

The Launch of the Baltimore Cheshed League

It was a tense showdown that came down to the wire. In a tight battle between Team Amuze building a Foosball table for the new Chai Lifeline center and Team Sage Management playing Rummikub at Weinberg Park, the winner was, well, everyone. Your eyes don't deceive; this past Sunday marked the kickoff of the Baltimore Cheshed League. No, there was no true battle and the competition was anything but fierce but much was accomplished by thirty local middle schoolers, all in the name of kindness.

The idea to create a cheshed league came to a number of community individuals who saw ripe opportunity for boys to more get involved in the community. "Combining the fun, competitive nature of leagues the kids are already a part of, like SBL or JFL, with the needs of local organizations, it felt like a win-win," said one BCL organizer. After consulting with Rabbi Shmuel Silber, morah d'asra of Suburban Orthodox Toras Chaim, a group of organizers including Dovi Ziffer, Zevi Daniel, Shmuel Fischler, Yaakov Lichter, and Naftali Langer, among others, ventured to create a small but scalable beta-test - thirty boys split into six mentored teams - to be tasked with weekly cheshed "missions". Those missions would be scored based on feedback from the participating organizations and, after certain point thresholds, the boys would receive weekly prizes such as free bowling, Target gift cards or Mama Leah's pizza. There would be no "winners" or "losers", only opportunity for growth, and indeed, fun rewards. Suburban Orthodox adopted the project and Northwest Refuse generously offered sponsorship for the league. Six team sponsors quickly signed on as well: Amuze, ARI Concrete, David Flamm - Nationwide Insurance, DC Dental, FP of MD and Sage Management LLC.

This past Sunday marked BCL Opening Day. After a Knish Shop catered kickoff event where they heard words of inspiration from Rabbi Silber, the boys split off with their coaches and teams to their various cheshed missions.

Team Amuze - Led by Coach Ben Blackman, the team was tasked with assembling a new foosball table to be incorporated into the Chai Lifeline center. After a tour of the facility (and a taste of potential future cheshed opportunities), the boys heard from Chai Lifeline volunteers about how the table they'd be building would be used to boost the spirits of sick children and their families; elevating the task from the mundane to something far greater. In the face of adversity, aka, barely-there instructions, the boys and Coach Blackman pulled it off, walking away with a sense of accomplishment and in the words of Amuze team member Eli Daniel, "(feeling) good knowing the table was going to those who needed it".

Teams ARI Concrete and David Flamm Nationwide Insurance - Each team brought smiling faces and brightened the afternoon for the Tudor Heights residents. The visit began with each boy introducing himself and sharing a couple of facts about himself. Then the residents introduced themselves and shared interesting information about their backgrounds. With musical accompaniment from Dr. Yitzzy Kaplowitz, the boys sang and danced during several songs. Finally, the whole group played a question and answer game, during which the boys were supplied with trivia questions to ask the residents. Even an unexpected fire alarm (don't worry - it was a false alarm) did not dampen the spirits of any of the participants.

Team Sage Management LLC - Team Sage headed to Weinberg Park along with Coaches Nechemia Isbee and Ari Elman. In the words of Coach Isbee, "All I can say is, wow! Watching the boys interact so naturally for more than an hour with people 70-80 years older was so cool, cute, inspiring...overwhelming." The Sages had two competitive Rummykub games running simultaneously involving all the boys and about 8 residents.

Coach Isbee was particularly proud of how each one of the boys shined.

Team FP of MD - With an assigned mission of supporting our local Hatzalah of Baltimore, the boys began their weekly mission with an exciting and informational tour of the ambulances and the facility, led by Elimelech Goldstein.

From there, the boys assisted Elimelech by packing up boxes of files and training books and transferring them to their new home at the station. The team got to ride the lift up to the second floor with the boxes and then helped Elimelech place them in the Hatzalah file closet. The boys efforts were extremely helpful to Hatzalah as it now allows the organization to keep all of their information in a central location.

Team DC Dental Supplies - Our most senior BCL team (all 8th graders) took on the latest event of the afternoon, visiting Sterling Hospitality at about 4:30 PM. The boys visit was especially helpful as it enabled the Assisted Living Facility to host a mincha minyan. Following mincha, the DC Dental team leveraged their prior waitering experience and helped serve dinner to the Sterling Residents. The boys assisted the residents during the meal while also engaging them in conversation throughout the visit. The Sterling Hospitality staff was extremely appreciative and thanked the boys for volunteering their time and efforts.

As discussed earlier, this initial iteration of the Baltimore Chesed League is being run as a beta-test. If you and/or your boys would be interested in participating in the BCL for future seasons, please feel free to email Dovi Ziffer at davidziffer@gmail.com.