



# Shielding Children Through Education And Empowerment

It's our most basic, primal instinct: Protecting our children.

We depend on ourselves, spouses, teachers, police, community leaders and even the decency of strangers to form a shield around our precious

isn't right.

Working with yeshivas, and organizations like Hatzalah and Shomrim, Magenu hosts public beneficial events, such as the upcoming Safety Day 2014, taking place June 15<sup>th</sup> at Floyd Bennett

"We want to empower the children," said Dr. Shani Verschleiser, who co-founded Magenu.

"It takes a village to raise a child is a well-known adage, but it is the absolute truth.



offspring. But what if we can't fend off the inevitable trespass, and those on whom we depend let us down through omission or commit sins of betrayal?

That's why we need Magenu an organization that teaches our children the right amount of suspicion and "street smarts" to protect themselves, when necessary, and a sense of empowerment to say "no" when necessary and most of all to tell a trusted adult when something

Field / Brooklyn Aviator. The first event was in Marine Park last year.

Thousands of children and parents will gather in a carnival-like atmosphere for fun and games with a safety theme, with help from the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, NYPD, FDNY, New York State Police and others. Vehicles and equipment will allow children to learn and explore while watching shows and a concert and enjoying games and rides.

It takes a community to protect our children, while the opposite also holds true, it takes a community to allow children to be abused. We can no longer ignore the reality that child abuse exists within our frum community and our existing methods are failing to deal with this tragedy."

Safety Day will be an opportunity for Magenu to unveil its newest curriculum, "Be a Star<sup>®</sup>," which is about personal safety.

The "Be A Star<sup>®</sup>" methodology is founded on the principles that all children are Stars and deserve

to be treated as such, and the teaching of the Gemara, "Stop, Think, and then Act." It not only encourages children to learn personal safety but also puts emphasis on educating significant adults in a child's life.

The program was carefully reviewed by Reb Shmuel Kamenetsky, who said "it is a necessity for every yeshiva to implement."

Reb Shmuel invited Magenu to attend this year's annual Torah Umesorah convention,

where the organization set up a double-sized booth to present its entire new curriculum and programing. School representatives from all over the world attended the May 7<sup>th</sup>-May 11<sup>th</sup> convention at the Split Rock Resort in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. Dozens of schools from Mexico to Chicago, Indianapolis, to Israel signed up for the Magenu programs.

"The overwhelming response to Reb Shmuel's request was unbelievable," said Eli Verschleiser.

Convincing the frum Brooklyn yeshivas to allow the program into their classrooms was a "daunting task," Eli Verschleiser added. "Each and every one was an individual battle, but concerns were ultimately turned into much praise."

Magenu has educated thousands of children, parents, and school staff over the past two years & is constantly expanding its reach, Verschleiser said.

Sarit Rubenstein joined Magenu at its inception having worked in the field for the past ten years. "Magenu is an organization with a mission statement that all children have the right to investigate and navigate this world without worrying about their personal safety. Magenu is



promoting the education of children in an utmost tznius fashion." Sarit said.

The mission of Magenu is fueled by statistics that 95 percent of abuse is preventable with education and young people need information about what is healthy in order to be able to recognize what is unhealthy. "Education allows for our children and their parents to have an arsenal of tools to keep them safe," says Dr. Verschleiser. "It allows for our Yiddishe Kinderlach to not be afraid but rather to be able to use the skills and tools we teach in their daily lives." Research shows that telling, even when something harmful has already happened, is critical to a child's wellbeing.

The "Be A Star ®" curriculum offers a few modules for a complete and similar message. School administration and hanhalla, staff and teacher trainings, as well as parent workshops are all part of the programming. They include recognizing signs of abuse, good hiring practices, rules and regulations to create a safe and secure environment for students, as well as how to ensure a staff members own safety. Magenu also has practical, easy to implement tips and tools for parents that they can incorporate into their daily lives immediately.

Saying 'no' to an adult even in ordinary circumstances is extremely difficult for a child, but in 90 percent of abuse cases the perpetrators are known and trusted by the child. "We need to empower our children with this skill," says Verschleiser. "Magenu does this in a manner that is comfortable for the child, rather than promote distrust or fear. In addition children need to know that even if they did not feel safe to say "no" they can still "tell"

because that is the most important aspect.”

In addition to the vibrant Brooklyn organization, Magenu has formed a new chapter in South Florida and is in the process of forming one in Lakewood, NJ. Earlier this month a Magenu team went to train local schools in the Hollywood Florida area. And the first of many yeshivos in Lakewood has signed up for the Be a Star program. The school has over 600 children where Magenu is scheduled to present its curriculum next month. Magenu is training a special team for the Lakewood community for it to continue to educate the tens of thousands of children and family members in the town.

Another primary focus, sadly, is protecting children with special needs, as it is not uncommon to find such cases within the challenged communities. Magenu has adapted proven curriculums and programing designed specifically for challenged children. Gesher Yehuda and Yeled V'Yaldah are some of the schools for these wonderful children that Magenu has educated.

Numerous yeshivos have also requested the Be a Star program translated in Yiddish, and in Hebrew. A delegate from Yerushalaim came to New York to meet and discuss the possibilities of such a program. Magenu has partnered with an experienced Yiddish-speaking team of Rabbeim and designers who are working to convert the program to Yiddish.

When asked why she felt it was time for Magenu, Verschleiser said the crisis of abuse in our community had reached a boiling point. “Everyone must be aware of the dangers and the long-term consequences of abuse,” he said. “To continue standing idly by or to minimize the crimes perpetrated against our children would be the greatest Aveira of all.”