US Chesed Volunteer Shortlisted for JVN Award

US Chesed is delighted to announce that, Shelley Schachter-Kahm a member of Muswell Hill Shul, has been shortlisted for one of the Jewish Volunteer Network’s (JVN) awards, the HW Fisher Overseas and International Volunteer Award. JVN have said that the volume of applications was immense and the quality of all nominees extremely high, showing the magnificent work that volunteers do in our community. So it is a real achievement for Shelley to have been short-listed. The winner of the award will be announced at the ceremony being held on September 8\textsuperscript{th} at the JW3 Centre in Finchley Road.

Shelley Schachter-Cahm contacted Project Chesed in the United Synagogue in September 2012 and asked us to promote the Toy Drop, a not for profit organisation that she had set up in 2002.

\begin{quote}
Toy Drop in Manila
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Toy Drop started when Shelley, who regularly travelled to the Philippines for work, had a 6-week trip so took her baby daughter with her – as well as some of her toys and books. At the end of the trip, she realised that her daughter had grown out of some of the things so she decided to take them (as well as some other toys and books she had been given) to an orphanage – the Bahai Maria Orphanage in Makati, Central Manila, which is home to 50 girls aged 0 to 15 years. Each girl received a box with an assortment of items, which they received with huge gratitude and delight. So much so that one 9-year old girl asked her if they could keep only 1 item each, as they wanted to give the rest to the poor children!

This led to Shelley setting up the Toy Drop, collecting toys, books, games and baby equipment from DHL offices (at that time Shelley worked for DHL) in the UK, Germany, the Czech Republic, Malaysia and Singapore and shipping these items to distressed communities.

Shelley has worked on 3 main projects together with the Chesed Department of the United Synagogue. This has been a very fruitful partnership, with Shelley’s ideas of Tzedaka, striking a chord in the hearts of many US members, who have given a huge number of toys, books and baby clothes to the Toy Drop.

Our first joint project was in September 2012 with the “We need your Teddies “campaign. The toys collected were delivered to needy children all over the Philippines. Later that year, using collections made on Mitzvah Day, Shelley was able to distribute toys to a Jewish orphanage called Bayit Lebanot in Dnepropetrovsk in the Ukraine.

In March 2013, Shelley initiated the Pesach clear out project, encouraging children and adults to donate second-hand and unwanted books that would form the basis of two libraries in the Philippines - one for the Manila Jewish Community and the other in Mountain Province, North Luzon.

Our most recent collection was in the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur 2013, when once again people were asked to contribute gently-used toys. The collections were still underway when Typhoon Haiyan, struck the Philippines on 8 November 2013, the deadliest Philippine typhoon on record, killing at least 6,268 people in that country alone. This brought the Philippines far more to the attention of the public and encouraged even more people to donate. In the aftermath of hurricane Haiyan, Shelley made contact with the Red Cross to donate and distribute all the items stored in the warehouse to the South of the country through credible distributors, leading to a personal thanks from the Philippine Ambassador to the UK.

Shelley runs the Toy Drop practically single-handedly – from publishing the collections by emails, Facebook postings and assistance through US Project Chesed through to answering messages day and night to spending (often with her children) entire weekends and evenings in the autumn carrying...
toys from all over London to the shippers, washing and packing the items. From September – November her home resembles a very untidy version of Hamley’s stock room. She spends endless amounts of time picking up these goods and it is never too much trouble for her.

All her holidays are spent overseeing the distribution efforts on the ground in the Philippines – she has linked up with an entire network of hospitals, clinics, schools and orphanages to make sure each child receives the goods being sent and leakage is kept to a minimum.

Shelley has not raised funds for the charity but she has collected a massive amount of “stuff”. In 2012-13 four container loads of toys, over 30,000 items, were delivered to needy children all over the Philippines and beyond. The local municipality in Mountain Province are now proud to have their own library stocked entirely from the collection with a very eclectic and very much loved collection of over 35,000 books.

She has been hugely successful in highlighting the needs of the people living in the Philippines, using her personal knowledge of the area to demonstrate the extent of the problems. With no fund-raising involved, everyone, adults and children alike, can contribute to the Toy Drop.

Tikkun olam continues to be at the centre of Shelley’s life.

Congratulations Shelley on getting this far and we all wish you the best of luck at the awards ceremony.

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