

## Around the Community

# Achiezer at 13: A Talk with Aliza Wartelsky

## Part 5 of a Series

By Avi Shiff

**I**n honor of Achiezer's 13<sup>th</sup> year, we are conducting a multi-part series celebrating the various facets of this remarkable organization. For Week #5, we spoke to Aliza Wartelsky.

### For how many years have you worked at Achiezer?

About seven years.

### What is your role at Achiezer?

I work in the Family Crisis Division, in addition to other responsibilities, such as directing our Respite Rooms in hospitals.

### What does family crisis intervention entail?

Often, when a family is experiencing a crisis, someone will refer them to Achiezer and they call and speak with me. We discuss the matter at hand a bit, and many times I have them come in for a meeting. This is when Boruch Ber Bender, Dr. Lowinger, and I speak with the family, usually encouraging them to bring along an advocate who can work with them. We go through their entire situation and address their actual challenges by attempting to provide practical solutions. Many times, while families are aware that they are "in crisis," they are completely unaware of what kind of help is available to them. We also refer the family to any other organizations who can assist in their predicament.

After we meet, I will send them an email recapping what we discussed and what next steps they should take. And of course, I follow up as often as needed.



Aliza Wartelsky with Boruch Ber Bender directing the distribution of yom tov food cards, March 2020

### So you really get personally involved in the families you help.

Absolutely! I feel so close to every family who calls. They become *my* families. I truly care about them so much. We try our best to think of creative and out-of-the-box ideas. Nothing is clear-cut. Every situation is different and personal, so we try to get to know the players and see what they are comfortable for us to do for them. We never push a family beyond their comfort level.

Often, as mentioned, people don't even know what they really need and how it's affecting the rest of their life. They aren't aware that there are actually people and organizations out there who can help them.

As we often say, sometimes we can't take away the *machalah*, the problem, but we can make it easier on the family and their children. Obviously, we cannot fix everything, but we want to help and be there for people in any way we can.

### Did you know?

April is National Humor Month, which was created to share the "therapeutic value of humor."

has increased.

We never know what any day will be like. Some days I can deal with 30 calls, while on others I may deal with four very lengthy calls, dealing with intricate issues.

With all of our growth, we are constantly exploring new ideas and initiatives, expanding as necessary.

### How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact what you do?

During the height of corona, our phones did not stop ringing! I couldn't put my phone down for a moment. From financial help to medical assistance to hospital support, we couldn't catch our breaths. Emails were coming in all day, and calls flooded each department.

Last April and May, I saw an exceedingly large number of unemployment cases, sometimes about 60 a day. *Baruch Hashem*, it's much quieter now on that front. But within the financial world, many people have been affected by Covid and its aftermath, and we have been helping people with résumés, career counseling, financial assistance, and so on. We were even called upon to coach people on how to properly use their stimulus check. So Covid took a toll on many individuals, but thankfully we have seen things calm down.

### Any final comment?

I want to express just how much I learn from our clients and the *chizuk* I get from them. These are people who are going through so much, yet they demonstrate such extraordinary *emunah* and *bitachon*, even when going through such pain! It's unbelievable. That really empowers us. I've never seen anything like it. Even when going through trials and challenges, the members of *Klal Yisrael* express such heartfelt *hakoras hatov* for even the little things we do. It means so much to us and it is really inspiring.

In addition, I've been so inspired by the people in our community, including professionals, such as accountants and lawyers, who offered their help pro bono during corona.

We have an amazing community all around, filled with amazing people, and it is an honor to be able to serve them through Achiezer.

I speak to Dr. Lowinger, our in-house mental health director, quite often and discuss what the right approach or solution is. Her mental health guidance is invaluable.

### What is the secret ingredient that makes Achiezer so unique?

The cohesiveness among our staff and how well everyone works together. In an environment where you are dealing with real-life circumstances, we are all very sensitive to the callers, and dealing with these kinds of situations makes one closer to their colleagues. It bonds us in a special way. We need each other to do our jobs and we support each other. I'm very lucky to have my closest friends here at Achiezer. We respect each other and each have our different areas in which we can contribute.

Despite working together, though, the sensitivity to confidentiality is incredible. We never use names in the office. Everything is kept private to the utmost. That is something that is very important to us.

### Can you comment on Achiezer's growth over the last decade?

Sometimes, when you're so deeply involved in something, you don't always get to sense the growth as much. You just kind of grow along with the organization, and it happens gradually. But we've definitely expanded. Our Respite Rooms have grown from two to five, and our staff