

Kid's vid clicks for soup kitchen

BY JAKE PEARSON

WHEN BAKING cupcakes and collecting bottles and cans didn't make a dent toward the \$10,000 Abby Hofstetter wanted to raise for charity, she turned to the Internet.

The ambitious 11-year-old uploaded a video online asking people to donate to the kosher Brooklyn soup kitchen Masbia about two weeks ago, and already 1,800 people have watched the video and pitched in \$10,251.

That success has led her to raise her target to \$25,000 by June.

"I'm just like, wow," said Abby, a sixth-grader from Cedarhurst, L.I., whose Brooklyn-born mom took her and her younger brother to volunteer at Masbia's Midwood soup kitchen a few months ago.

"How did this all happen so fast? This only started a few months ago, and it's really great how much people are helping."

After reading about Masbia in a Jewish weekly, Abby's parents, Sarah and Adam, who are Orthodox Jews, wanted their kids to appreciate how fortunate they are.

So they drove to Brooklyn and spent a few afternoons in the Masbia soup kitchen on Coney Island Ave., dishing out meals to poor Brooklyn residents.

The experience touched the precocious preteen.

"When I came [to the soup kitchen], there was a separate room in front of the actual soup kitchen that's heated," said Abby, who had never volunteered before. "And I saw all the people sitting there because they needed heating. ... They needed help."

That's when Abby decided that by her bat mitzvah in June, she wanted to raise funds for the group that works on a shoestring budget and runs four kosher soup kitchens in Midwood, Williamsburg, Borough Park and Rego Park, Queens.

"She's always been like that," said Abby's mom, Sarah, an ad executive who specializes in online marketing. "She's always been an enterprising kid."

The fund-raising effort touched Masbia co-founder Alexander Rapaport, who said he's never seen anything like this before.

"We have some kids who come for an hour or two and do some volunteering," said Rapaport. "But nothing to this level, where a girl comes two or three times and decides to raise this kind of money. It's incredible."

To see Abby's video, visit www.crowdraise.com/abbymasbia/fundraiser/masbia.



Abby Hofstetter, 11, of Cedarhurst, L.I., dishes up meal at Masbia soup kitchen in Midwood as father, Adam, looks on. Volunteering inspired her web fund-raising campaign for organization.

Chess master's app shows you the right moves

BY MIKE McLAUGHLIN

A BROOKLYN chess master thinks his latest winning move was creating a cell phone game to teach novices how to play the ancient board game.

Maurice Ashley — the first African-American chess grandmaster — designed a smart-phone app that debuted on Dec. 21 to educate newcomers to the game with 20 basic lessons.

"I've simplified everything," said Ashley, 44, of Park Slope. "It's nice and easy and for the broadest possible audience."

The iPhone app — called Maurice Ashley Teaches Chess — costs \$4.99.

Players learn the rules of chess and develop their skills through lessons that isolate the different pieces on the board from pawn to king.

The final lessons — which include audio recordings of Ashley — introduce players to more advanced elements of strategy.

"My forte is presenting chess to people," said Ashley. "Playing chess is like being the conductor of an orchestra, because there are so many parts to monitor at once."

There's also an option to play a computerized opponent.

Over the year it took Ashley and the programmers to create the app, he used his son and students in his private classes as guinea pigs.



Park Slope's Maurice Ashley, the first black grandmaster in chess, shows new app that delivers 20 lessons in the ancient game. Photo by Robert Mecea

"My students had a lot of feedback. They're very tech-savvy," said Ashley.

Because of their input, Ashley decided to offer a free preview of the game to whet shoppers' appetites for the complete package.

But he didn't follow all of their advice. His teenage stu-

dents were enthusiastic about Ashley recording some good-natured ribbing that players would hear if they're outmaneuvered, but he cut it from the final version.

"The teenage boys thought it was hilarious," said Ashley. "But we took it out because we didn't want people to get intimidated."

Ashley developed his app with German programmers and it landed in a crowded marketplace of chess games to play on cellphones.

Chess books and a video that Ashley made have been a success, but in the app's first week, 40 customers bought the app.

Ashley said he'll carve out a niche for his program, because many rival versions are too difficult for rookies to compete against the computer.

"A lot of the others just crush you. Nobody can learn from that," said Ashley. "We didn't put on the strongest level of computer in the world."