

Helping Hand Awards 2008



Helping Hand Award Winners with Chairperson Gill Fenner and Kate Garraway, GMTV Presenter and Panel Member

The Awards create an opportunity to highlight the 'unsung heroes' who make a real difference to people's lives and who inspire those around them. We recognise exceptional dedication and commitment by an individual or a group who shows unstinting care to a person or family, within our Community or in the wider community, over a significant period by volunteering, caring, befriending, mentoring or supporting others.

This year, we received over 75 nominations from across the UK, the highest number of nominations since the Awards began fourteen years ago. Our Panel has selected three final recipients of equal status, each of whom were presented with a formal commendation certificate together with a grant donated specifically for this purpose. In addition, all those nominated are recognised and receive official commendations.

This important community initiative, whilst held under the Norwood umbrella, is independent of Norwood and is self-financing, due to the exceptional generosity of our sponsors, The Aimwell Charitable Trust, The Rosalyn and Nicholas Springer Charitable Trust and another sponsor who has chosen to remain anonymous.

The three recipients have all donated their grants to charities of their choice.



Helping Hand Award Recipients:

Michelle Barnett

Michelle began her career as a Probation Officer and worked with high risk offenders for 11 years. During this time, she also set up a Norwood group designed to give parents a break from the challenges of caring for children with learning disabilities. In 2003 everything changed when she founded GIFT, an independent charity organisation encouraging a culture of giving and volunteering among young people within the Community. With Michelle's extraordinary drive and creative ideas, GIFT expanded rapidly and proved so successful that it soon needed someone to run the organisation on a full-time basis.



Michelle set aside her career as a social worker to take up the challenge and work for GIFT. Since then she, together with two members of staff, has built up an impressive cadre of 500 regular volunteers.

The beneficiaries of GIFT's work are people with disabilities, elderly people, young mothers and less fortunate Jewish families in need. Michelle made it a priority to go into schools and educate the younger members of our Community about the importance of charitable giving. Shoppers in North London are encouraged to donate additional items by placing them in a GIFT BOX. These are monitored and emptied by school six formers and then distributed to those in need.

GIFT runs a substantial project distributing surplus bread and food to individuals, families and organisations on a daily basis. Surplus bread is collected from kosher bakeries at the end of each day and stored in a specially converted area at Michelle's home for packing and distribution. This is done by over 100 volunteers, who deliver the bread to residents of Norwood residential homes, Jewish Blind & Disabled Family Centres, Jewish Women's Aid, nearly 100 Jewish families in need, homeless shelters and soup kitchens.

Michelle's dedication is unwavering. Her life is run on the principle of making a difference to whoever needs it. She has devoted all her energies to changing lives and providing sustenance or material support to those in need.

Rachely Plancey

Rachely is an outstanding example of an unsung hero. Since 1995 she has worked tirelessly helping parents of children with cancer, muscular dystrophy, dysautonomia and other life-threatening illnesses. She and her husband Meir, voluntarily created Camp Simcha in the UK in order to improve the quality of life for children suffering from life-threatening illnesses and to support their families.



Though Rachely has only recently turned 31 she has been supporting parents older than herself since the age of 19. Her colleagues are constantly inspired by her maturity and the sensitivity and empathy that she constantly gives to parents.

Today, Rachely works voluntarily, round the clock, as a Family Liaison Officer, supporting parents and siblings, helping them to cope with caring for a seriously ill child. She personally handles a full case load of families while also supervising and supporting her colleagues and volunteers who work for Camp Simcha. She organises trips out for the children so that they have unique and unforgettable experiences that lift their spirits and help them to enjoy life and find the energy to meet the challenges that lie ahead for them. She also provides direct support to the parents and siblings of the sick children.

The mother of four young children, with the fifth due imminently, Rachely admits that it is hard balancing her voluntary work with her home life. In the early days, her oldest child's bedroom was converted into an office to deal with the needs of her voluntary work, while her youngest child slept in the dining room.

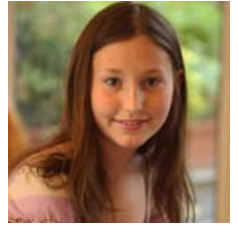
Never seeking thanks or recognition, she devotes herself selflessly to the needs of her families and to those members of staff and volunteers working with her. For years, she has not only supported the parents directly but also recruited and trained volunteers and organised parties and outings for the children.

Rachely also set up a mid-week medically equipped family retreat where the whole family experience 'normal living' whilst the medical care is still the number one priority. The last retreat Camp Simcha hosted was attended by over 200 people.

Parents will tell you that they simply could have not managed the terrible times without Rachely's constant support.

Eliana Ostro

Eliana is an extraordinary 12 year old. She has always had a heightened sense of compassion for others, and a desire to help anyone in need. From a young age she could not walk past a homeless person in the street without giving them money. One rainy November night, giving money was not enough, and Eliana insisted that she and her family returned to a homeless man with food to tide him along.



Just over a year ago, Eliana decided to volunteer at Neve Michael, a village in Israel for children at risk. The village is a haven for children who have been seriously neglected or abused by their families. Everyday, during Eliana's holidays, she played with the children at Neve Michael. She managed to establish a rapport with them through the universal language of play.

When her Bat Mitzvah drew near, she insisted that rather than have a large party in London, the money should be spent on the children at Neve Michael. As a compromise with her parents, Eliana agreed to hold her party at Neve Michael and share her Simcha with the children there. She asked her friends and family to give donations for the children, instead of presents for her.

Eliana wanted the girls of Bat Mitzvah age at Neve Michael to feel equally special, so she asked her family to arrange a day trip to take them to Jerusalem, a place that many of the girls had never had the opportunity to visit, even though they lived so near.

Eliana continues to raise money, busking and selling biscuits with friends as well as tutoring young children as an additional fundraising initiative. Eliana is a young girl of great compassion. She is an inspiration not only to other young people but to adults as well.

Chairperson, Helping Hand Award Selection Panel: Gill Fenner

Honorary Patrons: The Lady Jacobovits and Lady Sacks

Honorary President: Lord Janner of Braunstone QC

Selection Panel:

Dr Arnon Bentovim MBBS FRCPCH FRCPsych. DPM

Norma Brier BA (Hons), MSc, CQSW

The Rt Hon Lady Cosgrove CBE LLD

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Kate Garraway

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