



PROFILE: Opening the Door of Hope — Yerachmiel Stern, CEO of Pesach Tikvah

RABBI BINYOMIN ZEV KARMAN

“I entered the field when the subject of treating mental health in the Jewish community was in its infancy,” said Yerachmiel Stern, who currently serves as the CEO of Pesach Tikvah, one of the foremost clinics serving the *frum* community of Brooklyn. “Seeking professional help was taboo, and it took a great deal of ingenuity to break down the barriers that existed. But today, we see the fruits of those efforts, as it has become normalized for those who are affected to receive help in order to improve their lives.”

As I entered the office on 18th Avenue, Yerachmiel explained that a decade ago, after

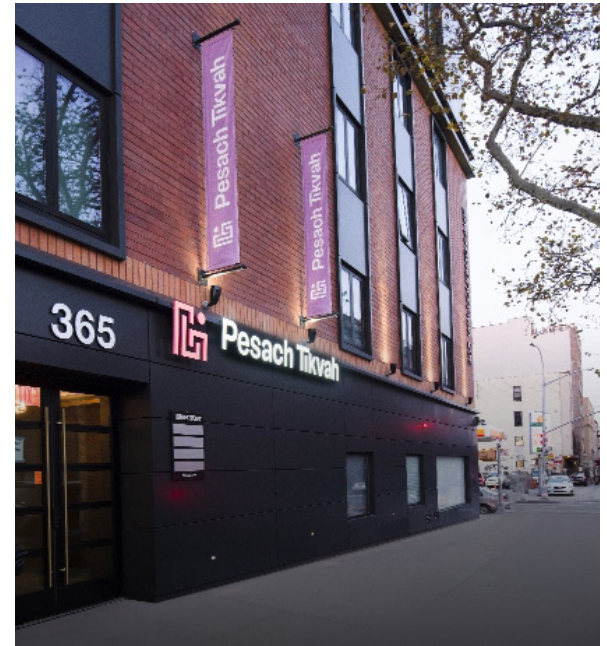
working as a clinician in the flagship Williamsburg location of Pesach Tikvah, he was drafted by Dr. Yitzchak Schindler and Mr. Avraham Heimowitz to develop a new clinic in the Boro Park vicinity. Growing up in Boro Park, he had a good feel for the neighborhood and the needs of the assortment of residents of the community.

“The management team at Pesach Tikvah made tremendous inroads with the Chassidish community in Williamsburg to familiarize them with the services available at the clinic,” Yerachmiel recalls. “In the beginning, people who were suffering just swept their problems under the rug and did not consider going for help. By networking with *mechanchim* and other community leaders, they were able to publicize how such services could be accessed and the successful outcomes they were experiencing. Before long, the Boro Park community was ready for a clinic

of their own, and I was asked to help build it from the ground up.

“When we opened our first Family Center at 4111 18th Avenue, and I set about assembling the staff needed for this project, I looked for an assortment of clinicians who had a variety of specialties and backgrounds. The clinic would service Chassidish, yeshivish and other types of clients, and we needed staff who could cater to all these types. At that time, more *frum* people were entering the field of mental health, and I was able to recruit a diverse group of topnotch therapists, including many who were specializing in an assortment of modalities. This allowed me to connect each client with the best match, both personality-wise and professionally.”

Yerachmiel’s background included a Master’s degree from Touro College, as well as several years working in Pesach Tikvah’s Williamsburg



clinic, and he used his experience as well as his natural instincts to find the perfect fit between the client and the therapist.

“Treating mental health is unlike other health issues, where the interaction between the doctor, PA or nurse is based on a physical exam, diagnoses and treatment,” Yerachmiel related. “When it comes to mental health, the relationship between the professional and the client is crucial. They must connect on a psychological and emotional level in order for the therapy to succeed. My training and work at the beginning of my career helped me not only with the clinical part of my current job, but also to understand the human aspect of the client and work with both pieces so I can match them up properly.”

As the reputation of the clinic spread throughout the Boro Park vicinity, Yerachmiel was called upon to expand the services and open a second Family Center at 5309 18th Avenue. “Today, the stigma of seeking help for mental health issues has dissipated greatly, and families are more willing to reach out for assistance,” he explained. “In the past, if a person was experiencing difficulties in the home, they might leave the comfort of their abode and seek relief away from their house, whether in yeshivah and Bais Yaakov for the children, or at work for adults. But life today is much

more complicated, and often leaving the house is far more difficult for someone suffering from anxiety, depression or some other malady. These people have learned that by seeking professional help, they can find true relief and continue to live their lives with less pressure and more happiness.”

More recently, Mr. Stern was called upon by the executive board of Pesach Tikvah to serve as the CEO of the organization, which he considers both a tremendous responsibility and a fantastic opportunity. “I have been associated with Pesach Tikvah for sixteen years, and I believe I have a good feel of how to move the organization forward to meet the challenges which lie ahead. With the pressures people are feeling these days coming from all directions, the need for competent professional therapists who follow the guidance of the Torah is increasing daily, and we work diligently to constantly keep ahead of the curve.”

One of the innovations of the organization is the Training Institute, where the staff receives instruction and hands-on guidance from some of the top trainers in the country. “Whether it is an intern who is just breaking in and beginning their career or an experienced therapist who is seeking professional development, we provide them with tremendous resources to hone their skills so they can provide their clients with the best ser-

vice possible,” Yerachmiel said. “This area is in a sense the pride of the company, since we not only recruit top prospects, but we even provide them with what can be called thousands of dollars of training on our own dollar. I feel this is important, since through this program, a professional who is growing will be able to reach their full potential.”

Although at the onset of his career he was somewhat of a pioneer in the field of mental health in the *frum* community, today Yerachmiel feels he has accomplished a lot, working in the original Williamsburg clinic, setting up the Boro Park clinics, and now assuming the role of CEO of the entire organization.

“The message I want to convey to the Jewish community of Brooklyn is that it is best to get ahead of a problem and deal with it early rather than letting it fester and grow into an almost insurmountable one,” Mr. Stern said. “In the past, people in the Jewish community would shy away from seeking help when they needed it, but today it has become much more acceptable to reach out for help. I’m glad that I had the opportunity to have some hand on tearing down the stigma and impediments to seeking help for mental health, and I look forward to steering our organization to provide more of it to all those in need as they learn the skills to overcome the challenges they face.”