

Synagogue Inclusion Toolkit

Guidelines, resources, and ideas for participating congregations



*Prepared and distributed by Jewish Family & Children's Service
to facilitate the Synagogue Inclusion Project.*



*The Synagogue Inclusion Project was made possible by a generous grant
from Combined Jewish Philanthropies.*

Jewish Family & Children's Service gratefully acknowledges
the following sources of information for this toolkit:

Union for Reform Judaism website
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism website
Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning website
The Jewish Federation of North America website
Pathways Awareness Foundation
The Special Needs Professional Committee of Greater Boston

Special recognition goes out to Sherry Grossman and Mindee Meltzer from the Special
Needs Professional Committee of the Greater Boston Jewish Community who created the
original Synagogue Inclusion Inventory

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“Rabbi Eliezer says: Let other people’s dignity be as precious as your own.”

Pirkei Avot 2:15

Memorandum of Agreement

As recipient of a \$1,000 grant issued by the CJP Synagogue Inclusion Project,

_____ agrees to:
name of congregation

1. Designate a project liaison responsible for overseeing fulfillment of grant requirements.
2. Conduct a synagogue inclusion inventory using the form provided in the Synagogue Inclusion Toolkit.
3. Develop a plan to spend the \$1,000 grant on activities and/or physical plant changes suggested by results of the inclusion inventory.
4. Implement the spending plan within nine months of receiving the grant.
5. Disseminate nine short articles on welcoming and including people with disabilities via the congregation's newsletter or website.
6. Submit a brief report on grant expenditures.

To support synagogue participation in this project, Jewish Family & Children's Service will:

1. Provide consultation and technical support to facilitate completion of the inclusion inventory, project planning, and project implementation.
2. Provide articles on inclusion for distribution via the congregation's newsletter and/or website.

Grant funds will be released to the congregation upon receipt of this signed agreement.

Chair of Synagogue Board of Trustees

date

Inclusion Project Liaison

date

JF&CS Representative

date

Synagogue Inclusion Inventory

Please use the following checklist to evaluate a wide range of physical characteristics, practices, and attitudes can make your synagogue community a welcoming place for people with disabilities and support their full inclusion in synagogue life. We strongly urge you to include members with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities in the process of completing this inventory.

Rather than a simple yes or no, your answers to some questions will probably be qualified. Please take time to note exceptions, concerns, or observations relating to each question.

Part 1: Physical Accessibility

Does our physical environment welcome people with disabilities?

Does our environment say “We want you here -- you belong?”

	Yes	Some	No	Notes (<i>exceptions, descriptions, challenges</i>)
EXTERIOR				
1. Are accessible parking spaces reserved for people with mobility limitation?				
2. Are building entrances accessible to people using wheel-chairs?				
3. Does exterior signage clearly indicate the location of wheel-chair-accessible entrances?				
4. If separate from the main doors, are accessible entrances comparably welcoming and attractive?				
5. Can people with physical limitations open exterior doors without assistance?				
6. Are clearly visible signs posted outside to indicate the location of accessible entrances?				
7. Are sidewalks and exterior spaces (patios, gardens, <i>etc.</i>) navigable by people with mobility limitations?				

	Yes	Some	No	Notes (<i>exceptions, descriptions, challenges</i>)
INTERIOR				
1. Are mezuzot low enough to be reached by people using wheelchairs and people of short stature?				
2. Can people with physical limitations open interior doors without assistance?				
3. Can wheelchair-accessible restrooms be accessed easily from any area in the synagogue?				
4. Is every area of the building accessible to people who cannot use stairs?				
5. Can wheelchair-accessible water fountains be reached easily from any area in the building?				
6. Is priority seating reserved for people with mobility limitations?				
7. Do seating configurations (in the sanctuary, classrooms, and social spaces) accommodate people using wheelchairs?				
8. Are floors free of potential tripping hazards or barriers for people using walkers or wheelchairs (e.g. raised thresholds, deep carpet, or abrupt changes in flooring surface)?				
9. Is lighting even, glare-free, and sufficiently bright for reading throughout the building?				
10. Are halls and doorways of sufficient width to allow wheelchair access.				
11. Are light switches low enough to be reachable by people using wheelchairs and people of short stature?				

	Yes	Some	No	Notes (<i>exceptions, descriptions, challenges</i>)
12. Are there work surfaces in the kitchen that can be used by people who use wheelchairs or who need to sit while preparing food?				
13. Is the bimah accessible to people who cannot use stairs?				
14. Is the Torah accessible or made accessible to people with physical challenges or short stature?				
15. Are tallitot and kippot easily reachable for people using wheelchairs and walkers?				
16. Are large-print and Braille siddurim readily available for those who need them?				
17. Are assistive listening devices provided for all who need them at services, special events, and educational programs?				
18. Is sign-language interpretation provided at services and events?				
19. Does the synagogue have a TTY?				
20. Is there adequate lighting at the podium to facilitate lip reading?				
21. Are unscented/hypoallergenic cleaning products, candles, soaps, and air fresheners used throughout the building?				
22. Are there accommodations for people who cannot hold heavy books (e.g. sections provided in lightweight copies)?				
23. Are there comfortable places to which people can easily retreat during services if sitting still or staying quiet becomes difficult? Is the service piped in to facilitate uninterrupted inclusion in worship?				

Part 2: Practices and Policies

Do our synagogue's practices and policies welcome people with disabilities?

Do written materials affirm our synagogue's commitment to inclusiveness?

	Yes	Some	No	Notes (<i>exceptions, descriptions, challenges</i>)
24. Do the synagogue's mission statement and written descriptions include language about welcoming people with disabilities?				
25. Does the membership application ask questions regarding needs for accommodation to facilitate full inclusion in synagogue activities?				
26. Does all program publicity include a statement about inclusivity and information about available accommodations?				
27. Does the religious school have a special needs policy that supports full inclusion of children with disabilities?				
28. Does the synagogue have specific programs and resources to support inclusion of children with disabilities in classrooms and other activities?				
29. Does the synagogue provide accommodations for students with disabilities who wish to become B'nai Mitzvot?				
30. Does the synagogue offer transportation to services for people who need rides?				
31. Do leaders and congregants consistently use people-first language?				
32. Does the synagogue have an inclusion committee?				

	Yes	Some	No	Notes (<i>exceptions, descriptions, challenges</i>)
33. Do staff and/or lay leaders reach out proactively to visitors or members with disabilities to solicit their feedback? (Do they feel welcome, comfortable, included? If not, why not?)				
34. Are congregants invited to stand “as they are able” during worship services?				

Part 3: Awareness and Attitudes

*Are our members comfortable including people with a range of disabilities in all aspects of synagogue life?
Are people with disabilities welcomed with understanding and respect in worship, study, and social settings?*

	Yes	Some	No	Notes (<i>exceptions, descriptions, challenges</i>)
35. Do staff and lay leaders receive training in disabilities awareness and inclusive behavior?				
36. Are ushers taught appropriate ways to greet and accommodate people with a range of disabilities?				
37. Are ushers, worship leaders, and congregants prepared to respond helpfully and without judgment to disruptive behavior during worship, study, or social activities?				
38. Has the synagogue sponsored an inclusion awareness Shabbat or workshop?				
39. Is disabilities awareness part of the religious school curriculum?				

Sample Bulletin Announcement

[Name of Synagogue] is pleased to announce that we have been awarded a grant of \$1,000 from CJP in support of our efforts to fully include people with disabilities in every aspect of synagogue life. After completing an “inclusion inventory” that will help us take identify opportunities to become more inclusive, we will select a course of action that will be supported by our inclusion grant. [Name of liaison] has generously agreed to be our congregational liaison for this project and will work with the disabilities staff at Jewish Family & Children’s Service to implement grant-funded activities. If you would like to participate in this initiative, please contact [name of liaison] at [phone number and/ or email address].

Online Resources

The Internet is rich with resources for congregations seeking to become more inclusive, including resource guides, workbooks, checklists, essays, and suggestions from communities that are committed to welcoming all Jews and making it possible for them to participate fully in synagogue life. The following links a small sample of the resources that can be found by “Googling” “synagogue inclusion.”

Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month Resource Guide. Jewish Federations of North America, 2010
http://www.fedcentral.org/local_includes/downloads/39194.pdf

Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month Resource Packet. Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning
<http://www.pjll.org/index.php?c=151&kat=Synagogue+Inclusion> (see download link)

Inclusion Awareness Shabbat Workbook, Pathways Awareness Foundation
<http://www.inclusioninworship.org/Jewish%20IADay%20WB.pdf>

Opening The Gates of Torah

by Jacob Artson

You have probably never met anyone like me before who cannot speak but who can communicate by typing. I am a perfect example of how someone can be very impaired in one area but have great strength in other areas. Actually, I think that is true of all people, but it is especially true about people with autism. When I was diagnosed with autism at age 3, I could not speak or move my body properly, and 12 years later that remains true. However, if success and worth are measured by being a mensch and giving back to others, then I would classify my life as a success. You can be the judge.

When I moved to Los Angeles at the age of 6, I was a classic case of severe autism. My behavior was so awful I hated myself. Almost everyone I met gave up on me almost immediately and believed I would never amount to anything. But there was one doctor who saw the gem locked inside my prison of autism. She smiled at me in a way that reflected her belief that I was a worthy person with the ability and desire to engage, and she waited the very long time it took for me to smile back. That was the beginning of my long and wonderful relationship with Dr. Ricki Robinson, who has been my guide as I struggle to reach my goals of becoming a productive member of society and a person worthy of respect.

Many purported experts claim that individuals with autism are not interested in socializing. This is totally ridiculous. I love people, but my movement disorder constantly interferes with my efforts to interact. I cannot start and stop and switch my thinking or emotions or actions at the right time. As a result, I am often very lonely and this is the worst thing about autism. I get very sad when I watch my wonderful twin sister going off to do fun things that I cannot do. At moments like that, I passionately hate autism. So next time you see someone like me at your synagogue or at your event, remember that they probably feel really lonely and you could be the person to make their day by smiling at them and letting them know that they exist.

Although I have often felt invisible because I can't speak, I have also learned that autism is not entirely negative. For example, I get a VIP pass at Disneyland, and I also get to kiss all the beautiful counselors at camp and pretend I don't know any better. On a serious note, not being able to speak means that you spend lots of time listening. In fact, most of what I know I've learned from listening to conversations that other people didn't think I could hear. I've also observed that people with autism support each other in ways that typically developing people do not. My friends and I have all known the horrible embarrassment of having an autistic episode, so we really understand and support each other through triumphs as well as tribulations. Finally, because I have had to struggle every day of my life to do things that other kids take for granted, I think that I have experienced God's love in a way that most kids have not. I used to get very offended at the notion of being someone's community service project. But then I realized that while my buddies were teaching me how to be like other kids, I was teaching them how to appreciate the beauty of God's world in a new way. All in all, who gets the greater benefit?

All of you here made a commitment to come today and spend an afternoon and evening understanding what it is like to live with a disability. To be honest, it is hard. It is an enormous effort for me to do the simplest tasks like writing my name or tying my shoe. In my daily struggle, Judaism has been a constant source of hope, comfort and guidance. From my earliest experiences in our synagogue preschool to my more recent experiences at Jewish summer camps and youth groups, I have had wonderful peers who have seen me as a person made in God's image, with the same dreams and concerns as other kids. And while everyone else may be sleeping during the rabbi's sermon, I am always listening because I need all the help I can get in finding the strength to make it though each day.

I want to thank all of you for inviting me to participate today and for being pioneers because I have never been a keynote speaker before. It has often been my experience that people with disabilities, especially those of us who are nonverbal, don't get an opportunity to speak for ourselves. Our parents or our therapists or self-proclaimed experts speak for us. By including me as a presenter today, you are already light years ahead of many other communities. So thank you for believing in me and all the other kids like me.

For the past two years, I have been part of a musical theater program for kids with special needs called the Miracle Project. It was very aptly named because many miracles happened there that make the parting of the Red Sea pale in comparison. For one, I met my wonderful girlfriend Lexi, who also has autism and has the most beautiful voice and smile in the whole world. For another, I wrote a song that we used in the show and Lexi sang it. Most miraculously of all, we all accomplished far more than we ever expected because we were a team – autistic kids, siblings, volunteers and acting coaches. People with special needs don't need to be spoken to like dogs with "good job" and "good listening" and similar phrases used to train animals to do tricks. All we need is someone patient who believes that we can fly and notices our hard-earned little accomplishments. When all those little accomplishments accumulate over days and weeks and months and years, the results can be truly miraculous!

INVISIBLE DISABILITIES AT THE SYNAGOGUE

by Aliza Hausman

After finishing "Invisible Disability Kids Are Being Left Out", I cried. It wasn't the first time I'd read a story like this, about Jewish children with disabilities being pushed to the margins of the community, but every time, I find my heart sags in my chest and all my issues as an adult with invisible disability (fibromyalgia) overwhelm me.

Most synagogues have a wheelchair ramp but that's where inclusion for people with disabilities ends. I've watched a kid with visible disability act out at synagogue. Few people make comments but their faces register that discomfort that I know the mother has seen time and time again on other people's faces and I silently pray she doesn't notice this time.

But when a kid with an invisible disability acts out, people don't bother to hide their discomfort or distaste. So you can imagine that when an adult with an invisible disability "acts out," other adults can be cruel because as an adult, they are certain that "you should know better."

My husband is studying to be a pulpit rabbi and as his wife, I am "expected" to make an appearance at synagogues that are not set up to handle my invisible disability. Synagogue used to be a warm and inviting place to me but once I got sick, synagogue became a nightmare, an obstacle course.

I cannot stand *and* hold a prayerbook in my hands without experiencing excruciating pain. (I can barely hold a book when I am sitting.) Instead, I sit through the entire service (usually Friday services because Saturday services are unbearable) and more than once, people have made callous remarks about this. "You're supposed to stand for the Torah!" someone spits at me snidely. As if I have a choice of whether or not to stand at that moment. As if my legs wouldn't buckle if I tried.

Even sitting in those awful chairs (doesn't any synagogue have comfortable chairs?) hurts so bad that for moments at a time, I just sit there, not praying, but just trying to be present, trying not to cry out from the pain. Funny enough, people are more likely to stare at you in synagogue if you're sitting and not praying than they are to stare at you if you're talking. I know this because sometimes I just sit there at synagogue and

talk not only because I haven't seen my friends since

my last distant synagogue visit but also because sometimes, it distracts me from the pain.

I daydream of synagogues with plush chairs with built-in *shtenders* to hold up my prayerbook but even at these synagogues, my disability would not be entirely invisible. Because sitting also hurts, I often have to stretch and crack my bones during services and so of course, people have made callous remarks and even glared at me for this. Even after I explained why I was doing this.

Even knowing about my invisible disability, people have told me to leave services if I can't sit through them without my "distracting" stretches. They've asked me to sit in the back. They've added that I should only come back when I feel better...except that because I never "feel better" if I took their advice, I'd never come back. And I can't help but think that if I didn't come back that they would be more comfortable. Because disabilities, visible or invisible, make people very uncomfortable.

The moments when everybody loves synagogues, when everyone's voices are joined together into one, when people are clapping and banging away happily, are the moments when I remember that I forgot my earplugs and I know that by the end of services (if I can make it that far) I will have succumbed to a sensory overload that makes everything sound louder, harsher, painful to my ears.

But if I explained this to the friends who are kind enough to come over and greet me after services, I would probably (and I have) get called a "hypocondriac" so I just grit my teeth, smile and say "Hello" and as soon as they are gone, I hobble out of the synagogue, leaning on my husband for support.

Synagogue is an important part of Jewish life, not just for praying, but for the interactions and friendships you build with the community. I know that my world is smaller because I cannot attend synagogue with any kind of regularity. I know it is even smaller because I cannot host meals with friends without great cost (financial and physical). And so slowly, I feel pushed to the margins of the Jewish community. 11/09

Aliza Hausman is a Dominican-American Latina and Orthodox Jewish convert, freelancer writer, blogger and speaker.

Welcoming People With Disabilities Into Your Synagogue

from the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism website

Rabbis can...

- Make a commitment to creating an inclusive synagogue community.
- Learn more about the disabilities among members of your congregation and consider any special pastoral care that may be needed.
- Use “people-first” language when referring to people with disabilities and in written communications.
- Urge your congregation to consider people with disabilities when hiring staff and when electing congregational leaders.
- Encourage your congregation’s religious school to infuse the curriculum with multisensory teaching strategies to encourage success by all students. Encourage the religious school to include disability awareness in its curriculum about Jewish values.
- Read your movement’s statements on disabilities.
- Speak from the pulpit about disabilities and the importance of inclusion.
- Welcome people with disabilities as b’nai mitzvah.

Congregations can...

Take the following action steps right now:

- Make a commitment to creating an inclusive synagogue community.
- Use “people-first language” in all synagogue publications, communications, and on the website.
- Add the universal access symbol to your synagogue’s ads, signs, and publications, and include a statement that all are welcome.
- Hold a discussion or training session with staff members, the board, congregants and teachers about welcoming people with disabilities. Instruct ushers regarding appropriate ways to greet and offer assistance to people with disabilities.
- Review synagogue programs for inclusivity. Encourage people with disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of synagogue life. Are people with disabilities active participants on committees, the board, sisterhood and men’s club, in all programs and services, and on the staff?
- Review attitudes conveyed by written policies and unwritten codes of conduct toward people who look or act differently from others.
- Welcome children with disabilities into the pre-school and religious school. Commit to including children with disabilities in the synagogue youth groups. Speak to children with disabilities and their families about the ways that the religious school and youth group could be welcoming.

Take additional steps...

- Create a committee on accessibility. Ensure that people with disabilities participate in the review of the synagogue’s physical and programmatic accessibility.
- Assess the synagogue’s physical accessibility: Is the building wheelchair accessible? Is the bimah accessible? Could someone with fine motor limitations or a visual impairment open the ark? Is there space in the sanctuary for people in wheelchairs? Are light switches, water faucets, water fountains and mezzuzot at appropriate heights for people in wheelchairs or those who are small? Are the kip-pot and talleisim low enough for all to reach? What about the siddurim and chumashim? Does the building have adequate lighting? Are there companion restrooms so that a spouse, parent or PCA can

assist someone of the opposite sex?

- “Improve your synagogue’s air quality by dusting woodwork, brass and other fixtures in the sanctuary, vacuuming with a HEPA filter and cleaning air conditioning filters on a regular basis.” (from “Opening the Gates of Torah 50 Plus Programming and Action Ideas,” Opening the Gates of Torah Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month Resource Packet, Special Needs Department Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning, Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington, November 2004)
- Place directions to accessible entrances on doorways that are not accessible. Keep the accessible entrance unlocked when the synagogue is in use.
- Install Braille and raised-letter signage. Offer Braille and large-print siddurim and chumashim, and offer assistive listening devices for those who are hard of hearing. Explore other assistive devices or accommodations that would facilitate inclusion.
- Learn about resources for deaf congregants, including ASL interpreted services, which enhance accessibility for them.
- Keep resource information about disability-related programs and services, Jewish special education, and Jewish values related to disability in the synagogue library.
- Speak to the synagogue webmaster about making the website accessible.
- Offer transportation to services and programs to those who can’t drive themselves.
- Locate and support local Jewish disability programs.

Tips for Creating a More Inclusive Congregation

from the Union for Reform Judaism website

MAKING YOUR BUILDING ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL:

Do not insult a person who is deaf or put a stumbling block in front of someone who is blind. –Leviticus 19:14

AROUND THE BUILDING:

- Create a task force that examines the building to see what can be done to make it more accessible to people with disabilities. Be sure to include people with disabilities on the task force. Have the task force create a short-range and long-range plan to address any physical impediments to inclusion. The task force may also want to survey the congregation as to what accommodations are needed.
- Replace heavy exterior doors with sliding doors that will open automatically to allow people with disabilities to enter the building easily and without assistance.
- Expand doorways – particularly to bathrooms and sanctuary – so that they are wheelchair accessible. If possible, make single doors into double doors
- Add grab bars in toilet stalls.
- Place signage around the building that calls attention to handicap accessible entrances. Include Braille on other signs around the building.
- Place *mezuzot* at wheelchair height at appropriate locations.

IN THE SANCTUARY:

- Place kippot and prayer books at a level that can be reached by everyone.
- Make available large print prayer books, Braille prayer books or lighted magnifiers at the entrance to the synagogue.
- Improve the sound system in the sanctuary with assistive listening devices and upgraded speaker systems.
- Mention all forms of assistance for those with special needs in the Shabbat program handed out with the prayer book.
- Make your *bimah* more accessible with handrails, a ramp or lift. **Or**, place a table on the main level of the sanctuary so that anyone can receive an *aliyah*.
- Remove one or more pews to make space for wheelchair seating.

IDEAS FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

All of Israel is responsible for one another. -Shavuot 39a

- Learn more about the disabilities among members of your congregation and make plans for any special pastoral care that may be needed.
- Hold a discussion and training session with clergy, synagogue staff, board and committee members, religious school staff and youth workers about welcoming people with disabilities. Instruct ushers regarding appropriate ways to greet and offer assistance to people with disabilities.

- Review attitudes conveyed by written policies and unwritten codes of conduct toward people who look or act differently from others.
- Locate and support local Jewish disability resources and programs. Support the National Jewish Disability Awareness Month in your community.
- Create a Special Needs or Disability Awareness Committee. Match each committee member with a congregant who has special needs. The committee member should ensure that there is seating and other resources available for each congregant with special needs during services or other programming.
- Create an area on the application form for High Holiday Tickets and other congregational programs for people with disabilities to indicate what assistance they require to participate.
- Create a Special Needs Fund to help with costs of improved access to the building, prayer books for those with visual disabilities, a better sound system and other accommodations.

HELPING OUR COMMUNITY TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE:

If there be among you a needy person, thou shalt not harden thy heart, but thou shalt surely open thy hand.
Deuteronomy 15:7

- Write a statement of welcome and inclusion that is added to all congregational membership materials.
- Include the universal symbols of accessibility in all publicity and marketing for your congregation (i.e. the icons for wheelchair access, assistive listening devices, etc.)
- Keep resource information about disability-related programs and services, Jewish special education, and Jewish values related to disability in the synagogue library.
- Invite a speaker on community inclusion to lead a program in honor of Disability Awareness Month.
- Add a relevant disability related quote to the bulletin each week during Disability Awareness Month.
- Create a program or open forum that will allow congregants to discuss any attitudinal barriers to inclusion that may exist in your congregation. Explore why those attitudes exist and develop a list of strategies to address and eliminate them from your congregational community.
- Enroll your synagogue in the Accessible Congregations Campaign through The National Organization on Disability www.nod.org. This program seeks to enroll congregations of all faiths that commit to removing their barriers and welcoming people with all types of disabilities.

EDUCATING ALL OUR STUDENTS:

Educate each child according to their way. -Proverbs 22:6

- Write a statement of inclusion that welcomes all students and include it in marketing and welcome packets for religious school families.
- Include a short section on “Special Needs” in your school registration packet that inquires about any academic challenges or difficulties, student’s specific diagnostic label, and modifications or accommodations that may be necessary for success. Assure parents/guardians that this information will be confidential and for the student’s benefit.
- Encourage your congregation's religious school to infuse the curriculum with multi-sensory teaching strategies to encourage success by all students.

- Hire a full or part-time Special Needs Coordinator, who coordinates programs for all students with identifies special educational needs.
- Designate preschool/religious school *tzedakah* that is collected during Disability Awareness Month for the synagogue's Special Needs fund to enhance access to the building or to programs. During this time, integrate disability awareness and inclusion programming into the curriculum in an age appropriate way.
- Help children with special needs to succeed in Jewish educational settings with modified curriculum and other accommodations. For some students with special needs, curriculum may need to be individualized.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE AND FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:

Oh God, may all created in Your image recognize that they are kin, so that in one spirit and in one friendship, they may be forever united before you. -Traditional Liturgy

- Hold support group meetings for families with special needs concerns (all physical, emotional, developmental issues). The group should provide a forum for families to discuss and share ideas related to real challenges, i.e.: education, medical help, service providers, emotional support, etc. To make the group easier for all to attend, offer supervised activities for children and other people with special needs during the meetings.
- Ask Caring Committee members to assist members of the congregants with special needs with grocery shopping and other errands on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. Also ask Committee members to provide rides to and from the synagogue for programs and Shabbat services for congregants with special needs.

Start an Inclusion Committee

By Shelly Christensen, RJ.org

February 9, 2009

Congregations have asked how to start their own Inclusion Committee. I know that within the Reform movement, many congregations have made inclusion an important value. The question is "how do you turn that value into action?"

Inclusion doesn't happen just because someone says it's so! Like many other synagogue functions, a collaboration between congregants and professional staff can provide the impetus to move from having that great philosophical ideal to taking the steps to ensure that people with disabilities are welcome within the full circle of Jewish life. That is, most certainly, the objective.

Why do we need an Inclusion Committee?

The Inclusion Committee is a committee sanctioned by the Board of Trustees. Just like other Board committees, there is an appointed chairperson who may or may not be a member of the Board. The Inclusion Committee membership should include individuals with disabilities, family members, professionals, people interested in inclusion and members of the professional staff.

The Inclusion Committee is the organization's "go to" committee for resources and information about inclusion and how to address specific needs as they arise. Members of the Inclusion Committee are the organization's "experts" on inclusion, so it is important to have a diverse range of interests and knowledge among committee members.

The Inclusion Committee will guide the actions of your efforts with the support of the Board and the organization. The following information is your guide to starting your own Inclusion Committee.

How do you start an Inclusion Committee?

If you're thinking about starting the committee, then you have been thinking about how to respond to congregants concerns about inclusion in: preschool, religious school, b'nai mitzvah training, youth groups, camp, adult ed, etc. Don't worry--inclusion is a process--a thoughtful, well planned process.

1. Start by getting agreement from your clergy, board and lay leaders that the congregation needs to provide a means to focus on inclusion.
2. Next, ask people to join the committee. Agree to have a synagogue professional sit on the committee, parents, people who are professionally involved in disability supports, social action advocates, and to ensure that we engage the motto "Nothing about me without me" people with disabilities.
3. Schedule your first meeting with lots of publicity. Use your bulletin and weekly e-mail and any other effective forms of communication.
4. Establish a Mission Statement for the committee. This is more important than it seems. It will help members focus as a group on the overall goals of the committee.
5. Inclusion is woven into every activity within the congregation. How do you know where to start? How do you know where you are going unless you know where you are? Have the Inclusion Committee be responsible for an assessment of the congregation.

Speaking of Disabilities

Indiana Institute on Disability and Community

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE □ Feb. 27, 2007

Speaking of disabilities. "People first" is the most important principle in communicating with and about people with disabilities, said Vicki Pappas, director of the Center for Planning and Policy Studies at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. This standard applies in a literal sense when describing people -- "person with autism" is appropriate; "autistic person" is not -- and in a figurative sense when interacting with someone who has a disability. "People with disabilities would prefer to be seen as people, not as objects of pity or as heroes who have overcome adversity," she said. "When you meet someone who has a disability, say hello, make eye contact, and give yourself time to get to know that person like you would with any new acquaintance." Below are more of Pappas's tips for effective communication.

DO use person-first language, especially in print. Regardless of the particular disability, put the person before the condition in every description. For example: "man who has cerebral palsy," "girl who is deaf," "teacher with epilepsy."

DON'T mention a disability if it is not relevant. "If you are writing an article about a professor's research, and that person happens to use a wheelchair, you don't need to mention it unless it relates somehow to the research process. This is just the same principle you would use in deciding whether to mention that someone is Jewish or Latino," Pappas said.

DO use specific terminology. If it is important to describe a person's disability, be straightforward and avoid terminology like "handicapable," "differently abled" or "special." This type of verbiage comes across as condescending, Pappas said.

DON'T make someone a hero for an ordinary feat. Avoid characterizing everyday activities as huge accomplishments for people with disabilities. "I'm all for including a bride with hearing loss in a wedding special, but when the headline is 'Deaf Woman Gets Married,' that's insulting," Pappas said.

DO greet people at their eye level. When talking with a person who uses a wheelchair, it is appropriate to sit or crouch down in order to talk face-to-face, Pappas said. "Even if you are speaking through an interpreter, it's important to make that direct eye contact," she said. Similarly, it is best to approach a person who is blind by announcing your presence.

DON'T worry about common phrases. "It is not a big deal if you say 'See you later' to someone who is blind. No one is going to be offended by these types of expressions. Relax and use your natural manner of speaking," she said.

DO respect personal space. "It's okay to offer assistance in a polite manner such as holding a door open. Beyond that it is best to ask first rather than to rush in and grab a person who appears to be struggling," Pappas said. A final note on personal space: a wheelchair should be approached as though it were part of the body -- don't sit or lean on someone's wheelchair unless you know them very well.

Jewish Family & Children's Service Services for People with Disabilities

The following services are grounded in the belief that all people with disabilities should live with dignity in the community and enjoy the rights afforded their peers regardless of their differences. Services reflect the values of individual autonomy, community inclusion, and care continuity. These services also make it possible for people with disabilities to maintain a Jewish home and participate in cultural and religious activities in the manner that is most meaningful for them.

- **Family Circle Programs**

Information, consultation and support for people with disabilities and their families, including the **Disabilities Resource Network** and **Family Futures Planning**.

- **Supported Housing Programs**

Daily living supports and community for adults with disabilities who seek to live independently in their own apartments or in small group settings.

- **Independent Living Supports**

Case management and direct services that help people with disabilities maintain stability and independence while pursuing their personal goals.

- **Day and Work Supports**

Weekday programs that build vocational and independent-living skills through volunteer and paid work experience, social interaction, and small-group learning.

- **Social Programs**

Jewish Life programming that offers socialization, recreation, celebration, and learning for adults with developmental disabilities or psychiatric challenges.

- **Special Needs Trusts**

A means of setting aside funds for a person with disabilities without impacting access to Social Security and state-funded health insurance benefits.

For more information, please call 781-647-JFCS (5327) or visit www.jfcsboston.org.

More services for people with disabilities

The CJP Disabilities Housing Initiative is working with JF&CS and other partners to expand the number of supportive housing units for people with disabilities. For more information on the Housing Initiative, contact Elizabeth Sternberg at 617-457-8593 or elizabeths@cjp.org.

The Connections Program at Jewish Vocational Services provides a continuum of services that help Jews with mental illness and other disabilities improve the quality of their lives through personalized career planning and placement services. Support is provided on the job or in school to enable participants to successfully achieve and maintain their goals. For more information about Connections or other JVS programs serving people with disabilities, please contact Rebecca Pyle at **617-399-3204** or rpyle@jvs-boston.org.

Gateways: Access to Jewish Education helps Jewish children with a full range of learning styles, abilities, and challenges succeed academically, socially, and spiritually. They provide a flexible array of educational programs, supports, and resources in a variety of Jewish settings, including Jewish day schools and supplemental programs. For more information, please visit www.jgateways.org.

Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters (JBBBS) Friend 2 Friend Program matches volunteers and adults with disabilities (18 and older) in one-to-one friendships. In the traditional program model, our matches meet 2-4 times per month doing fun community activities of their choosing. In the MAGIC model, matches meet one weeknight each month to enjoy a variety of events with other pairs of friends. For more information, visit www.jbbbs.org.

The Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston offer a wide variety of programs for people with disabilities of all ages. JCC programs for children with disabilities include early identification and intervention, adapted aquatics, martial arts, summer camping experiences, and teen friendship groups. Programs for adults include activity groups, adapted aquatics, social groups and Jewish learning. The JCC also works with advocates and families on inclusion issues through its "Beyond the Ramp" conferences and committees. For more information, please contact Judy Pearl at jpearl@jccgb.org or **617-558-6508**, or visit www.jccgb.org.□

For more information about these and other Jewishly affiliated programs serving people with disabilities in the Greater Boston area, please visit www.cjp.org.