

January 4, 2011

Letter to Editor of Jewish Week

We at Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA) applaud the article by Steve Lipman, (*Brooklyn Center For At-Risk Teens Itself At Risk, December 21, 2010*). JCCA's staff has had the opportunity to observe the work of Our Place directly, and can attest to the deep compassion of their staff, the high quality of the services, and the program's critical importance to the Orthodox community of Brooklyn. For 188 years, JCCA, a child and family services agency that is part of the network of UJA-Federation of New York, has been a leader in working with children, youth, and families at risk – especially those who have been abused and neglected and are struggling to establish new lives and families.

Our Place partly served as a model for JCCA's three-year-old Kew Gardens Hills Youth Center in Central Queens which, on a nightly basis, serves 30 to 40 high school-aged young men of Ashkenazi and Bukharian Orthodox backgrounds. Like Our Place, JCCA's Kew Gardens Hills Youth Center was created in direct response to the Orthodox community's cry for help with the growing numbers of former Yeshiva youth who have become disaffected, have no place to fit in their communities, and typically have nowhere to turn to for support. For these youth, who struggle with substance abuse, depression, alienation from family and Jewish community, programs like Our Place and JCCA's Kew Gardens Hills Youth Center offer acceptance, a safe haven from the streets, and a bridge back to their communities. These youth are in dire need of nurturing and strengthening by culturally sensitive mentors who can help redirect them, and help them to find meaning in their own lives

With diminished resources available from public sources (city, state and federal), and fewer dollars available from private foundations and start-up grants, Our Place and similar programs must look to the generosity and social consciousness of donors within the Jewish community. Without this support the result is inevitable: the doors will be closed to these deeply needy young people forever.

We sincerely hope for ongoing support both for our own program and for other essential programs like Our Place. JCCA is grateful to our local partners who helped in establishing the Youth Center in Kew Gardens Hills: lay leaders, rabbis, the Queens Jewish Community Council, a private foundation, and UJA-Federation. We hope that together, we can ensure that our doors will remain wide open to serve those Jewish youth who need us most.

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