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Administrator
Fund for Awarding the Leonore and Larry Zusman-JDC Prize
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I am writing this letter to nominate Dr. Ronald Wachtel, the founder and director of Kav L'Noar for the Leonore and Larry Zusman-JDC Prize for Recognition of Social Services Excellence in Israel. In my capacity as a Professor of Psychology and Education who specializes in research and clinical work with troubled adolescents in the United States and Israel, I have repeatedly had the opportunity to bear witness to the creative, compassionate and dedicated work of Dr. Wachtel and his colleagues at Kav L'Noar (KLN). I can think of no other individual more deserving of this important honor.

It should be noted that I was familiar with Dr. Wachtel's work as an educational psychologist in the New York metropolitan area even before he moved to Israel. During the three decades that he counseled children and adolescents in New York, Dr. Wachtel was universally respected as a caring and compassionate professional who made a difference in the lives of countless youngsters struggling with emotional or family issues. Although I was disappointed to learn that New York was losing one of its most respected advocates for children in need, I understood that Dr. Wachtel's energy, idealism and creativity would be put to uniquely valuable use in Israel.

In the course of numerous meetings with families and professionals during his first year in Israel, Dr. Wachtel became acutely aware of the unique needs of the Anglo-immigrant community in Israel. He found that many members of this community were facing

serious difficulties dealing with their adolescents, who often presented as rebellious, alienated and confused. Dr. Wachtel also came to understand the dangers of the myth that English-speaking teens are from affluent, emotionally stable and self-reliant families. This myth masked rising instances of serious difficulties facing this population. Many were struggling with adolescents who dropped out of school, participated in dangerous, anti-social behavior and faced chronic parent-child conflict. The suffering of these families was often compounded by parental disappointment that these problems arose even though they moved to Israel out of ideological fervor, often accompanied by a deeply held belief that life in Israel would instill in their children a set of values that would provide fertile soil for raising a new generation in an atmosphere infused with meaning and idealism. The contrast between these expectations and reality was further heightened by a belief that not only was their aliya failing to help Israel, but the feeling that their families were turning into a burden on Israeli society.

Dr. Wachtel founded Kav L'Noar (KLN) four years ago to help address this need. KLN targets Anglo immigrants and their at-risk pre-teen and teenage children by providing a wide array of services. In this relatively short period of time, Dr. Wachtel has established an organization that includes a family clinic for psychological counseling, a mentoring program, telephone consultations, summer workshops for teens, ongoing support groups for parents, community education lectures for families and members of the educational/mental health community and a referral service for the general community.

I have had the opportunity to observe these programs directly during several visits I have made to Israel since the inception of Kav L'Noar. On three occasions I met for extended periods of time with the program's mentors to discuss their experiences mentoring the over one hundred Anglo teens that this program has served. I have been repeatedly impressed by the idealism, professionalism and dedication of this group; individuals who clearly view their work with the youngsters not as "job" but as a calling. Similarly, on numerous occasions I received desperate calls from Anglo families in Israel who are trying to deal with children who face severe emotional and behavioral difficulty. I can't think of a single referral to KLN that hasn't resulted in a call or email from these parents thanking me profusely for connecting them to this invaluable resource, which they often refer to as "life-saving".

From the start, Dr. Wachtel insisted that KLN will not turn away any family because of an inability to pay for services, and, indeed, many of its families are in financial distress. The staff at KLN knows that Dr. Wachtel will underwrite the cost of therapy, mentoring and other charges when a family is unable to do so. While Dr. Wachtel was successful in 2007 and again in 2008 in securing two small grants from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Absorption for New Aliya, he personally has raised close to 99 per cent of KLN's budgetary needs through several annual trips to the United States.

An important arena that Dr. Wachtel has targeted is that of primary prevention. Over the course of the last three years I had the privilege of participating in a series of community lectures sponsored by KLN focusing on practical approaches Anglo parents can take to

protect their children from risk. On each of these occasions I was impressed with the professional manner that the lectures were arranged as well as the outstanding attendance. The large number of people in the audience as well as the long distance that many of them traveled to attend the lectures clearly reflected the deep interest and need that KLN is meeting. It should be noted, that in addition to these parenting lectures, Dr. Wachtel also offered a number of talks aimed at improving the awareness and knowledge base of educators and mental health professionals who work with the Anglo community.

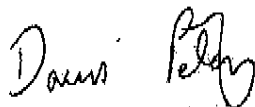
More recently, KLN's new space has allowed them to develop a series of parenting workshops focusing on a broad range of topics relevant to enhancing parenting and marital skills. In addition to the obvious benefits of providing parents with much needed support and knowledge, these workshops have often served as an important way station engaging both mothers and fathers in a process that frequently led to their entering ongoing counseling with one of the KLN's therapists. In a particularly innovative program this past summer KLN attempted to provide structure for adolescents during a period of the year that is often filled with heightened risk. Two seven-week workshops for teenage girls included drama, dance, drawing, painting, makeup, scrap booking and self defense. In addition to providing a fun and comfortable environment, girls were encouraged to open up to one another which lead to significant growth in communication skills and building relationships.

Among the 1,000-plus family members served by KLN in the last four years, Dr. Wachtel's success rate has been outstanding. More than 90 percent of the teens that came to KLN for help in finding a suitable school have been placed in an educational setting that works for them. As noted earlier, KLN has provided regular mentoring to roughly one-third of the 300 adolescents with whom it has worked and prides itself in the knowledge that these youngsters typically come "off the street", are in the process of becoming more fully integrated into the lives of their family and, in some cases, making a positive contribution to their community.

In summary, Dr. Ronald Wachtel's dedication, caring and activism has made a significant difference in the lives of numerous families trying to integrate their children into productive and happy lives as members of the mainstream of Israeli society. I believe that Dr. Wachtel's work richly deserves his being awarded the Leonore and Larry Zusman-JDC Prize for Recognition of Social Services Excellence in Israel.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,



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