

My Son's Story at The Skill Building Center

Living in Monsey, it's easy to take our children's education for granted. After all, there are so many schools that can provide a solid, Torahdik education for both girls and boys.

And yet three years ago, my wife and I feared that no local yeshiva could give our son Ari, now 8, what he needed, and that, even if he managed, he would never thrive.

In kindergarten and even before, Ari had difficulty focusing and sitting still, to the point that could barely learn or retain anything. His challenges were very stressful on the family, and we anticipated even more stress, both on Ari and on us, as he was about to enter yeshiva. Would he be labeled as a child with "behavior problems" or "learning problems"? We wanted school to be a positive experience for our son, yet we couldn't imagine how or where this would be the case. And yet, with no other

options, we enrolled him in yeshiva. And, as we feared, despite Ari's capabilities, it was a disaster.

It was at this point that a friend suggested we speak to Mrs. Sarah Eidlitz, the principal and founder of The Skill Building Center/ The Skill Building Center. The Skill Building Center was founded to fill a very real void in our community. There are many children who manifest learning, social or emotional challenges, great or small, in kindergarten, or even earlier. Like Ari, many of these children are bright, and many wind up in the regular yeshiva system, where their needs cannot be met. Fast forward a few years, and they have become the very "children at risk" we all hear so much about. That was our great fear.

The Skill Building Center, for children ages 5 to 8, addresses the needs of these students before their issues become completely debilitating; before their

self-esteem is destroyed; and before they fall completely out-of-sync with their peers. Here, classes are very small, and each student is given his or her own individualized program, incorporating the latest therapeutic and educational research. The goal is to teach these kids to move beyond their deficits, and to give them a solid foundation which will ultimately enable them to thrive within a more traditional yeshiva setting — and in life.

After interviewing Ari, Mrs. Eidlitz recognized his potential and felt her program would, indeed, meet his needs.

It is with extreme gratitude and thanks to Hashem that Ari is now in the midst of his 3rd and final year at The Skill Building Center. We are so pleased and proud at the progress our son has made. He is reading and writing, both English and Hebrew fluently, and where once he could learn only one-on-one, he now sits in

a group and does his work independently. His social skills have developed to the point where he not only has many friends but he is actually popular. Where before, even at 5 years old, Ari's self-esteem suffered greatly because of his difficulties, he now feels so good about himself. It brings tears to our eyes when we think about how far Ari has come and how bright his future actually is.

Etz Chaim's first annual dinner is May 18th, and it is no small coincidence that they will honor the memory of my late father, Rabbi Doniel Patchen z"l, and Ari's grandfather.

My father was a yeshiva educator for over 40 years both in the New York Metropolitan area and in places such as Richmond, VA and St. Louis, MO. He dedicated his life to spreading Torah to every Jewish child, particularly those with special needs or who did not "fit the mold."

Although my father did not live to see Ari complete his term at Etz Chaim, he was keenly aware of the progress Ari has made and he was both impressed and amazed at the high level of education, both in Limudei Kodesh and Limudei Chol that Ari received.

The Skill Building Center embodies my father's ideals: that all children, no matter their challenges, be given an education that meets their needs in a true Torah environment. Thanks to The Skill Building Center, children who would otherwise be forced into school situations that could lead to frustration, failure and pain, can now receive a yeshiva education that teaches them invaluable life skills in a warm, supportive, professional environment. Their needs are met by a staff as dedicated to Torah values as my father, a"h, was