

## An event not to 'SKIP' out on



By [Andrea Boyarsky/Staten Island Advance](#)

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For Sharon Chernok of Great Kills, one organization has been there through the years to help provide her children with the care and support they need.

Sick Kids [Need] Involved People (SKIP) of New York was there nearly 20 years ago when she needed help getting Medicaid for two of her five children who have varying disabilities. And they were there again, more recently, when speech therapy services were terminated for one child and she wanted it to be reinstated.

"They do anything they can do to help you keep your family intact," Mrs. Chernok said of the Manhattan-based not-for-profit.

"They hone in on you as a family."

The organization is now asking for the community's support so they can help more children get the services they need. On Friday at 7 p.m., the Staten Island Yankees will host SKIP at their game against the Tri-City ValleyCats and \$5 of the proceeds from the \$20 group ticket price will go to the organization.

A number of staff members and families who have been helped by SKIP will be at the game, including Tyrese Alleyne-Davis, a seventh-grader from Brooklyn, who will throw out the first pitch.

"You can meet some wonderful, true, real people, and help a cause that definitely needs help," said SKIP co-founder Margaret Mikol. "We can't do this without everyone's support." □



Photo Courtesy of Sharon Chernok

Sick Kids [Need] Involved People (SKIP) has helped Sharon Chernok of Great Kills receive services for her five special needs children. Pictured from left are: Joseph, Becky, Sharon, Shayna, Rachel and Yoni Chernok.



Photos Courtesy  
of Barbara  
D'Amora and J.  
Gregory  
Raymond

Children who have been helped by SKIP include Nick D'Amora of Annadale (left) and Tyrese Alleyne-Davis of Brooklyn, who will throw out the first pitch during the Staten Island Yankees game Friday night. Proceeds from the game will benefit the not-for-profit organization.

## BEGINNINGS

□Mrs. Mikol and her husband, Yves, started SKIP in 1982, and the organization was incorporated the following year. Their late daughter, Julia, was born with severe combined immuno-deficiency, a disorder that compromised her immune system. For two-and-a-half years, she lived in a hospital supported by a respirator, but her parents were determined to bring her home.

In 1981, Julia Mikol became the first child on life support in New York to go home from the hospital. The Mikols started SKIP to ensure that all sick or developmentally-disabled children in the state could have a proper childhood with their family.

Through the years, the agency has grown and now helps more than 3,000 families in the state, and over 300 on Staten Island. The children they serve have a variety of diagnoses, including cerebral palsy, Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis, spina bifida, congenital heart defects, cancer and autism.

"We try to help families build enough supports and services to keep their children at home rather than institutionalize them," Mrs. Mikol said. "For the most part, we get a good direction from the families as to what it is they want us to do."

The services they help establish include: Home care/nursing; environmental modifications; assistance technology, and family education. They also connect families to schools, extracurricular programs and summer camps designed to meet their children's needs.

"We're advocates, linkage systems," Mrs. Mikol commented. "When families don't know who can help them, we try to figure out who can help them."

## LOCAL HELP

□Mrs. Chernok's children, — Rachel, Becky, Yoni, Shayna and Joseph — who range in age from 23 to 30, have been helped by SKIP in a variety of ways. They have a range of diagnoses, including spina bifida, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, learning disabilities and hearing loss.

When her children were younger, the organization helped Mrs. Chernok find early intervention programs and pre-schools that catered to children with special needs.

As they aged, SKIP set them up with residential habilitation specialists to teach them basic life skills, such as tying shoelaces and answering the phone. Additionally, agency staff recommends recreational activities they know the children will enjoy.

"The best thing about SKIP is they are there for everyone," Mrs. Chernok said. "They've helped me bring the services to my kids, instead of bringing my kids to the services."

Barbara D'Amora of Annadale, whose 14-year-old son Nick has autism, has been using SKIP's services for about 10 years. She first started using them after applying for Medicaid waiver services, and was looking for "services that would give him a quality of life he never would have had just sitting at home."

SKIP set Mrs. D'Amora up with a Medicaid Service Coordinator, who helped her find

initiatives that met Nick's needs. Since then, Nick has participated in programs through organizations such as Eden II, On Your Mark, The Grace Foundation and the Jewish Community Center.

Nick also has a residential habilitation specialist who helps him with life skills like folding laundry, preparing meals, paying for items at the store and using his iPad as a communication device.

"Anytime I have issues or questions, they are there to help," Mrs. D'Amora said. "By supporting this organization, people are supporting local children and their families."

For more information on SKIP, visit [skipofny.org](http://skipofny.org). To purchase tickets to Friday's game and have a portion of the proceeds go to the organization, visit [siyanks.com/groups](http://siyanks.com/groups) and click the SKIP of New York link.



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