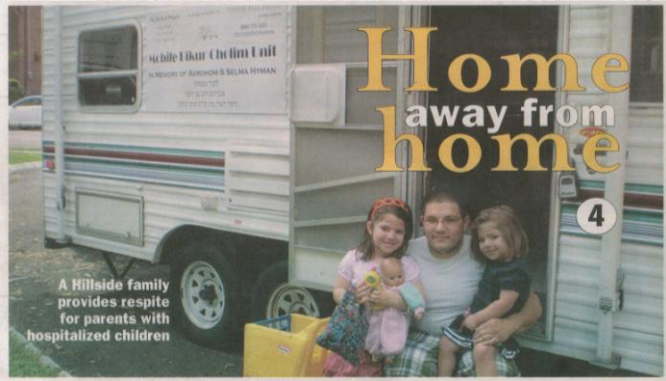


NJN

www.njewishnews.com Vol. LXIII No. 37

Thursday, September 10, 2009 21 Elul 5769 JEWISH FEDERATION OF CENTRAL NEW JERSEY EDITION

\$1.00



Home away from home

4

A Hillside family provides respite for parents with hospitalized children



Nessa Itzkowitz, left, seen with her sister Yehudit and brother Boruch, was the inspiration behind her parents' equipping this RV as a respite space for parents of hospitalized children. Photo by Elaine Durbach



Rachel and Josh Itzkowitz have created a mobile home-away-from-home for parents with hospitalized children.

Parents from page 4

The first stretch at the hospital was for 10 days. There were many other stays after that, until she was out of the woods — and they face the prospect of more.

Almost as soon as Nessa was home and thriving, and grateful for their daughter's progress, they began thinking about some way to increase their *gemilut hasadim* — the mitzva of performing acts of kindness. The Itzkowitzs are members of Bris Avrohom, a Chabad community in Hillside, and like their leader, Rabbi Mordechai Kanelsky, and his wife, Shterney, who created a number of major projects in memory of the baby they lost, they wanted express their gratitude in a concrete way.

That would be in addition to what they have already done for years as volunteers with Hatzolah of Union County, the Orthodox Jewish volunteer emergency medical service. Josh, who works in real estate when not volunteering, is a first responder; Rachel is a dispatcher, working the phones from their home. She also works two days a week as a volunteer with the family advisory council at New York-Presbyterian, providing parents with orientation in the neonatal intensive care unit.

At first they dreamed of establishing a long-term care facility for children from observant families with major medical needs, but they were advised to start smaller. Short of the money to buy an RV, they asked their children to loan them the funds from their college saving accounts. "The children all agreed," their mother said. "Once we had money, some donations came in, and we

were able to pay them back."

They bought the vehicle, 2000 Fleetwood Mallard. They had thought they might plug it into hospitals' power supply, but when they were told that wouldn't be allowed, they retrofitted the van, equipping it with its own power source so that it has enough energy for three days. At the flick of one switch, there is power for lights, air-conditioning, a stove, an electric urn, and a refrigerator.

Inside, there is a double bed made up with soft pillows and fresh linen, a toilet and a shower, a fridge stocked with water and soda, candles and a wine cup, and prayer books and other Jewish texts. There is even a flat-screen television. The table and seating for four can be folded back to make space for a bunk bed.

There is also a pamphlet describing the Revach Project, and a questionnaire inviting comments. Rachel said it has been hard to get people to write down their responses; they want to voice their gratitude in person. "People have been very grateful," she said.

Only once so far have there been two requests for the unit for the same weekend. A couple from Panama got to use the vehicle, and Rachel organized for the other family to have a room in the hospital. But the Itzkowitzs say they know how many more people could do with such help, and they are determined to raise the funds to set up more units.

To book the Revach Project vehicle, or to support the project, contact 908-436-9310 or info@therevachproject.org.

edurbach@njewishnews.com

Couple makes 'space' for parents of sick children

Vehicle provides a Shabbat haven at area hospitals

ELAINE DURBACH
NJIN Bureau Chief/Central

At two-and-a-half years old, Nessa Itzkowitz has spent more time in the hospital than many people do in their lifetime.

Born with hypoplastic left heart syndrome, a condition that used to shut down a child's life within days, Nessa has two operations behind her and a third still in the offing.

The surgeries have kept the little girl in New York-Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital in New York City for weeks at a time and have taken a toll on her parents, Josh and Rachel Itzkowitz of Hillside. They have seven other children but always made sure there was a parent by Nessa's bedside. It was especially hard for them on Shabbat, when they were desperate for somewhere quiet and private, a place they could share a Shabbat meal and sleep for a while — while staying close to their ailing daughter.

Determined to help others in the same situation, the Itzkowitzs have made it their family mission to offer parents of hospitalized children a place for some Shabbat rest and relaxation. Their solution: a fully equipped recreational vehicle, parked outside the hospital where parents — as Rachel put it — "can feel like human beings."

Known as the Revach Project — from the Hebrew word meaning "space" or "respite"



The Revach Project RV has a place for parents to rest in peace and quiet, while staying near their sick child. Photo by Elaine Durbach

— the mini-home-away-from-home has been called into use 12 times in the four months since its completion.

All of those have been at New York-Presbyterian, but the Itzkowitzs are willing — and eager — to take the Revach van wherever it's needed within a couple of hours' drive from their home. They leave it parked nearby so the family of the hospitalized child has access to it for Shabbat.

Rachel said that as long as her husband, or someone else driving the van to its destination, "can be home in time for Shabbat, that's fine."

Retrofitted for comfort

At the family's home in Hillside, as older sisters, 17-year-old Batya, and five-year-old Yehudit lure the chatty Nessa away to do art rather than paint nails, their mother described what they went through when she was born.



Inside, there is place to sleep, eat, or just relax in privacy. Photo by Elaine Durbach



See Parents page 9