


TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2008

NON-PROFIT NEWS

 Submit news items to charity@northjersey.com

Filling a gap in special education

In the non-profit world, just providing a valuable service isn't good enough – at least when it comes to paying the rent and meeting a payroll.

That's a lesson the Sinai Special Needs Institute in Teaneck has learned after a half-dozen

years of running deficits that cut its net assets nearly in half.

"This year, for the first time in the seven years I've been here, we're not running in the red," said Stuart Koesterich, the institute's business manager.

Koesterich gives the credit for turning the organization's finances around to Sam Fishman, a board member and the group's consulting managing director.

For non-profits, financial viability often depends on convincing well-heeled donors that your work is worth opening up their checkbooks. And Fishman hasn't been shy about conveying that message to the wealthiest members of North Jersey's Jewish community, Koesterich said.

"There's been a major change in the fund-raising effort," Koesterich said. "He's done a good job of telling our story and reaching out to more substantial individuals who can write those big checks. We didn't do a good job before of getting our message out about what Sinai does for these children who have no place else to go."

Sinai provides special-education programs for children from the age of 4 through high school with learning and developmental disabilities whose parents want them to attend Jewish schools.

It operates programs at yeshivas and Jewish academies in Paramus, Teaneck and Livingston, as well as supported housing in Teaneck for young adults. The organization receives no government funds, instead relying on tuition payments and donations.

"We work with students with a range of disabilities; autism, Asperger's syndrome, seizure disorders, cancer survivors," said Laurette Rothwachs, dean of the institute. "They're in small classes, no more than nine, with two teachers and as many assistants as are needed."

Sinai Special Needs Institute

1485 Teaneck Road,
Suite 300

Teaneck, NJ 07666
201-833-9220

Web site: sinaischool.org

The institute provides special-education programs for children attending Jewish schools around North Jersey.

One of the teachers in each group focuses on academic education, the other on religious studies, said Rothwachs, who has been running Sinai since its inception in 1982.

"These are kids who have not been able to be successfully mainstreamed," said Natalie Lichtman, associate principal of the lower school at the Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy in Livingston.

Sinai's largest program is located in the academy's building, although the two are separate organizations.

"If not for the Sinai program," Lichtman said, "most of them would be in the public schools or continuing to flounder in a yeshiva. As far as I know, there is no similar program in the area that

serves Jewish day schools."

Sinai's tuition is stiff: \$30,000 annually for elementary school, \$40,000 for high school. But that doesn't cover the full cost of the program.

"Our cost per student averages in the \$50,000 range," Fishman said. In addition, Sinai gives scholarships to about half its students' families. "We need to raise 40 percent of our budget through fund raising," he added.

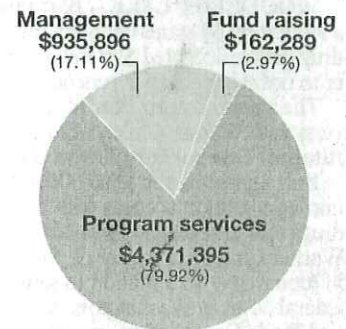
While the institute has begun to turn its finances around, Fishman said the job is far from complete. "A year and a half ago we were facing a serious financial crisis. We needed to raise about \$2 million. At this point, we're doing about half of that."

Spending on programs: Sinai spends 80 cents of every dollar on its program, about average for educational non-profits in the state that work with the learning and developmentally disabled. **Neutral**

Spending on fund raising: The institute brought in about \$9 in contributions for every \$1 it spent on fund raising, placing it in the top third of similar organizations in New Jersey. **Plus**

Executive compensation: Rothwachs' compensation package, including benefits, came to nearly \$175,000 last year, in the top quarter of pay for groups like this. **Minus**

How the program spends its money



Source: Organization's 2006 tax return

R.L. REBACH/STAFF ARTIST

Financial stability: Although Sinai is now running in the black, it had a deficit for at least six years. **Minus**

Outcomes: Sinai has successfully helped several hundred students make the transition from special-needs programs to being mainstreamed in regular Jewish school programs. **Plus**

Demand for services: The institute has a steady waiting list, drawing students from around New Jersey and New York City. **Plus**

Transparency: The organization readily supplied all financial documents. **Plus**

E-mail: lipman@northjersey.com