



Cup of Tea *with* Roizy Waldman

LOCATION: Williamsburg
FAMILY: Mother of six boys
OCCUPATION: Writer; founder of Reprieve for Families
PASSION: Ensuring that when needed, *yesomim* and children of divorce have access to mental health care.
SHE WISHES PEOPLE WOULD KNOW:
“One hundred dollars before the wedding is equivalent to one thousand dollars after the wedding.”

By Devorah Levitz

Roizy Waldman is a Satmar born and bred woman who is making a difference. Less than two years ago, she founded Reprieve for Families with the vision of providing funding for *yesomim* and children from divorced homes who need the support of a licensed therapist but cannot afford the fees.

“I know firsthand the depth of loss that comes with losing a parent too young,” Roizy tells me. “My father lost his own father at just ten years old, and he carried that absence with him for the rest of his life. And then many years later, my own brother passed away suddenly at 31, leaving behind a wife and young

children. I remember my father speaking at the *levayah*, telling my brother’s nine-year-old son, ‘I know what it’s like to lose a father at this age.’”

About three years ago, Roizy finally began acting on an idea that had been simmering in her mind. “There are many wonderful organizations for children who have lost parents, and there are a few for kids whose parents are divorced,” she states. “They offer Shabbatons, workshops, Yom Tov gifts and so much more. Each organization does something else, and they are truly spectacular.

“But when it comes to therapy—which is what a lot of these kids need

to process their trauma and move on—very few provide funding, and for good reason. An average session is 250 dollars a week, and typically, children need months or even years of therapy until they are ready to graduate. The cost can quickly become astronomical.” Still, Roizy decided that she would begin.

She called some organizations and *askanim* who were already helping *yesomim* and asked for their opinion about opening such an organization. Everyone she spoke to encouraged her to try to get it off the ground, while also confirming that she was crazy to think it could be sustainable. “You have to be

a bit crazy to make changes,” she avers. “Being safe sounds good, but it doesn’t accomplish anything. I had to allow myself to be *meshuge* in this area. I figured that at least I was being *meshuge* for a good purpose.”

She applied to become a nonprofit and called her organization “Reprieve.”

“To me, that’s what therapy is: a reprieve for the child, a safe space amid all the chaos in his or her life,” Roizy explains. With some donations from friends and family, as well as her own *maaser* money, Roizy took on two clients. With only two clients being serviced, the risk was low. “I knew Reprieve might not work out,” she says.

“But I told myself that if all I achieved was to help these two children, that alone would be worth it.”

So it began. She raised some money, paid the therapists, and checked that the children were getting the help they needed. At that point, not too many people knew what she was doing, so she didn’t have to deal with a waitlist of heartbreaking stories. Roizy was learning on the job, gradually building up a network of donors and advisors.

Zev Freund, MSW, was the first one on board. As a therapist with a passion for mental health advocacy, Zev heard that Roizy was helping to pay for therapy for children, and he wanted to get

involved. With his extensive connections, he immediately discerned that she was doing what no other organization was doing. He recognized that her work had unique value and jumped right in. He continues to put his full energy and connections into helping her succeed.

Another board member is Yoel Felberbaum, CEO of Brooklyn Financial Group (BFG). Yoel is passionate about community service, and Roizy realized his business skills could help the organization stay on track financially. In her capacity as a writer, Roizy had done some work for Mr. Felberbaum in the past, and knowing his passion

for helping the community, she was confident he would want to be a part of Reprieve. Indeed, he quickly agreed.

Rav Daniel Hirsch, who’s a renowned *chassan rebbi* and *shalom bayis* counselor, brings a unique perspective to the board. At age ten, he lost his mother, and years later, he lost his young wife as well. Rav Hirsch knows firsthand what the children serviced by Reprieve are going through. A respected community member who’s been instrumental in helping hundreds of families in the community, Rav Hirsch was one of the first to encourage Roizy when she was starting out. Now that she was forming an official board, she went back to him, and thankfully, he agreed to join.

Rav Hirsch gave Roizy a message that rings in her ears to this day: “One hundred dollars before the wedding is equivalent to one thousand dollars after the wedding. If you can help

children and teens process their trauma before they are married, that’s the ideal. After the wedding, there are other adjustments, and it will end up costing more and being so much harder to get the right therapy then. You are not just saving these children. You are saving their spouses, their marriages, and their future *doros*.”

With these three board members in place, Reprieve quickly began to develop into a well-run organization. Roizy’s niece Frieda Mermelstein, an exceptionally capable and organized person, volunteered to be the first point of contact for families who call. Reizel Perlstein, MSW, a CMA site supervisor at Comfort Health Management with an unbelievable passion for mental health advocacy, joined the board and is a driving force behind Reprieve’s success. Yoely Drummer, MHC, who also supervises at Comfort Health, joined Reprieve, bringing his

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formidable experience and expertise. And half a year after joining the board, Rav Hirsch introduced Roizy to his sister, Ruchy Rubin. Ruchy, exceptionally smart and practical, offers a unique blend of personal experience, maternal empathy, and emotional intelligence that enriches the organization’s mission. Her personal narrative of resilience and healing drives her passion for the organization’s work, ensuring that children receive the emotional support needed to process complex family transitions and loss.

In November 2023, with the board in place, Roizy began to plan her first fundraising event. She made a slew of phone calls and soon had around twenty women gathered around her dining room table for brainstorming. Together, they laid out plans for Reprieve’s inaugural fundraising event.

Hosted in the Shtetl Gallery in the Condor Hotel, the event had both an educational and entertainment component. The Shtetl Gallery, owned by artist Pinchas Glauber, is a beautiful and intriguing space. It provided a magnificent backdrop for the four therapists who came and shared with the audience a taste of what therapy is and why it can sometimes be so crucial to a child’s positive outcome for life.

After the therapists shared, Chany from Mimulo, a unique florist in Crown Heights, presented one of her signature demonstrations. Part flower arranging, part *emunah* lesson, Chany’s spiel was fascinating, entertaining, and uplifting all at once. The event was a great success and the women left inspired to participate and spread the word about Reprieve.

I ask Roizy whether this pub-

licity was helpful or stressful. Surely the funds raised are all needed, but is she able to keep up with demand? “No,” Roizy asserts. “We always seem to have more of a need than we can fill. Some organizations start out with a big backer and a large starter fund, and when they become well known, they are able to fundraise as the initial backer eases out.

“In our case, we did not have any initial windfall. We are constantly trying to raise funds to get more kids into therapy. Our waitlist is long and keeps growing. Some of the stories are heartbreaking. But we can only give as much as we have.”

I know that therapy can take many months, and I wonder what happens if Reprieve starts funding a child and then can’t continue. “We try our hardest to avoid this,” Roizy assures me. “We only take on a new client when we are confident that we can service pay for at least a number of weeks and then work like crazy to fundraise the rest. *Baruch Hashem*, we have had tremendous *siyata diShmaya*.

“Not everyone needs a full year,” Roizy is happy to share with me. “We tell our clients that we promise six weeks at a time, up to a year. We check in with them every few weeks, and they tell us when they are done. With Hashem’s help, we’ve never had to drop anyone early due to lack of funds.

“It always makes us so happy when a client tells us that they are ready to stop. Then we know that we’ve truly made a measurable difference in somebody’s life. A life that will then go on to affect others as well.

“We once had a young girl who told her mentor at Lev L’Yeled that although all her friends were entering *shidduchim*, she



was afraid to do the same. The anxiety she felt from her parents’ divorce was preventing her from moving forward with her own life in a healthy way. The girl’s mentor sent her to Reprieve, and we funded her therapy by sending the payments directly to the therapist each week.

“After six months, the girl left me a voice note thanking me profusely. She had been seeing an excellent therapist who was able to move her forward week after week. Now, after just a few months, she felt confident to graduate from therapy and enter *shidduchim*. She had the tools she needed to be a healthy wife and mother and was excited to begin the next stage of her life.”

Roizy tells me that they have two nonnegotiable boundaries regarding therapists. First, for everyone’s protection, they only fund work done with licensed therapists. Additionally, in the spirit of what Reprieve stands for, and in line with the intentions of the donors, the ther-

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apist must be *shomer Torah u’mitzvos*. Roizy explains that while there may be therapists outside our community who are excellent at what they do, in this very foundational and sensitive area, she wants to make sure that everything is done from a Torah viewpoint.

“Reprieve is not only about funding,” Roizy says. “People reach out to us for help in finding a therapist. They may be able to pay, but they don’t know where to start or whom to go to. We have staff who are incredibly helpful in networking and identifying appropriate therapists. Additionally, our board members are sometimes able to leverage their connections to advocate for our clients to get in sooner to a therapist with a waitlist.”

Aside from the fundraising events and occasional donations, one of the most impactful ways in which people support Roizy’s work is by taking on the “*zechus* of a child.” Platinum Philanthropists commit to funding a full year of sessions,



while Gold Philanthropists commit to six months. These commitments can come from an individual, family, company, or group. They form a core force that supports the work of Reprieve.

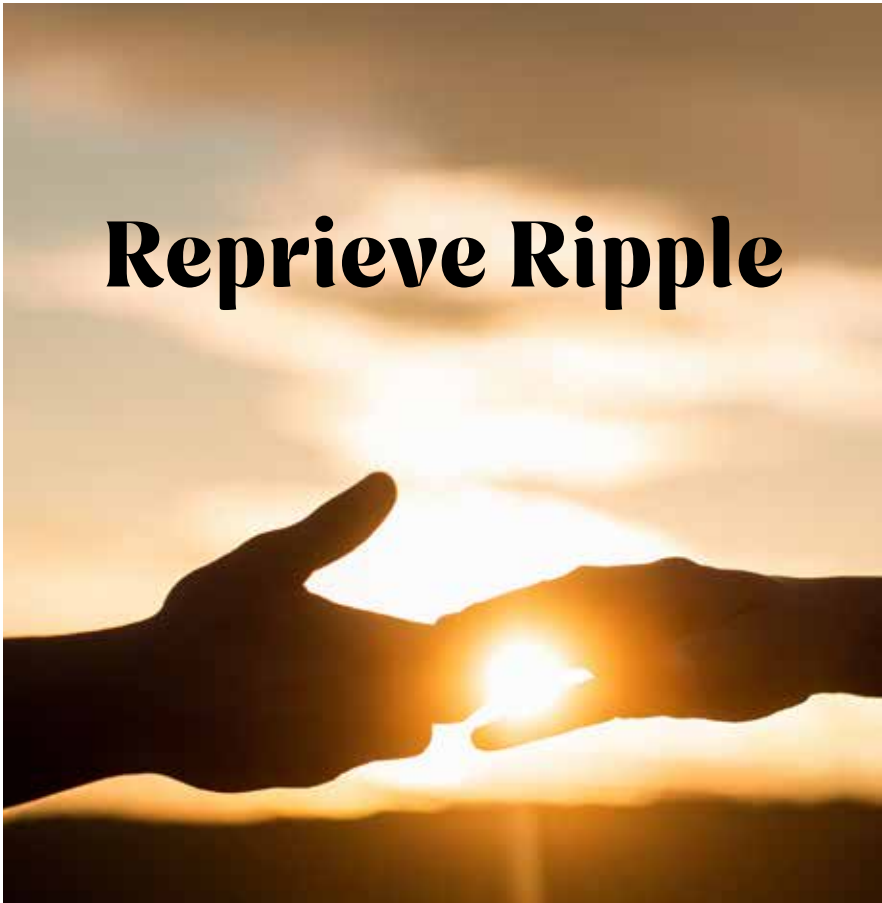
The board members often reach out to their own networks of family, friends, and colleagues to garner donations. Even so, Reprieve currently has a wait-list of close to eighty people. Most are children and teens, though some are young newly married men or women who need extra support at this pivotal time in their life. Sometimes, the transition to marriage brings up old traumas or makes a person recognize what they are missing in a different way than before. In particular, a new husband may not be so supportive of his wife spending their limited funds on therapy; after all, she seems wonderful and normal and healthy to him, and it can be difficult for him to recognize how important this is. Reprieve provides the validation and funds to help these young women start off their married life with the support that they need.

Roizy hopes to run events in the mountains this summer. “Our biggest supporters are men and women who have seen the difference that therapy made for a member of their own family. It could be for any reason, not necessarily a situation involving death or divorce, but once somebody sees how crucial therapy is for someone who needs it, they open their wallets generously to help our clients.

“For our clients, therapy is not a luxury,” Roizy says. “Therapy is the place where they can process grief, share without being judged, and just be safe. Once they have that safe place, they can figure out a way to move forward. It literally changes the whole trajectory of their lives.” ♥

If you would like to host a Reprieve event this summer or help in any other way, Roizy Waldman can be reached through Wellspring.

Reprieve Ripple



A number of months ago, I was invited to join the Reprieve Ripple Channel, a WhatsApp group that was set up to share unique opportunities to support specific needs of the families Reprieve serves. At the time, I don't think I knew exactly what Reprieve did, but the premise spoke to me. Each week the admin of the group would open a window of awareness to help out a family with a very specific need.

Reprieve Ripple Channel was started after a client of Reprieve started showing up at therapy in the winter without a coat. Her old coat didn't fit well anymore, and her mother, who barely had enough money for food, certainly didn't have enough for a new coat. When a board member found out, he asked some friends to help sponsor a coat. Within a short while, the money was put together and the girl was able to once again go out in the cold safely. Roizy recognized that she could harness this power of community to raise funds for this sort of ancillary need of her clients.

One week, the request was to help an *alman*, the father of one of Reprieve's clients, fix his car so he could get to work. Another week, Reprieve asked for help in purchasing a washing machine for an *almanah* who was washing laundry by hand in the bathtub.

Being part of the Ripple Channel group is truly eye-opening and rewarding. If you are interested in seeing what it's all about—with zero commitment!—please reach out to Reprieve. You don't need to be a big donor to make a big difference. You just need a big heart.

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