

**Title of Presentation:** The Orthodox Jewish Consumer: Culturally Competent Residential Services

**Principal Presenter:** David Mandel, M.A., M.B.A.  
Title: Chief Executive Officer  
Organization: Ohel Children's Home and Family Services  
Address: 4510 16th Ave.  
Brooklyn, NY 11204  
E-mail: dm@OhelFamily.org

**Additional Presenter:** Aaron J. Prero, Ph.D.,  
Title: Family member; Economist  
Organization: Social Security Administration (not representing SSA)  
Address: 5909 Key Ave.  
Baltimore, MD 21215  
E-mail: AJP@kligerandco.com

The principle of cultural competence is applied mainly to serving the large ethnic minorities in a way that avoids cultural barriers, thereby assuring that these populations will not be underserved as they have been. However, there is another, smaller cultural minority of mental health consumers, Orthodox Jews, who are typically poorly served, specifically in the area of residential services. Ohel Children's Home and Family Services has developed a model of culturally competent service for this group. It applies the model in its residential treatment and other residential programs, which serve approximately 150 adults with mental illness and emotional disturbance, many of them Orthodox Jews. This study catalogues and describes the features of the model and reports on the ease or difficulty with which the various features have been implemented at Ohel.

Residential services have historically been problematic for Orthodox Jewish mental health consumers largely because most Jewish cultural and religious practices are centered around one's home, unlike many other religions, whose practice centers around the church. A consumer who lives in a residential facility is dependent on the residence to provide this cultural anchor.

Consider the situations of practicing Orthodox mental health consumers residing in community treatment facilities, either post hospitalization or as an alternative to hospitalization. It is clear that the likelihood of recovery is greater where they do not have to confront challenges in order to maintain their way of life that includes kosher food, the traditional Sabbath and holiday meals and activities, traditional Chanukah and Purim festivities, an outdoor sukka for the Sukkos week, a Lag B'omer outing, and the opportunity to hear the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, not to speak of supported synagogue attendance on a weekly or daily basis.

The list of cultural and religious features whose absence can be a barrier to recovery by these consumers is long. It would be difficult for a residence that is not thoroughly oriented to this lifestyle to keep track of the various elements, more so to provide them.

Ohel is a non-profit social service agency in New York, operating under an annual budget of \$40 million. Its divisions include adult mental health services, developmental disability services, adolescent services, foster care, and trust assistance. The mental-health division consists of a community mental health clinic, a residential treatment program, two levels of supported housing, and a clubhouse.