

Reuben Gittelman Hebrew Day School

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Dennis Fries talks to local kids about Operation Noah.

Teenager Brings his Charity to Bergen County

Dennis Fries, a Jewish teenager from Chandler, AZ, was hospitalized for a series of medical tests when he was 13 years old. During this period, Dennis got to know first-hand the kind of loneliness and fear that patients, particularly children, often experience when they are alone in the hospital.

One of the things that Dennis found to bring comfort to fellow patients was soft cuddly stuffed animals. With this in mind, he set up an organization called Operation Noah, whose sole purpose is to collect and deliver stuffed animals to hospitalized children. Because of sanitation reasons, all the toys must be brand-new.

In just over two years, Operation Noah has succeeded in bringing over 20,000 stuffed animals to children undergoing medical treatment in more than 50 hospitals. Operation Noah has expanded beyond Arizona to California, New York, Louisiana, Maryland, Florida, Maine, New Hampshire, Hawaii, and Washington, DC. Dennis' goal is to set up chapters in every state, so that children in hospitals all over the country can be comforted.

Two months ago, the charitable organization Areyvut brought Dennis, now 15, to Bergen County to talk to local

schools about how to make chesed a reality. During his visit, Dennis spoke to grades K-5 at the JCC on the Palisades in Tenafly about helping sick children in the hospital. Temple Beth Sholom of Pascack Valley in Park Ridge was another stop where Dennis talked to grades 5-7 about starting a local chapter of Operation Noah.

At Temple Emeth Religious School in Teaneck, Dennis spoke to students and parents from the third-grade family education class about donating new stuffed animals to local hospitals. His last stop was at Yeshivat Noam in Paramus, where he talked with the second graders.

The 15-year-old also personally delivered new stuffed animals to local hospitals, including Englewood Hospital, the Valley Hospital, and Holy Name Hospital during his trip.

Dennis encourages the formation of new chapters of Operation Noah in any location. Stuffed animal drives can also take place for short-term reasons, such as a bar/bat mitzvah or a school charity drive.

For further information on collecting and donating stuffed animals to Operation Noah, visit www.operation-noah.info or www.areyvut.org.

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