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### **New Square appoints Vaad to deal with sexual abuse**

In [Michael Orbach](#), [News](#), [Sexual abuse](#) on **April 21, 2010 at 8:38 pm**



by Michael Orbach

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At noon on a Sunday afternoon, Isaac Brewer sits at his desk in the back of Fax Unlimited, the electronics store he operates on Route 59 in Spring Valley. The flat-screen monitor on his desk displays several camera views that let him watch the unattended front of the store. Every so often, a customer walks in and Brewer dishes with them over what printer to buy, and every so often, the phone rings and Brewer switches fluently between Yiddish and English, telling one customer that he'll be happy to drop off a toner at so-and-so's mother-in-law. And in between conversations, Brewer speaks about sexual abuse.

"The problem has been going on since the world has been created," explained Brewer, black waistcoat and gray sweater draped over the back of his chair. "But the Rebbe felt a need to get serious about it and to help victims and stop predators... The Rebbe has given us a carte blanche."

Brewer is part of a six-member committee established 18 months ago by the Skverer Rebbe, Rabbi Dovid Twersky, to combat sexual abuse inside the New Square chasidic community. The committee, known simply as the Vaad, in many ways represents a giant leap forward for the community in dealing with sexual abuse. Advocates for victims of sexual abuse are not as charitable, however, and view the Vaad as a continuation of the legacy of cover-ups that have tainted the larger Orthodox community's past dealings regarding sexual abuse.

Part of the committee's strength, Brewer maintains, derives from the insular nature of the community of New Square, which is considered secluded even by chareidi standards.

"We are a closed community," said Brewer, who speaks eloquently with a slight accent that betrays his upbringing in England. "You can take it in a negative way, but in a positive way a predator cannot slip away to the next synagogue." Brewer is refreshingly candid about New Square's past failures in dealing with sexual abusers inside the community.

"Previously, they were working with professionals, but a lot of education was missing," Brewer said. "Things slipped away... We never turned a blind eye."

He likened earlier attempts to deal with abusers to hiring amateur 'sharpshooters.' "They'll miss; we missed." Since its inception, the Vaad has met with some of the best known psychologists who practice in the Orthodox community,

Brewer says that all educators inside the New Square community have attended sessions about the identifying factors and symptoms of sexual abuse. Trained monitors have been placed inside all schools. It is their responsibility to look for signs of abnormalities in the classroom. Victims of sexual abuse inside the New Square community are sent to treatment, an almost unheard of occurrence in a chassidic community.

“Three years ago I would never understand the trauma he [the sexual abuse victim] goes through,” explained Brewer. “These people are going through an enormous amount of pain.”

More controversially however, the Vaad, under the direction of the psychologists, sends sexual abusers to treatment.

“There is no forgiveness,” Brewer explained “They pay for victim’s treatment, they go through their own treatment and there are measures of protection.”

Those measures include prohibitions against known abusers going to the mikvah, and cameras placed in populated areas.

Brewer declined to discuss whether the Vaad would be willing to work with secular authorities; it would be very hard to answer with yes or no across the board, he said. But he repeated a quote he attributed to a rabbi in the wake of the sentencing of Baruch Mordechai Lebovits, the convicted molester who received a maximum sentence last week.

“It’s a very sad day, but something had to happen,” Brewer quoted the unidentified rabbi as saying.

In certain cases, Brewer clarified, where there was “no way of being taken off the streets, [seeking help from authorities is] definitely an avenue, but I’m not sure this is the most effective [way]... They are not our enemies.”

So far, he explained, no predator, or mazzik, in his words, (literally: damager), that the Vaad has dealt with, has left New Square. But if one were to leave, Brewer said, there would be consequences.

“One of the leading gedolai HaTorah instructed that it was not right to find a mazzik and let him go. It is our job to put the hammer on him,” Brewer explained.

Brewer says the response inside the community has been overwhelmingly positive. The next obstacles the group faces are securing a permanent stream of funding and finding more psychologists who are fluent in Yiddish. He says the program would be expanded as needed.

“We are following instructions from the professionals to the letter,” stressed Brewer.

[Ben Hirsch](#), president of Survivors for Justice, an organization that works with survivors of sexual abuse, was not impressed

“Dealing with reports of sexual abuse through even a well intentioned communal “Vaad,” serves one purpose, the cover-up of the crime,” said Hirsch. “Usually with catastrophic results, when the pedophile strikes again. Only when the residents of New Square realize that the only way to deal with the crime of sexual abuse is to report it directly to the sex crimes division of the police department, who are trained and equipped to investigate these crimes, will their community will be safe for their children.”

Marci Hamilton, the author of “Justice Denied: What America must do to Protect its Children,” compared the Vaad’s action to the Catholic Church.

“That’s just a conscious choice not to learn from the Catholic Church’s problem,” explained Hamilton. “What we know now is that in the Catholic Church and other religious organizations, when they choose to handle these issues internally and do not bring in prosecutors and the state agencies that are trained to deal with these issues, these predators get the better of them. No one should think they can handle this on their own. It’s both hubris and dangerous.”

The Vaad has already dealt with one high-profile case that reached the upper echelons of New Square society: Heshy Brier. Brier, in his 50’s, served in an unofficial capacity directly under the Skverer Rebbe. He is widely believed to have sexually abused hundreds of children over the years. Isaac Brewer of the Vaad would not comment on any specific cases for fear of undermining the Vaad, but reportedly Brier has been stripped of his power and is in treatment.

“He didn’t want to go anywhere in public,” Holczer related. “We went to the Skverer Rebbe’s house in Nyack. We went next to the water and I told him how he had affected me and how there are other kids and I wanted to hear what that was like for him.”

Brier declined to speak about the allegations.

“I’m not going to comment on this,” he told The Jewish Star on Wednesday afternoon. “If you want to, go talk to the Vaad.”

Holczer also contends that sexual abuse is far more widespread in New Square than the Vaad maintains.

“I’ve sat with kids who are now in their 30’s. When they were 13, they told the Rebbe about sexual abuse and the family got kicked out of Skver,” Holczer said.

He said there are questions. “They are behind helping people to report, but what’s going on with the cases they know with offenders walking free?” asked Holczer. “There are people who are walking free that have offended and abused both sexes and they’re still free.

Holczer said that at a meeting he had with the Vaad last week, its members were receptive to the idea of working with the authorities.

“I would like them to assist me and any victims from Skver prosecute their offenders. For them to know that sexual abuse is not only a sickness but a crime. A crime that has affected hundreds of kids. For them to remove someone from office, for them to fire a melamed (a teacher), is not sufficient.”

Another abuse victim of sexual abuse from New Square spoke to The Jewish Star but asked that he not be identified in the newspaper.

“There’s a joke and it’s a very sad joke,” said the victim. “There was a guy trying to get a hitch on 45 going into Williamsburg [from New Square] and he stood there with his hand out. When someone drove by, he said ‘I want to go to America.’”

The therapist who treated Brier praise

“It’s a great example of the community in New Square shifting in a very positive direction,” the therapist said, “This guy was very very connected from all facets of the community. He helped build the medical center; he was involved in getting government benefits. This guy was very connected politically. Unfortunately, he used his power and position to harm kids, which is the most devastating part. To me, the community responded to the allegations by not saying ‘How are we ever going to bring this guy down’ — but, ‘How can we protect the community in a way, and get the victims help, and how can we get this man help?’”

“It’s an extraordinarily painful case, but at the end it has gone well,” the therapist continued. “Not in terms of the pain, it doesn’t keep it away, but it shifted the dynamics from denial and blaming victims to getting everybody help.”

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