

Expressing anxiety through art

Students use 'Worry Wall' to communicate and reveal

By JESSE SHERER

The students in Cheri Rosen's 5th grade class at B'not Shulamith in Woodmere were busy drawing pictures. Some were drawing airplanes, some their parents, some pets, and some scenes of school.

Though it may have looked like a regular art class, it was not. These students were participating in the Worry Wall project.

Created by Hewlett resident Richard Borah, the Worry Wall aims to give children a creative outlet for their fears.

"We needed something that would allow teenagers and children to express the concerns

the project," said Borah. "After 9/11 people were more focused on what anxieties and fears they had, particularly what fears children had. But it's not limited to fears stemming from 9/11."

A movable wall, eight feet high by 12 feet long, it will be worked on and displayed throughout the community in different host locations. It can also be broken down into smaller sections, so that it can be viewed at separate locations simultaneously.

The wall will consist of individual pieces of paper, about 8 1/2" X 11", featuring the students' illustrations. All student work will be anonymous. The numerically ordered pieces will feature grayscale shading which, when combined, will form a mosaic of illustrations against a gray backdrop of two young adults' faces.

The Worry Wall was not a one-man job. It is collaboration between Borah and several other contributors.

The Observant Artists Community founded in 1996, is a non-profit organization of which Borah is the founder and president, encourages creative and artistic expression among observant Jews and supports the arts as a powerful way to portray and communicate the many facets of Jewish life.

His wife Andrea Borah was also instrumental in the project through her work as the clinical director of TOVA mentoring program. A community service organization that provides young adult mentors for middle and high school students in the South Nassau and Far Rockaway communities, TOVA works closely with parents and principles at 14 area schools to effectively decrease drop out rates, school failures, and

at-risk behavior in teens. They are the only group that services both public schools and yeshivas.

The final partner was F.E.G.S, the largest nonprofit and nongovernmental service agency in the country. Formed in 1934 it oversees educational and outreach programs in synagogues in New York and Long Island.

"We see this as a way to join forces for outreach to the Jewish community," said Ellen Stoller, an art therapist and assistant vice president of F.E.G.S.

"It's excellent for children to express their worries in pictures," said Rosen. "It's also important, because as teachers we want to know what's on their mind, and this a thorough way of finding out."

Shulamith's administrators praised the project for its ability to help children. "Today's children have a lot on their minds," said Joyce Yarmak, principal. "To keep it in is a terrible thing. This is a wonderful way of expressing and sharing."

"It's a wonderful means of expression," said Naomi Herzberg, the assistant director of development at the school. "Each picture tells a story."

The Wall can be used for any age group.

Thus far the Wall has traveled to Darchei Torah in Far Rockaway and HAFTR High School, where children expressed the pressure they feel about school, about finding the right person to spend their lives with, and about making the marriage work. Other worries range from war to missing their parents. The organizers were struck by the complexity of their worries.

It was met with acclaim at Shulamith. Said 10-year-old Reena: "I like art so its lots of fun."

The Worry Wall project is expected to run through January. The organizers hope it will open doors to similar projects.



Ten-year-old Aviva of Lawrence, expresses her worries by coloring with Ellen Stoller of F.E.G.S.

they have in these current times," said Borah. "Kids have a lot of worries that their parents and teachers are often unaware of. This project is not only cathartic for them but communicative as well. It can be revelatory to their parents and teachers."

Thought it was created after 9/11, the project is designed as a response to all worries and fears, not just those concerning 9/11.

"September 11th highlighted