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Shul of Bal Harbour Launches Nationwide Program for Teachers

BY HINDI DIAMOND

Because he feels that Jewish teachers are being underpaid, Rabbi Shlomo Lipskar of The Shul at Bal Harbour has launched a nationwide program call Peace of Mind for Jewish Education, aimed at easing some of their economic strain.

"It is our obligation to help these educators in Jewish day schools through little crises that may occur, which puts great stress on their living expenses," he said, "so we have set up this program, which has already loaned out more than \$100,000 to help teachers in 11 schools."

Now, The Shul has prepared 4,000 Peace of Mind kits explaining the success of their pilot program, which they are distributing throughout the United States to schools of Jewish education.

According to Rabbi Lipskar, more than 45 teachers have been helped by loans they have received since the program started. They operate both in Dade and Broward counties.

Aryeh Rubin, director of Targum Shlishi Inc., a foundation that helped initiate and fund the Peace of Mind project back in 1998, says, "The results have been extremely positive. To date, everyone has repaid their loans. I also am gratified to sponsor projects that are replicable in other communities."

"Since the program started in 1998, its impact on the community has been very positive," according to Rubin, a member of The Shul who has been the guiding light of the program. "Those of you who have been involved with Jewish education have known for a long time that the most valuable resource of the Jewish community, and of the Jewish nation are our teachers and educators. We want to assure the continuity of our people, and Jewish education is paramount. We strive to help teachers and administrators to have an income that affords a level of comfort and dignity without the duress that often accompanies teachers' salaries," he wrote in a cover letter targeted to the directors of Jewish day schools nationwide.

GEMILUS CHESSED

Rabbi Lipskar commented: "In our Jewish tradition, one of the noblest forms of tsedakah is giving interest-free loans, known as gemilus chessed, 'bestowing kindness.' This concept inspired us to establish a wonderful program for teachers in our community, which recognizes that teaching is a most transcendent and godly task. A teacher can inspire a child to become his or her best self and make a difference in the world."

One of the Peace of Mind recipients, Rabbi Dovid Shapiro, a teacher at the Hebrew Academy, in a letter of thanks to The Shul, wrote: "Situations can sometimes become quite difficult on a teacher's salary. Such an occasion arose when I had the good fortune and pleasure to marry off one of my daughters, two years ago. It was then that I found out about your gracious 'Gemach' and was able to borrow money to help us out tremendously with the wedding expenses.

"As a teacher, I often wonder why more is not done for the plight of the teachers, but your Gemach has definitely done more than its share in showing your concern, and letting us know that our work is appreciated, for which I,

among others are eternally grateful,” he added.

The Peace of Mind program extends to Dade and Broward counties, Rubin explains, and its kits outline the requirements for implementing the free-loan for teachers project.

There are three requirements, the kits point out:

- The applicant has to be a teacher in a Jewish school,
- The teacher has to have a guarantor, for loans up to 4,000, and
- The teacher has three years to pay back the interest-free loans at the rate of \$100 a month.

“The program has apparently struck a chord with educators across the country,” Rubin said. “Interest and queries about the program have already come from educators in Arizona, New York and New Jersey. The Lookstein Center of Bar Ilan University has distributed information on the Peace of Mind program to its entire list of Jewish educators.

“I hope that this project prods the organized Jewish community to appreciate the work of the teachers of Jewish day schools throughout the nation, particularly in Miami, to allow them to continue to educate our children with dignity and peace of mind,” Rubin added.

For further information, e-mail Miriam@theshul.org or write to Peace of Mind, The Shul, 9540 Collins Ave., Bal Harbour, FL 33154.