



# School Psychologist and Occupational Therapist Join Gan Team

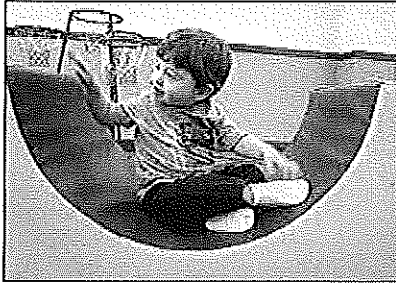
## Supporting the Whole Child at the Gan

BY WENDY BEDER

Understanding the importance of addressing the educational and developmental needs of all children, Gan Yeladim Early Childhood Center in Stamford hired Hillary Isaacs and Aimee Elsner. Isaacs, a licensed school psychologist with 15 years of experience, serves as the school psychologist, and Elsner, a licensed occupational therapist with 17 years of experience, serves as the occupational therapist. "Words cannot begin to express how grateful we are for the services of Hillary Isaacs and Aimee Elsner. They not only respond to parents who feel that their children are in need, but they are always interacting with students in the classrooms to ensure that issues are not missed. They are the complete picture, making themselves available to the family as well as the child," said Scott Newman, a Gan parent.

In her role as school psychologist, Isaacs collaborates and consults with Gan teachers, directors, parents and therapists to understand the individual needs of children, and to provide referrals, screenings and behavioral and educational strategies for children who require additional support. Isaacs supports the social, emotional and behavioral health of children by leading social skills groups and play therapy. If a child requires a referral and support through Early Intervention and Individualized Education Plans through his/her residing town, she serves as the child's advocate and represents families at their IEP meetings. In addition, Isaacs offers lectures and training programs on various topics such as sleep. Isaacs also implements Curriculum Based Assessments for pre-literacy and develops a balanced literacy program for all children at the Gan, with a focus on reading skills in the Gan's Transitional Kindergarten classroom.

In her role as occupational therapist, Elsner utilizes the "Handwriting Without Tears" writing program in all the Gan's classrooms. She works directly with teachers to provide strengthening activities and to ensure that children use the correct pencil grip. Rachel Messinger, current Gan parent, talks about her impressions of the



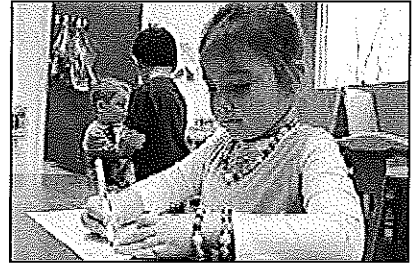
Jack Friedman, age 2, had fun while building his body strength in the new sensory gym designed by Occupation Therapists Aimee Elsner and Amy Budovitch. The space was made possible through funds raised by the 2011-12 Gan PTA, led by Melissa Bildner.

handwriting program: "I'm really impressed with how much writing my son is doing in his final year. I think the handwriting specialist makes a big difference."

Elsner also collaborates and consults with Gan teaching staff, directors, parents and therapists in offering children extra attention and support with sensory development, providing screenings and strategies such as "sensory diets" for both at home and school. With money raised by the Gan PTA, Elsner helped plan and design a new sensory gym at the Gan that benefits all children. Elsner also taps into her current research on nutrition and speaks about "Nutrition in the Early Childhood Years."

"Hillary and Aimee are true assets to Gan Yeladim. They enrich the services provided by the school staff and bring valuable resources to children and families both in and beyond the classroom," said Keri Ben-Tzvi, a Gan parent.

See "Gan" on page 11



Understanding that penmanship, a basic foundational skill for learning and self-expression, comes not merely through repetition but also through proper strengthening of muscles, Gan Yeladim has Occupational Therapist Aimee Elsner working with the children from a young age. Shown is Ava Grunberg, age 4, drawing.



The use of hand puppets is one of the many ways the teachers at Gan Yeladim, together with School Psychologist Hillary Isaacs, support the children's social and emotional development. Research shows that healthy social and emotional experiences impact the developing brain. Shown is May Simone Avidan, age 2, with teacher Claudia Brenner.

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## A Special Party for a Special Boy

BY CHANIE TELDON

Balloons, presents, cake and games: those are some of the ingredients of a great birthday party, but most would agree that the most important one of all is friends. As any parent will say, children look forward to their birthday not just for the sweets and gifts, but for the chance to have those precious few moments at the center of everyone's attention. They delight in having friends and family fawning over them and celebrating their special day.

But for some kids, a birthday party is not something they take for granted. "It always bothered me that making a party for Danielle was so difficult, but she and her school friends have special needs, which can make social interaction difficult and scheduling a nightmare," said Marsha Weinstein, a parent.

That's where the Friendship Circle comes in: armed with a cake, decorations, hats and plenty of friends,

the Circle brings the party to places it would otherwise not have been. "The central goal of our organization is to provide the wonders of companionship to those who otherwise would miss out on it. What better time to do that than on a birthday?" said Malya Shmotkin, executive director of the Friendship Circle.

On a recent December evening, Max Meberg, a 9-year-old boy diagnosed with autism, broke out a bright smile when two Friendship Circle volunteers, some staff and other friends burst into his family home with gleeful shouts of "Happy Birthday!" It was his mother, though, who seemed genuinely moved by the gesture. "Max was beginning to notice that his sibling's birthday was celebrated differently than his and I think he wanted some of that; the friends, the fanfare and of course, the attention," said Diana Meberg, Max's mother.

See "Party" on page 14

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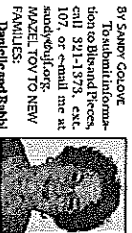
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Yehuda Jaffer on the birth of a son and daughter. Debra Adler Klein and Matthew Klein on the birth of grandson, Zachary Miller, son of Morgan and Joshua Klein. Joseph May on the birth of a great-grandson, Koby Schuster, son of Yaron and Tzipora Schuster. Cori Sankovitch and Adam Saragov on the birth of a daughter. Angelika and Jeff Schaeffer on the birth of a son.

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Lower Steno on the birth of a grand-daughter, Harper Rachel, daughter of Ben and Greg Steno. Julie and Rabbi Jay Teikman on the birth of a daughter, Millie. Addam and Michael Alameddard and Landi and Ted Alband on the engagement of their children, Caroline Alexander and Brad Alband.

Janet and Robert Sherry and Susan and Philip Sherry on the engagement of their children, Ryan and Hannah. Gena Finkelson on the engagement of her grandson, on the engagement of her children, Jason and Leah. Wendy and John Fitzgerald on the marriage of their son, Adam Fitzgerald, to Dana Weinstein.

Lois and Philip Gromer on the engagement of their son, Jimmy Gromer, to Jennifer Stern. Sherry Herzberg, Tony Shepel and Sandy Speyer, who were honored at Chabad's Lovers of Love.

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BITS AND PIECES

Abraham Leshov and Carol Holstein on the engagement of their grand-daughter, and Sherry and Bennett Katz on the engagement of their son, Benjamin. Ariela and David Feldman on their daughter, Maya Tadda, being chosen to be part of Team Connecticut playing the double tennis at the Special Olympics National Games in June in Princeton, NJ. Beal, David P.M.A. MITZVAH: Benji and David Blidman, Audrey Sussman, David Blidman, and Miriam of Edith Sussman and Ed Sussman and Frederic Greenbaum. Nana Kravitz, daughter of Tamar and David Kravitz, son of Blida and Jay Lang. Hava and David Feldman on their daughter, Maya Tadda, being chosen to be part of Team Connecticut playing the double tennis at the Special Olympics National Games in June in Princeton, NJ.

NEW AROUND TOWN

Alison Patrick recently joined the United Jewish Federation of Greater Stamford, New Canaan and Westover Hills as the new Executive Director. Alison has experience in other management and computer positions, including purchasing and human resources. She has also been responsible for benefit plan administration, office supply purchasing and scheduling with employee recruitment, as well as organizing corporate events and activities such as United Way Day of Giving. She speaks basic German and French. Patrick is originally from Stamford, England, she has lived in the area since 1988. UJF CEO Jay Cohen welcomed Patrick at a recent event, noting, "Alison's exceptional computer and technological skills will be a tremendous asset to the organization. We are so happy she has joined our team."

NOTES FROM A JEWISH EDUCATOR

"Emotionally Responsive Practice" A Foundational Value in Jewish Early Childhood Education. "Whodunnit? Murder at the Bunting Bush" have in common with a 4-year-old who has a meltdowm? That they are being used as a means to help the child learn to regulate their emotions. I think about these questions at a recent Can program.

Three times a year, parents and staff at Can Yehudim come together for "What's on their World." They spend time together in the classroom so that parents can become familiar with what their child experiences at Can, and staff can get to know the children better. Each year, the staff studies a particular topic in order to deepen their understanding of children and to enhance the learning process. This is shared with the parents, and embarks deeper collaboration between home and school. For the 2013-2014 school year, the staff is "Emotionally Responsive Practice."

Emotionally responsive practice is a term that was developed by Dr. Howard Kutzman. It is the process of understanding the child's perspective on the world, and then using that understanding to guide the learning process. This includes working with parents, teachers, and students to create a supportive learning environment. This includes working with parents, teachers, and students to create a supportive learning environment.

As founding director of Can, my role was to highlight how Can addresses these issues from a Jewish perspective. I was recruited to lead that team because of my background in Jewish education and my experience in the field of child development. I was recruited to lead that team because of my background in Jewish education and my experience in the field of child development.

At the end of the year, we will have a "What's on their World" event where parents and staff will share their experiences and insights. This event will be a great opportunity for parents and staff to connect with each other and to learn more about the children and the classroom. This event will be a great opportunity for parents and staff to connect with each other and to learn more about the children and the classroom.

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Children sitting at a table during a classroom activity.

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Challenges in Jewish Education

Agudath Sholom to Host Panel. Congregation Agudath Sholom will host an annual panel discussion on Jewish education challenges. The panel will feature speakers from various Jewish educational institutions and will discuss topics such as curriculum development, teacher training, and community involvement. The panel will be held at the synagogue on Saturday, January 12th, at 7:00 PM.

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Meeting of Connecticut Jewish Family Service Executives

Marie Greenberg, CEO of Jewish Family Service, attended the Connecticut Jewish Family Service Executives meeting. The meeting was held at the Connecticut Jewish Family Service headquarters and featured presentations from various Jewish service organizations. The meeting was a great opportunity for executives to share their experiences and to discuss ways to improve Jewish family services in Connecticut.

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Group of people at a meeting.

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Come Read with Us! Reading Partners Off to a Strong Start. Under the new leadership of Marilyn Agreus, Reading Partners is off to a strong start this year. Nearly 40 new volunteers have joined the program, and we are now serving over 100 children in need. We are excited to have so many new volunteers and to see the impact we are making in the community. We are excited to have so many new volunteers and to see the impact we are making in the community.

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Caroline Garcia and four nonverbally play together at the Gan Yelidim Early Childhood Learning Center on High Ridge Road in Stamford.

# Learning Through Play

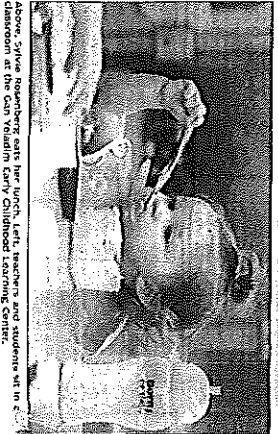
## Gan Yelidim Early Childhood Center: Child-centric curriculum used

By Maggie O'Connell  
Staff Writer

STAMFORD — Students riding down the windows pane at Chabad Labovitch of students, but while here, was no organized outdoor. The Gan Yelidim Early Childhood Center, which serves children from 18 months to five years old, is a unique learning facility using a child-centric curriculum.

The learning style is centered in the classroom's layout. Rooms are no traditional board of light-colored, pre-printed papers, glossy, pre-printed papers, and projects, as well as displays and drawings. The 3-year-old children have name cards with photos and the school is all

no pretty materials, she said. The kind of projects that are done here, children learn when they are different than at many other schools, she said. The projects are not quality materials, we don't have a lot of money, but we have a lot of creativity. Still, there are some pretty projects that are done here. My daughter hopes through a class of 2-year-olds. I found the whole school was a mess, according to the director, who is also in charge of the school. Instead of a traditional board of light-colored, pre-printed papers, glossy, pre-printed papers, and projects, as well as displays and drawings. The 3-year-old children have name cards with photos and the school is all



Above, three nonverbally play together at the Gan Yelidim Early Childhood Learning Center. Below, three nonverbally play together at the Gan Yelidim Early Childhood Learning Center.



Caroline Garcia plays with the piano.

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