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The Jewish Press – February 27, 2009

THE ARROWSMITH PROGRAM EXPANDS IN THE YESHIVA COMMUNITY

'HARNESSING THE POWER TO LEARN'

"Because a mind is a terrible thing to waste." The ad text for an education facility for young adults caught my eye, its obvious message reverberating over and over again. A mind is a terrible thing to waste A mind is a terrible thing to waste

Certainly, no one can deny the cultivation of a young mind yields fertilized fields of row upon row of opportunity. Far more than pure academia, it also fosters a healthy dose of self-esteem, enabling a child to emerge into adulthood as a wonderful vibrant and valued partner to Jewish family, humanity and society at large.

For the learning disabled child, however, cumbersome obstacles lie precariously within the path of his journey to internalize the basics of skills and facts, numbers, theories, and ideas. Unfortunately, as such a child encounters the awesome big wide world of learning, the sheer peril of wasting a promising intellect looms before him, threatening his sense of social and emotional equilibrium as well as his very future.

Barbara Arrowsmith Young was one such learning disabled child growing up in Canada. Gifted and ever-so determined, she attempted to unleash the crippling dyslexia and auditory processing difficulties that had impeded her learning accomplishments for so long once she reached young adulthood. Working untiringly with the scientific premise that the brain is plastic and has the inherent ability to restructure itself, she developed a series of cognitive exercises, which ultimately addressed the problem behind her learning disabilities.

The Arrowsmith Program is Born

For close to three decades since then, Barbara Arrowsmith Young has expanded her personal victory by incorporating winning solutions for many of the most common learning disorders found within students of average or above average intelligence. Winning the acclaim of some of the most respected professionals in the field, Arrowsmith Young demonstrated

something remarkable.

Rather than providing an alternate support system that compensates for a weakness like many of the curriculums bent on helping a child with learning difficulties, she demonstrated through exercises that produce results that a child's brain can actually change its abilities, thereby strengthening the capacity to learn. Not surprisingly, as a result of her chartered success, the program has been implemented in public schools in Toronto in the last 10 years.

A Revolution in Today's Yeshivas

The celebration of Barbara Arrowsmith Young's advancement for the learning disabled has not escaped the yeshiva education system. Recently, the Arrowsmith Program has found its place of honor in seven yeshivas in the United States, among them, the Jewish Education Center in Elizabeth, N.J., Bais Yaakov of Boro Park, Yeshiva Tiferes Yisroel in Brooklyn, Hebrew Academy of Long Beach (HALB in New York), Degel HaTorah of Monsey, Toras Emes of North Miami Beach and Maimonides Academy of Los Angeles, where astounding progress is continually being made.

With the Arrowsmith's record of excellence being documented in these yeshivos, it is no wonder Jewish parents countrywide are paying very close attention. In Jewish centers in Baltimore and Lakewood, initiatives in placing the program into local schools have already begun and more are likely to surface rapidly as the need for successful alternative learning to aid those with learning disabilities is accented.

Arrowsmith at HALB

Take the case of Yosef*, a student of above average intelligence in HALB, who until recently had an extremely difficult time processing directions, especially for tasks requiring a number of steps. His learning disabilities were keeping him from achieving what he was capable of accomplishing scholastically.

"Two years ago," cites Yosef's mother, "Yosef had an auditory processing disability. When I used to give him directions to do something he would look at me and say, "Wait What?"

"This is his second year at Arrowsmith and I have not heard him ask for repetition of task directions once in the last few months. He is able to follow through on directions without further clarification. In the past, in school, he

didn't have the ability to ask his teacher each time he needed clarification on the directions so he just wouldn't start the task. This could lead to a 'meltdown' with Yosef unable to do the task at all. A teacher who has worked with Yosef for the past three years reports no meltdowns this year and Yosef's teachers have remarked on his willingness to start and complete tasks asked of him."

"Arrowsmith has given Yosef the ability to remember the steps in a task as well as understand them. As a result, his self-esteem has improved significantly since he began Arrowsmith."

Since being a part of the Arrowsmith program, Yosef's progress has been noticeable at home as well. From an apprehensive student with little drive for completing homework, he has evolved into a happy and calm child who views these assignments with enthusiasm not seen before. In addition, Yosef has become more affectionate, knocking down some of the social walls he previously had built around himself.

Arrowsmith and Yeshiva Tiferes Yisroel

The case of a Tiferes Yisroel student demonstrates the Arrowsmith advantage even more.

"I have seen improvements in my handwriting," he says as he evaluates his personal progress since benefiting from the Arrowsmith Program. "I used to write fast and messy. I still write fast but also neater. I have noticed I understand what I am learning by Hebrew a lot better. I also can remember a lot better than I did before. Now I would like to improve my sense of humor and become more mature."

Others have responded in like: "Our son, Moshe, is almost 15 years old," observes one parent. "He has struggled to keep up with his peers ever since he's been in yeshiva. Our biggest nightmare in the past was always PTA night. We'd come armed with explanations about his learning difficulties and try to explain the reasons why he's disorganized and unfocused. We'd request modified homework and tests and always hope for the best."

"This past PTA was a totally different experience. As soon as we sat down, his Rebbe exclaimed how impressed he is with Moshe. He can't believe his complete focus and attention from the moment he sits down in the classroom, especially since he's either coming from or going afterwards to his Arrowsmith classes. He's able to concentrate, take notes, ask questions and participate, and do regular classroom skills which he wasn't able to do just

four months ago."

Arrowsmith in the Bais Yaakov World

The Arrowsmith Program has demonstrated its successful effectiveness, too, at Bais Yaakov of Boro Park. One involved educator in the school makes the following noteworthy observations.

"I am happy to provide the following observations in the order in which they have been reported," she writes. "Children enjoy coming to the classroom and are motivated to do the work. Math speed and accuracy improved so well, in just a few months girls who were previously failing are now at the top their math classes. Parents say homework is easier and is taking less time to complete. Children who have had difficulty keeping up with note taking, now take notes coherently and with ease. And memory in general has improved."

Conclusion

The Arrowsmith Program clearly points to a flourishing concept in educating the learning disabled child by addressing a child's weaknesses and setting him or her on an individualized program of exercises to strengthen the brain's ability to learn. Once that is achieved within a three- to four-year program, the child can participate in a full curriculum with no further need for program accommodation. Naturally, following such an extraordinary journey, life's fertilized fields of row upon row of opportunity are waving, summoning and beckoning.

Far more than simply harnessing the ability to learn pure academia, the Arrowsmith Program strengthens the ability to learn and fosters a healthy dose of self-esteem, enabling a child to emerge into adulthood as a wonderful vibrant and valued partner to Jewish family, community and society at large.

More Information

Read about the Arrowsmith Program in Chapter 2 of the New York Times best selling book *The Brain that Changes Itself* by Dr. Norman Doidge.

Visit the Arrowsmith website at www.arrowsmithschool.org.