

**L**ubavitch Children's Centre is situated in the heart of Stamford Hill. The centre is a haven for nurturing and valuing each and every child with warmth, love and respect. The Centre is supported by Hackney Learning Trust and Haringey Council. It is also designated a Sure Start Children's Centre by Together for Children.

I had the opportunity to meet with the Centre's Manager, Devorah Leah Sudak, who took the time to discuss with me various programmes run by the Centre and to show me around some of their specialist rooms.

Considering all that the Centre offers, I half expected to be met with noise and hustle and bustle. Walking into the Centre, however, all I felt was a calm and happy atmosphere, with happy sounds coming from behind the nursery door. The waiting area has soft comfortable seats and on the wall is a beautiful artistic piece designed by Michael Muchnik, one of the foremost Jewish artists of our day and he has revolutionized Chassidic art. The beautiful Mitzvah Tree and Mitzvah Train is completely tactile with various different textures which the children can touch and feel whilst learning about the Mitzvahs. You would be hard pressed to find a Mitzvah that is not represented in one way or another in this stunning mural. It is worth visiting the Centre just to study this magnificent piece alone.

As I was sitting in the waiting area, I observed how one little child, of about two years old, was helping the Morah pick fruit for the entire class. The Morah encouraged him to choose a fruit he likes and then pick fruit for his friends. The whole exercise

was completely child-centric, allowing him to be gently led by his teacher whilst he made his decision.

### The Nursery

The nursery is open from 8:00am to 6:00 pm. This is the first of its kind in the Jewish Community which gives children of full time working parents a safe, homely environment for them to blossom. The nursery is equipped for children aged from 3 months to 5 years, where each of the qualified staff has a strong commitment to quality education and strong Jewish values. The nursery boasts top of the range furnished rooms with age appropriate toys, a secure outdoor playground and educational technology. Having children of varying ages in one room mimics the typical familial environment where children of all ages come together as one unit. This allows the children to develop their own sense of independence whilst at the same time learning to interact with others.

The Centre strongly believes in "Chanoch Lenar Al Pi Darko", each child is given the individual attention that they need to allow them to develop with self-confidence, respect for others and a sense of responsibility.

### The Sensory Room

The Sensory Room is a room where the children can explore their world through tactile, audio and visual play. The equipment available in the sensory room varies depending on specific sensory areas being focussed on at any given time.

On the day of my visit the room was filled with state-of-the-art visual equipment. Amongst them was an acrylic cylinder lamp that changes colour by touch of a button or step-on pads, a light show featuring fish on the wall and a light box activated by sound such as the clapping of hands. In addition there were various tactile toys made of natural materials, fur and a foil type sheet for texture and sound. Hanging on the wall was a music board that simulates all different everyday sounds so as to acclimatise the child to his everyday surroundings.



Sensory Play

The Mitzvah Tree by Michael Muchnik



### Activity Room

On the day of my visit the Centre was launching a new project called "My Journey", where parents could track their child's progress. This is an exciting opportunity for mothers to get more involved in their children's development and a possible pointer for any potential problems which could benefit from early intervention, as mentioned below. Free packs are available at every session and I was given one to take home. The pack includes paints, crayons, little pom poms, tissue paper and a variety of crafty stuff to encourage creativity in your child. The Activity Room is also where the Mommy & Me activities take place (see box).

### Health, Information & Support

The Centre also acts as a focal point for health, information and family support needs from the birth of your baby throughout early childhood. The Centre offers, antenatal clinics, childbirth classes, nursing support, immunisations, child health reviews and exercise classes for parents with on site crèche. There are also evening exercise classes for fathers. Contact the Centre for the full schedule for their various drop-in sessions.

### Early Intervention

Sometimes it can be difficult for a parent to pinpoint whether a child needs extra help and when they do they are often subjected to long waiting times for assessments, appointments and referrals. The Centre runs various drop-in sessions and workshops where parents can discuss their concerns with professionals such as Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists and Physiotherapists. If there does seem to be an issue with your child, the Centre is connected to Hackney Ark and direct referrals can be arranged. Sometimes it is this early intervention that can make all the difference to the development and progress of your child.

### Serving the Special Needs Community

Children with special needs are well provided for, with the entire centre being wheelchair accessible complete with automatic entrances and lifts to every floor.

The ethos of the centre is that everyone is different in one way or another. There are tall people, short people, thin people and fat people. Having a special need is just another way in which one child differs to another and all the children in the nursery are treated on an equal level.

Therapists visit the centre on a regular basis and advise the nursery staff on what exercises and other specialist activities should be provided for any specific child. These exercises or activities then become part of the entire classroom structure, so that no child is singled out in any way. For example, if a child needs extra help with the fine motor skill of cutting paper, this will become part of an activity in which all the children do paper crafts. The staff will ensure to give extra assistance or guidance to the child who needs the help with cutting, without it being obvious to the other children. Similarly, if a child needs to do some stretching exercises, the entire class will do these exercises, promoting, not only good health, but total inclusion for all the children.

As I was walking down the stairs from the Activity Room at the end of my visit I noted the bright colourful photographs of smiling happy children. All the way down the stairs on the walls are tactile panels for the children to touch, play and explore even as they are walking up and down the stairs. The entire Centre is focussed on the children to maximise their potential and the whole atmosphere is conducive to maintaining a happy, playful and educational environment.

### Special Summer Programme

Look out for advertisements of the Special Summer Programme at the Centre. Activities will include

- Baking Days
- Painting Sessions
- Fun Bus
- Balloon Modelling
- And Much Much More

The Summer Programmes need to be pre-booked and some activities may be subject to a minimal charge. The programmes fill up very quickly so make sure to book soon.

### Mommy & Me

A child's potential is best achieved in an environment where parents develop and learn alongside their children. The Centre has a range of activities for children and their parents. Some of these include:

- Cooking with Toddlers
- Messy Play
- Soft Play
- Circle Time
- Interactive Story Time
- Free Crafts
- Sensory Play
- Toy Library

### Not Forgetting the Fathers

On Fridays between 1:30-3:30 pm during the Summer is specifically dedicated to Outdoor Play for Father's and Children. During this time there are no women in the building so there is no issue of Tznius. This is a perfect time for Daddies to get involved and for children to have Special Time with their Tatties.

### Contact Information:

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