

THE Jewish Home

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Five Towns
Family Newspaper

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See page 7

Around the Community



48

Virtual Halacha Program Celebrates
Milestone Chag HaSemicha



46

A Spirited Hachnosas Sefer Torah



54

The Zareinu Revolution is Here

PAGE 9



Sharing the BIG Jewish Ideas

Page 76

Welcome Back to School

Page 88

Teachers Ensure Our Legacy

Page 72

Which Red Tie Did the Most?

Page 102

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The Zareinu Revolution is Here

Because every child deserves the chance to blossom



Torah Academy for Girls (TAG) and Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore are two of the eight current member schools of Zareinu

By Chavie Cohen

It is the first week of school. Chani finds herself sitting in the same spot she's had every year — back row, corner seat.

It has only been a few short days since the first day of school. Just like all the other girls in her class, she too walked into the school building on Monday with her carefully selected school supplies and stylish new backpack. But the novelty and excitement have faded quickly, replaced with the familiar emotions of fear, dread, and shame.

The hours drag by endlessly. Her mind wanders aimlessly. She sits wordlessly; the only thing escaping her lips is a sigh. And even recess does not provide the necessary reprieve.

Chani is sweet. She is bright. She has a learning difference. And it is for all the “Chanis” out there (and “Moshes,” “Meirs,” and “Miriams”) that Zareinu was founded earlier this summer by a group of seasoned educators and dynamic lay leaders.

Zareinu, built on a foundation of pioneering educational initiatives, was established with one fundamental belief: that every Jewish child in our community deserves the opportunity to be educated alongside their peers.

Baruch Hashem, the Orthodox population of the Far Rockaway and Five Towns area has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years and boasts many upstanding schools and yeshivos. Thousands of boys and girls go to school each day, eager for another day of successful learning. But what about the hundreds of

children who have learning differences that prevent them from succeeding in a mainstream classroom environment?

Zareinu's model is unique, combining the best of both the general and special education worlds. Zareinu has partnered with the finest institutions in our community. Member schools include (as of press time) Bais Yaakov Ateres Miriam, Bais Yaakov of the Five Towns, Bnos Bais Yaakov, Shulamith School for Girls, Torah Academy for Girls, Yeshiva Darchei Torah, Yeshiva Ketana of Long Island, and Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore. And it is inside the walls of these institutions where the magic takes place.

Each Zareinu class is limited to 12 students. This cap ensures that every single student gets personalized attention and a tailored education that targets their specific strengths and weaknesses. There is no such thing as slipping through the cracks or getting lost in the crowd — there is no crowd!

The Zareinu rebbi, morah, or teacher knows each child on a personal level. Moshe loves mathematics and just moved up one level in reading. Baruch has trouble reading but loves anything to do with planets. Relating to each student on an individual level allows for maximum growth and achievement.

Each Zareinu educator is highly ed-

ucated and trained in the latest methodologies. But just as importantly, each teacher, assistant, rebbi, and staff member is there to make a difference in the lives of their students.

“The warmth and love for each student is palpable,” says Rabbi Justin Lepolstat, MS, program director of Zareinu. Rabbi Lepolstat is in and out of each class, connecting, collaborating and—

most importantly—caring.

Zareinu's star leadership team also includes veteran educators Naomi Nadata, MS, program director, and Alice Feltheimer,

MS, educational coordinator. Serving on its presidium are Messrs. Yehuda Biber, Alon Goldberger, and Chesky Newman—tireless and visionary community leaders who are passionate about Zareinu's mission to help every child blossom.

As opposed to learning in a special-ed school, which sometimes carries an unwanted stigma, Zareinu students learn in a regular, inconspicuous classroom down the same hallway as their friends'. Zareinu gives each child the gift of normalcy—the chance to say, “I go to BBY” or “I'm also in Yeshiva Ketana” like the other children on their block or in shul. They wear their uniforms with pride, blending right in with all the other students their age.

Aside from not feeling singled out or

different, this setup provides countless opportunities for socializing and integration. For example, Zareinu sixth-grade girls take part in the school-wide bas mitzvah play. Zareinu first-grade boys celebrate a Chumash Mesiba together with the rest of the peers. Their curricula mirror those of their fellow students but in a way that is perfectly tailored to them.

Zareinu students build close connections with each other. They celebrate their successes together and form a secure, close-knit community. But on the playground and in the lunchroom, they have the opportunity to branch out and form friendships with many other children their age.

Zareinu's personalized pedagogy means Mendy might be mainstreamed for math while Gedalya is mainstreamed for Gemara. Sara struggles with science and gets a custom curriculum that covers the basics in the way that she learns best. This program recognizes that no two children are alike and works with each child's team to determine the optimum framework that will enable them to soar and succeed.

“Some kids just need extra tutoring, and they'll be fine in the typical environment,” says Rabbi Moshe Bender, s'gan rosh hayeshiva at Darchei Torah and one of the driving forces behind Zareinu. “But for kids who need more than that, Zareinu is a real lifesaver, and I'm eager to support this worthy cause in any way I can.”

To find out more about Zareinu, please call 718.406.8343; email info@zareinu5T.org; or visit Zareinu5T.org.

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