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Child Molester Sent to Treatment Center

by Julie G Fax

Posted on Feb. 6, 2003 at 7:00 pm

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2

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David Schwartz, a counselor for preschool boys at an Orthodox music and arts camp, was sentenced to one year in residential treatment and five years' probation for molesting a 4-year-old boy in his care at summer camp. A six-year prison sentence was suspended.

The Jan. 21 sentencing at the Airport Courthouse came after Schwartz, the 36-year-old father of young children, accepted a plea bargain in which he pleaded no contest to one felony count of committing lewd acts with a child. (A plea of no contest in a criminal court is the equivalent of guilty, but if victims decide to sue

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Schwartz, they cannot use the criminal plea against him, according to the district attorney's office.)

Schwartz will have to register as a sex offender for life, undergo at least two years of sex offender therapy and is prohibited from being alone with minor children, including his own, for the period of probation. He will have to pay restitution to various victims' funds and pay the therapy and medical costs of both the 4-year-old victim and another boy.

Prior to his acceptance of the plea bargain, Schwartz had maintained his innocence. He was arrested Aug. 2, 2002, after two boys came forward and said Schwartz had molested them at Camp Ruach in Culver City.

Schwartz's attorney did not return phone calls seeking comment.

"He deserves much more than what he got. He got away with it, but the damage is done to our kids and our families forever," said the father of one victim.

Assistant District Attorney Mara McIlvain said her office offered the plea bargain because some of the parents did not want their children to have to testify.

"Our son was under too much pain and fear to face him. Taking him to court would take the chance of bringing back the nightmares and pain, so we had to bargain," one victim's mother said. "We had to weigh a lot of things, and the most important thing was our son."

While all the boys in the group told stories that indicated they had

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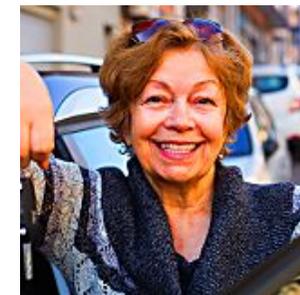


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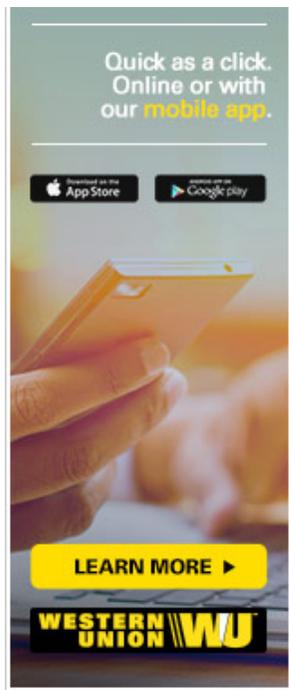


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been molested and tormented, only two were able to tell their stories coherently and consistently enough to be considered admissible in court.

Three parents spoke with The Jewish Journal, telling of the long-lasting pain Schwartz has inflicted on their families. Parents said their children spoke of being touched and hurt, and watching Schwartz make "white pee-pee."

Testimony and physical evidence on at least one boy indicated that he was sodomized. Schwartz is alleged to have brought a bird into class and cut off its head in front of the children, telling them that if they told anyone about what happened, he would do the same to them and their parents.

Parents said that while in retrospect there were some indications that things were not right -- one boy didn't want to go to camp, another said his "tushie" hurt, but the parents thought it was a common rash -- none of the boys said anything directly until after the last day of camp.

Parents said Schwartz, who was in charge of the youngest group, was sometimes left alone at the camp with the boys, when the older groups went off-site for swimming or trips.

The director of Camp Ruach could not be reached for comment.

The three families who spoke to The Journal said their sons are all in therapy.

One parent shared that in therapy, her son drew a picture of a boy crying, with his mother lying dead next to him.

Some of the boys refuse to go to the bathroom alone, because the abuse was alleged to have taken place in the bathroom. One of the boys has become extremely sensitive to seeing animals in pain. All are having nightmares.

Dr. David Fox, a rabbi and clinical psychologist in Beverly Hills who consulted on this case and on others like it, said the effects of abuse in young children vary.

"The obvious effects are nightmares, mistrust of certain adult figures, in some cases nausea as the body becomes the receptacle of the child's anxiety, fear and sadness.... We have children at this age who develop insecurity or conversely can develop self-protective anger to show they are not going to let this happen again," Fox said.

The psychologist has often seen depression, as well, and in extreme cases, children below the age of 6 have been put on suicide watch.

Much of the therapy is still being handled by Stuart House, a cutting-edge facility where the District Attorney's Office, therapists and medical personnel work together on abuse cases to minimize the additional damage evidence collecting can do to children.

When Schwartz was first arrested, many in the Orthodox community -- those who knew him and those who didn't -- asserted the innocence of Schwartz, who was a counselor at Camp Ruach for two years and taught middle school social studies at Yeshivat Yavneh in Hancock Park. Several rabbis who knew him privately expressed disbelief that he could have perpetrated such acts.

At a hearing soon after his arrest, at which his bail was reduced

from \$1 million to \$300,000, Schwartz's supporters heckled the parents of the victims, accusing them of harming another Jew. But as details of the boys' stories came out, support waned.

At the Jan. 21 sentencing, several prominent Orthodox rabbis -- who had not been supporters of Schwartz -- appeared to show support to the families and to send a message to the community.

"It is important for rabbanim to let it be known that these things can not be tolerated," said Rabbi Gershon Bess, one of the most respected rabbinic figures in the Orthodox community, who spoke at the sentencing. "It is the obligation of everyone to protect all children, and to make sure that a person like this is not in a position to hurt other children."

Bess said he has seen progress in the Orthodox community's willingness to not only deal with situations as they arise, but to undertake proactive measures to educate parents, teachers and children.

"Parents have to realize that unfortunately, these things do exist and do occur, and it is the obligation of every parent to educate their children and to develop a very open relationship with children," said Bess, the father of nine.

Meanwhile, the victims and parents search for healing, knowing that Schwartz will be out in a year.

"This guy is extremely dangerous," one father said. "He is going to be walking out and getting a job, and with his beard and kippah on his head, nobody would think of checking his background."

One mother takes comfort in the thought of eternal justice.

"He can get away with it in the court down here, but not with the court upstairs. There is a higher authority, and he is going to pay."

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