

Oxfordshire retreat rouses Rebbetzins



Rabbi Dr Jonathan Dove

JT Reporter

Federation Rebbetzins have been energised by a two-day trip to leafy Oxfordshire. The programme was part of 'Sharsheres' – a new division created to offer ongoing professional development as well as *chizuk* and networking opportunities to Federation Rebbetzins.

The retreat provided the first opportunity for the group to come together in a relaxed environment and spend quality time together. With communities ranging from Golders Green to Ilford, it was the first time that many of the Rebbetzins had

met the rest of the group. Old friendships were nurtured, and new ones forged during a memorable few days.

Sessions in the packed programme included *shiurim* and inspiration for teaching within the *kehillah*. Attendees undertook a half-day public speaking course, which offered practical tips for a variety of speaking occasions. A highlight for many was the guided tour of medieval Jewish Oxford. Talks were delivered by the Rebbetzins themselves – from Rebbetzin Shoshana Tugendhaft's presentation about the *koach* of connecting to Jewish history, to Rebbetzin Chaitchi Knopfler's exploration of recognising *hashgochas* Hashem in daily life. The group were honoured by a *dvar* Torah from Rebbetzin Rena Lichtenstein, senior educator and wife of the Rosh Beis Din.

Guest presentations featured Rabbi Jonathan Dove, Clinical Director of Project Lily, who spoke about mental health in Torah sources, and Mrs Racheli Plancey, who expounded not only on the services offered by Camp Simcha, but also gave hands-on advice to Rebbetzins supporting families through illness.

Dayan Yehoshua Posen of the Federation delivered sessions to explain the process of divorce mediation and again gave practical tools for supporting others. As one participant pointed out, Rebbetzins are often the first port of call for those facing challenges, and subsequently need to be equipped, much like GPs, with information and resources on a wide range of issues. The training

offered served to fill this need.

An evening painting workshop added some light relief to a gruelling schedule and also echoed the sage advice of Rabbi Dove, who had spoken earlier in the day about the importance of self-care. It is vital to be in good physical and mental health to be able to care effectively for others.

Most recent newcomer to the Federation, Rebbetzin Ruthie Halberstadt of Machzikei Hadass, expressed her delight at being invited to the retreat, saying that it had offered, amongst other benefits, 'a real recharge'. She commented, "the programme was created with great insight and creativity. The carefully chosen sessions were a wonderful mix of information, personal example and advice. It is fantastic to be part of the Federation team; networking is invaluable in helping each other and enhancing our individual work."

Future plans for Sharsheres events include conferences, *shiurim* and social events.

Rabbi Avi Lazarus, CEO of the Federation, said, "The Federation places enormous value on the work of its Rebbetzins and is excited to invest in their training and support, for the benefit of their communities and the wider *kehillah*. We are especially grateful to our Director of Sharsheres, Rebbetzin Aviva Landau, who has spearheaded and masterminded the retreat and other programmes with such dynamism and professionalism."



Rabbi Eli Brackman leading a tour of Jewish Oxford
PHOTOS BATSHEVA PELS

Yiddishkeit flying in Highbury Fields

Joe Jacobs

Almost 1000 people flocked to Highbury Fields last Sunday for the second annual Big Jewish Summer Fete. Organised by Chabad Islington, the free festival of Jewish culture was open for the whole community to join in. Whilst celebrating the richness of Yiddishkeit and Jewish culture, the event aims to promote community cohesion and tolerance in the diverse London Borough of Islington.

In his speech the Mayor of Islington David Poysner said: 'Islington is a very diverse borough. We all work together, we all live together, we are a wonderful community. Whenever we go to events, we have people of all faiths coming together to celebrate in Islington.'

The stage featured performances by amongst others, klezmer group Don Kipper and the London Jewish Male Choir.

Activities included special workshops on Judaism by Tzivos

Hashem, kosher ice cream and bagels, and hummus tasting, while free Krav Maga, hula hoop and yoga workshops got participants moving. The event also featured puppeteering shows, a puppet making workshop, bubble show, pet activities by Islington Council, stalls by Simon Marks Jewish Primary School and Stroke Association, and a Police minibus.

Chabad Islington's Rabbi Mendy Korner filled the space with his comedy classics slot, while his Stump the Rabbi session encouraged lots of difficult questions on Judaism from the audience. Celebrity legal commentator Joshua Rozenberg talked about a coroner's discriminatory cab-rank policy, Jewish burials and the law.

Sunday's event was generously supported by grants from BIG Lottery Fund, Arsenal in the Community, Islington Square, Tesco, Simon Marks Jewish Primary School and Funzing.

Chabad Islington was set up in 2011 to help revive the once thriving Jewish community of Islington.

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