HASC Center day programs and residences. His main job entails counseling those couples as well as other individuals in HASC Center. He also supervises the *kashrus* in the kitchens in the residences and acts as an all-around *shatzmatz* (a man who takes care of all *ruchniyus* in a particular town or place).

"We try to maintain each person's background," he explains. "If someone comes from a certain background, he shouldn't have a *yeridah* in our agency. If someone dresses a certain way at home, he shouldn't change it here."

Rabbi Salgo says that the abilities of some of the boys are phenomenal, and at HASC Center, those accomplishments are recognized, such as the boy who made a *siyum* on *Mishnayos* recently.

"We look for long-term goals [for the boys]," he says. "When a resident made a *siyum* on *Mishnayos*, we made a big deal out of it."

But the main goal of the new building on 63rd Street, says Dr. Wakslak, "is to have those who attend maximize their abilities in a warm and *heimishe* atmosphere. We understand that their goals can be best attained when they feel comfortable in their surroundings, take pride in what they are doing, and feel the love and compassion of the people who are working with them," adds Dr. Wakslak, as the *Mashgiach* implies that the success of these young men is a reflection of the success of *Klal Yisrael*.

As I make my way out of the building into the inclement weather outside, I marvel at the parallel universe that these boys inhabit. Establishments such as HASC have found a way to bridge the two worlds, allowing us a peek into the innocence and goodness that characterizes that other world.