

Rubber Meets the Road

A *tachlis* look at the universal steps a synagogue needs to take to be successful at inclusion and make it a cornerstone of your house of worship.

Speakers: Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi and Meagan Buren

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I. Session Slides

Slide 1

RESPECT
ABILITY

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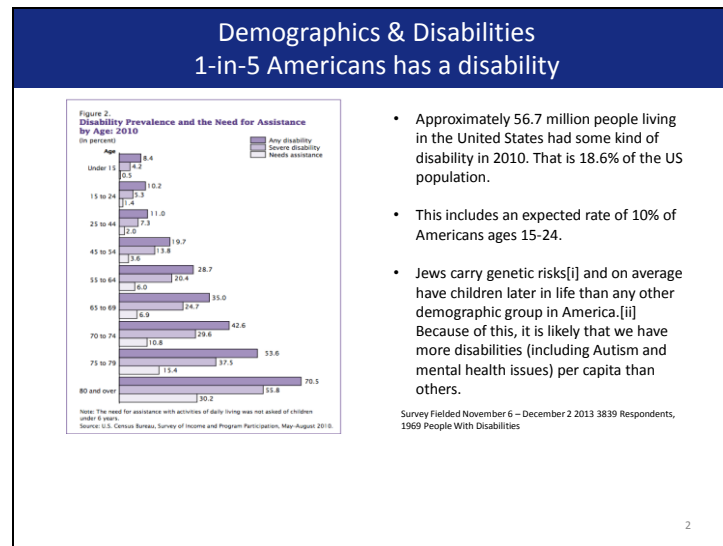
Rubber Meets the Road
Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, President, RespectAbilityUSA

Cohort Members:
Conservative Synagogue Adath Israel of Riverdale
Park Avenue Synagogue
Park Slope Jewish Center
Temple Beth Emeth
Union Temple
Westchester Reform Temple

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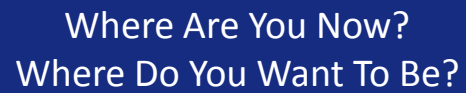
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Slide 3

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Rubber Meets the Road



..VERSUS..

involvement inclusion

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How To Get There

- **Perfection is the enemy of the "good enough."** Good results on a great plan are always faster, more efficient and effective than perfection.
- **Work backwards from the finish line with a strong theory of change.** Determine the goal you want to achieve, and then work your plan and timeline backwards from your goal.

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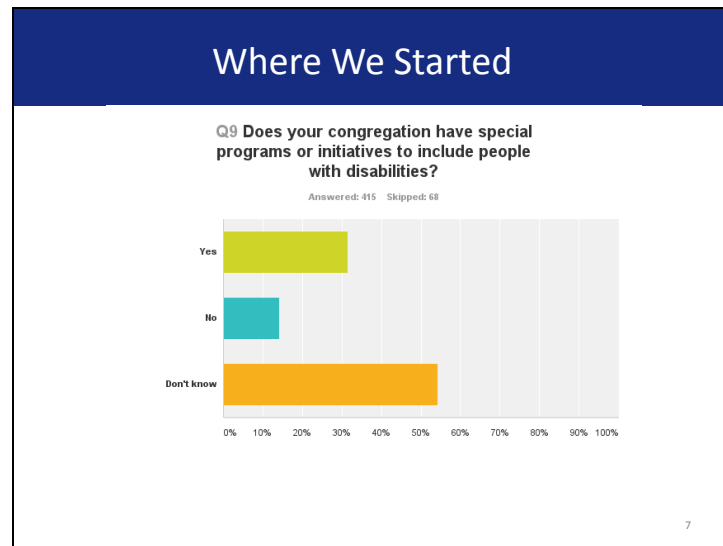
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RespectAbility Cohort Hands-On Inclusion Summit- March 2, 2016

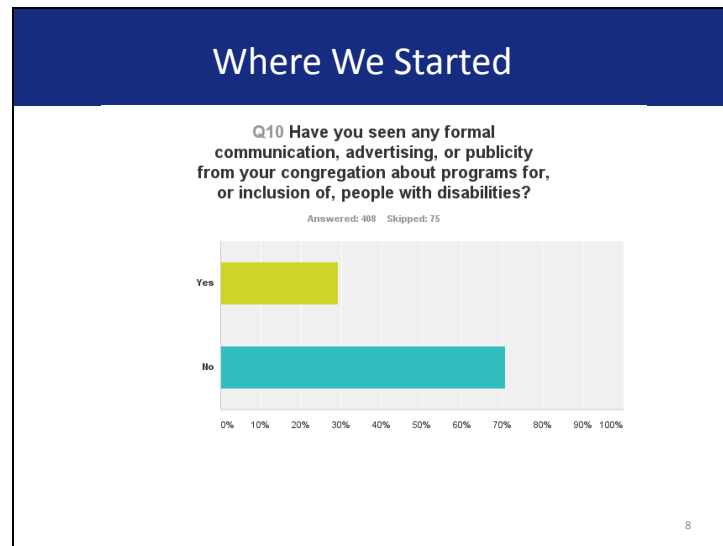


- It's ok to start with baby steps.
- First impressions can be lasting
- Have proper tools and aids to lead to success

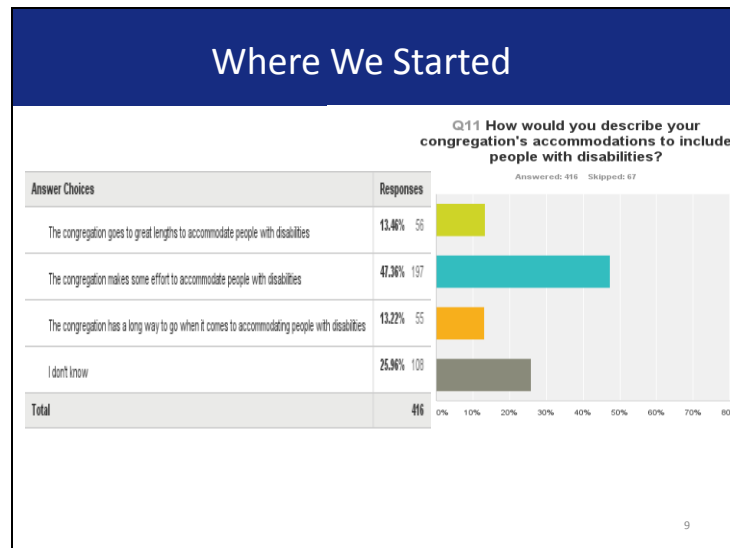
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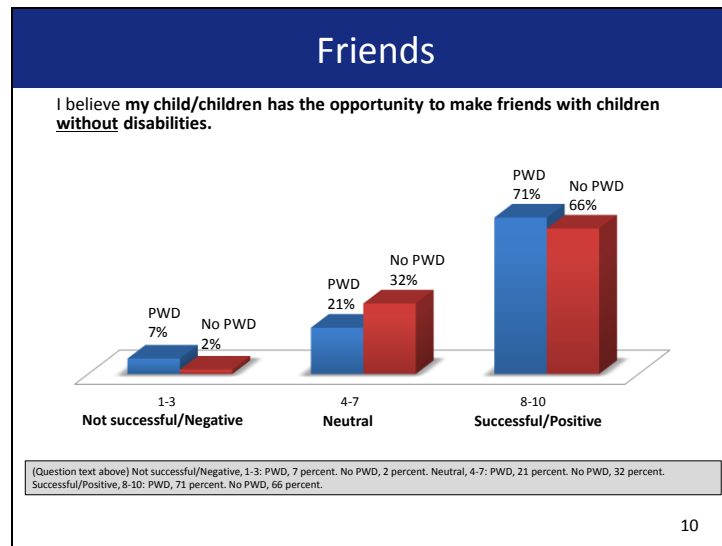
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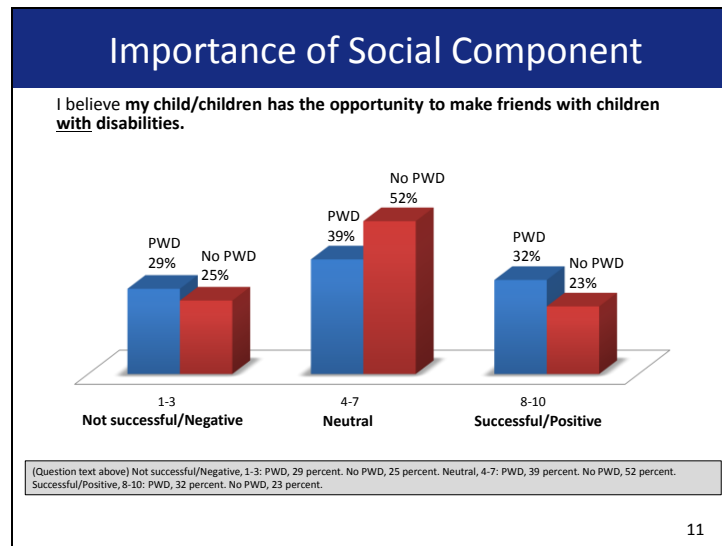
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Bottom Line

- 1. Be Clear About Your Targeted Goals and Theory of Change:** Build your project management system and performance metrics
- 2. Don't expect people to come to you – go to them**
(Events, social media etc.)
- 3. Focus on outcomes, not outputs.**
Real results can take a marathon, not a sprint. Don't forget to take a step back and re-evaluate people, processes and performance metrics and to re-adjust as you go.
- 4. Smile.**
Work, no matter the hours and intensity, should be fun. Leaders with a "glass half full" mentality will get more productivity and positive outcomes from their teams. After all, life is short. Why not make it fun?

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Attitudes and Awareness

- Communication Plan
- Sermons
- Website
- Newsletter
- Signage
- Social Media



The screenshot shows the website of the Paragroup Jewish Center. The header includes the organization's name and a navigation menu with links: HOME/ABOUT US, CALENDAR, LEARNING / LIBRARY, COMMUNITY / KIDSHULAN, SOCIAL JUSTICE / TIKVAH, and SUPPORT PSJC. The main content area features a section titled 'Inclusion At PSJC' with a sub-header 'For more information on the Inclusion Hands on Workshop with RespectAbilityUSA, read below or click [here](#).' The text describes the center's commitment to inclusivity and its participation in the 'Inclusion Hands on Workshop' project. It mentions that the center has been awarded a grant through LUK-Pedagogik to participate in the project, which aims to help communities in the NYC area to foster the development of inclusive communities and to support the needs of individuals with disabilities of all ages, both within formal and informal educational frameworks. The text also states that the center's mission is to be inclusive to all those who seek innovative and competent Jewish education. It mentions that the center's committee and MATAN, which work with families to find the best model and schedule for a family, offer family services on Shabbat and holidays open to members and non-members. Services are led by experienced leaders with guitar accompaniment and encourage movement and participation by the children present. A small note at the bottom states: 'If you are looking for the Shabbat or a workshop and have questions about the accessibility of our facilities, please email us at [info@paragroupjewishcenter.org](#)'.

The message that all people are of equal value and must be respected and heard fairly, must be communicated from the Rabbi, President, Executive Director, School head and the lay leadership

Physical Accessibility



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Physical Accessibility



The photograph shows a brick building with a banner that reads: "The way that appearance as we make ourselves to people of all abilities". The banner also features the International Symbol of Access (a stylized figure in a wheelchair) and logos for "IBO CARE" and "ACCESSIBILITY". In the foreground, there are orange construction barriers and a black car parked on the street.

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RespectAbility Cohort Hands-On Inclusion Summit- March 2, 2016



RespectAbility Cohort Hands-On Inclusion Summit- March 2, 2016



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Practices and Policies

- Inclusion Coordinator (Central Address)
- Application Forms
- Mission Statement and Inclusion Policy
- Line on All Program Ads

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This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

- Meets the needs of Jews with Disabilities
- Needs to be available
- Plan and trains staff depending on children's abilities
- One key address for questions

Nothing About Us Without Us.







- People have to work together.
- Need a strong inclusion committee.
- Support one another.
- We all are one community.

Programming

Remember: ATP- Ask the Person

- Line on All Forms- ok to say you need notice
- Checklist for Events
- List of Volunteers or Staff for Meeting Key Needs



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- Line on All Forms- ok to say you need notice
- Checklist for Events
- List of Volunteers or Staff for Meeting Key Needs



Creating a Home Away from Home: Support or Affinity Groups




- Family members of people with disabilities benefit from peer groups.
- People with disabilities should be able to have their own gatherings when THEY want to.
- Need mutual support.

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Training

- Teachers
- Staff
- Ushers/Greeters
- Don't Forget-
Create the
Infrastructure
 - Put it in your
standard manuals
and procedures



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- Teachers
- Staff
- Ushers/Greeters
- Don't Forget-
Create the
Infrastructure
 - Put it in your
standard manuals
and procedures



Youth

- Application
- Process to Speak to Parents
- Teacher Training
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah Process
- Social



Child's Name _____

Our goal is to provide a wonderful year for your child at our Religious School. To do so, would you please tell us a bit more about your child? We ask so we may best partner with you with respect for your child within our commitment to inclusion. This information will be reviewed by our Rabbi and Religious School Director only and will be kept in confidence. Please note that either the Rabbi or Religious School Director may reach out to you to further discuss how best to meet your child's needs.

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GO, FIGHT, WIN!

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Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/RespectAbilityUSA>

<https://www.facebook.com/RespectAbility4All>

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II. Attitudes and Awareness

A. Example Cohort Sermons

1. Park Avenue Synagogue

Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove
Erev Rosh Hashanah, 5776

Inclusion

One of the oldest, and sweetest, and well known tales of the holiday season is told of a young Jewish boy, orphaned as a child and adopted into a warm hearted gentile family. The boy knew himself to be Jewish, though he did not know what exactly that meant. He lived a simple life as a shepherd, going out each day with his flock, playing his flute all along. One fall day, sitting at the side of the road, he noticed person after person traveling to the nearby city of Berdichev. One by one they passed, until the boy's curiosity got the best of him and he asked the travelers where exactly they were going.

"We are on our way to Berdichev to spend the high holidays with the great tzaddik, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev."

"High Holidays," the boy asked, "What are they?"

The men laughed, "Silly boy. The Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur – the whole world is being judged. You should not be here with sheep, you belong in the synagogue!"

The words struck a chord in the boy and not knowing what to do, but knowing he had to do something, and, not yet familiar the new High Holiday ticket policy, the boy and his flute followed the crowd into the synagogue. Never in his life had he seen such a sight. The sound of the Hazzan's voice, the townsfolk engaged in prayer, every iPhone out of sight and set to "vibrate." It was at that moment that the boy knew, more than anything else, what he did not know. He could not read Hebrew, and he could not recite a single prayer. More than anything in the world he wanted to join in, but he lacked the tools to do so, and nobody, but nobody, paid him any attention. All thru Rosh Hashanah, and then Kol Nidre he sat, seeking a way into this holy community. The time for Neilah prayers arrived, the tension in the room mounted and he understood the sanctity of the waning hour. One by one, the worshippers gathered at the ark, silent and without kibitzing; in his eighth year the Rabbi's stern warnings seemed to have finally taken effect. So sacred was the moment, some say, they saw the head-usher offering prayers of his own, and some say...even the executive director.

With tears in his eyes and unable to contain himself any longer, the boy took out his flute and began to play. A joyous, flurry of blaring notes. All the worshippers froze and stared, "How dare this child create such an outburst! How dare he desecrate our sacred day!" With every darting eye turned against him, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak ran off the bimah toward the terrified boy and embraced him. "This boy," announced the Rebbe, "has saved us all. All day long, I saw that our prayers had not ascended to the heavens, and with the gates of Neilah closing, our names were not yet inscribed in the book of life. Only by way of his pure heart and the pure prayer of his flute, more true than any prayer offered by any of us today, have the gates of heaven opened. We owe this boy our gratitude...and may each one of us in this sacred hour learn to pray as he does."

To each and every one here, old friends and new, I welcome you as we usher in the High Holiday Season and the Jewish Year of 5776. May it be a sweet year, filled with health and happiness, for you, your family, the Jewish people and all of humanity.

As we open our hearts and souls to the year ahead, this evening I want to talk to you what we need to do to make our community a more inclusive one. Who among us, I wonder, is that shepherd boy looking for a point of entry, but lacking the tools to do so? Who is it who stands at the periphery so desperate to be a stakeholder in our tradition – but unable to get in? How can we meet those people where they are in order to make their journey shorter, clearer and more easily traveled.

Let's begin with the most obvious, the new High Holiday mahzor, Mahzor Lev Shalem, that sits in your hands. I want to publicly acknowledge and thank Deanna and Bob Adler and family for their generosity in underwriting this project. The prayers are the same, in some cases more traditional than before, but the spirit of this mahzor is one of inclusion--the translation of the prayers, the transliteration of the prayers for those unfamiliar with the Hebrew, the cues on when to bow, the explanatory comments and the beautiful readings that will accompany us on our journey in these days and years ahead. Though it lacks a flute, the ethic this new mahzor embodies is that of our story. An egalitarian prayer book with the patriarchs and matriarchs side by side, Yizkor meditations in memory of a parent who was hurtful, a *hineni* prayer for a male or female hazzan, and instructions for those new to Jewish prayer. Be it your first or fiftieth Rosh Hashanah this mahzor provides a path for those seeking entry into our tradition. We dedicate this mahzor this evening, we express our gratitude to the Adler family, and we pray that our humble petitions, now and in the years ahead, will be received by the heavens above.

Significant as the mahzor is, it is but the first, not final step towards creating an inclusive community. It is nothing short of remarkable to consider how many “outsiders” we will encounter in the days ahead, alerting us to the inclusive calling of the hour. The central figure of tomorrow's Torah reading is Hagar, a name which literally means – “the stranger / *Ha-Ger*” – she and her son cast out of Abraham's household, only to be brought back in by God. And then Hannah – a woman whose inability to have children inflicts incalculable mental anguish, her self-worth in the universe called into question as she must bear witness to the fruit bearing wombs of her contemporaries. The haftorah for second day Rosh Hashana tells of the tears of Rachel, whose losses puts her in physical and spiritual exile. Perhaps most famously, the tortured relationship between Abraham and his son Isaac, who, according to numerous commentaries, struggled with his own developmental hurdles. On Yom Kippur afternoon, when we will encounter the prophet Jonah, who, from his very beginning to end, flees the boundaries of community. The high holidays are a rolodex of outsiders looking in; and in each and every case, redemption comes by way of a divine act that welcomes that individual back into the fold.

All of which begs the question for us today. Who is the shepherd boy, the person estranged amongst us seeking entry? What is it that we must do – God-like – to welcome them in? First and foremost, tonight we open our eyes to those seeking entry into the Jewish community. On more than one occasion, I have spoken of the need to reconsider our communal posture to the prospective convert. The Jewish community and our synagogue in particular must understand itself to be an agent towards creating Jewish families – not a

gatekeeper preventing that from happening. We must do so because our children and grandchildren will, statistically speaking, fall in love with someone who is not Jewish. We must do so because we believe that the spirit and practice of Jewish life is compelling, worthwhile and worth sharing. We, who are committed to the Jewish future, must be ever eager to extend a warm embrace to those seeking to enter the Jewish fold.

To be an inclusive community, to make our synagogue reflect Isaiah's vision of a house of prayer for all people, will involve a soul searching inventory. There are so many lacking the keys to enter, each different, but each equally viewing the Jewish world from the outside in. The story of the shepherd boy is told many ways, interestingly, half the time the boy is raised in non-Jewish surroundings, half the time the boy is described as differentially abled. Proud as we are of our Matan program for children with differentiated needs, proud as we are that we live stream our services to home-bound members, we know there is much more we can do. We need to wire this room and others with hearing loop technologies to assist people with hearing loss. We need to make every part of the building wheelchair accessible including, especially so, this bimah. Lest we forget, some of our greatest biblical heroes faced disabilities of some sort. Isaac was blind, Jacob walked with a limp, Moses, our greatest prophet of all, had a speech impediment. Neither their spiritual potential, nor any of ours, is contingent on being labeled "fully able." On this subject, there is no "us" and "them," we are all equally endowed with infinite dignity. As you may well know, a *Sefer Torah* is rendered unfit/*pasul* if it is missing even a single letter. So too the "kashrut" of our entire community rests on each Jew being present, each Jew hearing God's voice according to his or her capacity.

In the years ahead, our community must understand its mission to be one of radical welcoming. Whether we succeed or not, however, depends not only on any one mahzor, bimah refurbishment, policy from the board or sermon from me. Our success depends on each of you. How you greet the person of color walking into this building for the first time; what you say - not what I say, will determine if he or she will come back. Five years ago I announced that the clergy of Park Avenue will officiate at same-sex weddings. But how a gay couple is greeted when they walk in hand-in-hand, that only you can determine. What about the congregant whose hearing aid buzzes too loudly? What about the *utzidik* kid, who, God bless him, has trouble sitting still during services; speaking or singing a bit too loudly? Will you, like the congregants in our story, shoot darts at that child and his parents, or will your words and gestures communicate that your prayer, that the Jewish people, is more complete in the knowledge that ours is a community welcoming to everyone. One thing I know about the people at the periphery; they don't want your pity, in fact they don't want special treatment at all. All they want is that here in a synagogue of all places, they are greeted and received no differently than we would want for ourselves, as individuals created in the image of God. What is being Jewish, if not to live with an awareness that we were once strangers in a strange land and have that awareness inform all our interactions? As the prophet Isaiah teaches us on Yom Kippur, the rituals of Judaism are rendered hollow and meaningless if they are not accompanied by a compassionate and eager welcome of those strangers amongst us.

My beloved teacher, Dr. Eliezer Slomovic of blessed memory, once shared with me the story of God's complaint office. One day, three people (of sorts), walked in. The first was the *aleyну* prayer, the second was the prayer for rain/*geshem*, and the third was an old man. First,

the *aleynu* prayer spoke up. “God, I am a prayer that affirms your sovereignty, calls for the establishment of your earthly kingdom and speaks to the aspirations of a broken humanity. I am so important, but you...you stuck me at the very end of every service right before mourner’s kaddish. All anyone thinks about when they sing *aleynu* is the cookie they will eat Kiddush to follow. God, I deserve better than that. It is just not right.”

Next, comes the prayer for rain / *geshem*, in Hebrew “*Mashiv Haruah U’Morid Hagashem*.” “God,” says the prayer, “what could be more important than rain. Our harvest, our well-being, our sustenance, our land, our people – it all depends on me, *geshem*. And yet four words are all I get. A *shtikele* of mention and sometimes the Cantor even forgets to recite me. God, it is just not right.”

Third and finally comes the old man. “God, I am a modest man, and though I am alone in the world, I am content. Every week I come to shul, take my assigned seat at the back enjoying the words of the rabbi and the prayers of the hazzan. God, please don’t think me vain, but when I come in and I look at everyone with their backs to me, with their *talesim* draped on their shoulders, and I see them and nobody notices me...and nobody greets me...God, it is just not right.”

God thinks through the problems and the three complainers are called back in. To the *aleynu* prayer, God says: “Look, there is not a lot I can do. The prayer books have already been printed, the Adlers made their donation, and the hazzan – well let’s just say he doesn’t handle change well. But this is what I can do. Three times a year, twice on Rosh Hashanah and once on Yom Kippur, I will make a very big deal of you. Right in the middle of the service, when the crowds are largest we will sing you full force. The Rabbi, the Cantor will get down on their knees and everyone will understand the importance of *aleynu*.” Satisfied, the *aleynu* smiled and left contented.

And to *geshem*, the prayer for rain, God replies. “Look, I get it. Rain is important. But you know how these new rabbis are. You know we live in a time of diminishing attention spans – they are pruning the service every chance they get. Besides, with these new desalination plants on the Mediterranean, some are wondering if we even still need a prayer for rain. But this is what I will do, once a year, at the end of Sukkot, on Shemini Atzeret, when everyone comes to shul for *yizkor*, we will pray for *geshem* to your heart’s delight. The *hazzan* will set you to glorious music, and you will have your proper due.” Satisfied, the *geshem* prayer smiled and left contented.

Finally, to the old man, God turns. “I tried and tried. I called the membership director, the executive director, I even put in a call to the Rabbi. But the seats just don’t move in the sanctuary and your seat in RR, well that is where you will be for the foreseeable future. But this is what I can do. Every Friday night, in the Kabbalat Shabbat Service there is a beautiful prayer called Lecha Dodi when the Sabbath bride is welcomed. At the conclusion of that prayer, from this day forward, I hereby decree that everyone will stand up, turn around with a smile and face the back of the room and everyone will see that you sir are there in shul.” And the old man smiled and left contented.

Friends, sometimes spiritual heroics involve nothing more than a kind word, warm handshake and generous smile. These are the gestures that designate us to be an inclusive community. In the days ahead, in the years ahead, every Friday night, and every day, may we

never be so comfortable that we become inured to the needs of the outsider seeking in. After all, are we not, each and every one of us, desperately seeking to stand in God's presence. May we always be the sort who signal, in spirit and in deed, that our community has been made whole by dint of the presence of another. *Kol Haneshamah Tehallel Yah*. With all of our souls may we praise God. *Kol Haneshamah Tehallel Yah*. May every soul may sing God's praises. And may each and every one of us be blessed with a year of health, happiness and peace.

2. Park Slope Jewish Center

Rosh Hashanah Day 1, 5776

Rabbi Carie Carter

INCLUSION

Today, on Rosh Hashanah, the Sabbatical year of 5775 comes to a close.

After a year of trying to do things differently—a year of evaluating our relationship to the land, to the food we eat, a year of offering debt relief and considering the inter-connectedness of humanity, a year of letting go of personal control and expectation, this year of Shmitah—this year of Release and Refreshing—has ended. And, as one might ask professors who have just returned from Sabbatical, so we must ask ourselves: What do we do now? How might we at PSJC be different in this year following our year of letting go?

For me, the beginning of an answer to this question lies in the Torah reading we heard just a short time ago.

It is the story of: Sarah's Intense Jealousy, the Expulsion of Hagar, the Near Death of Ishmael. The Torah reading we explore on this first day of Rosh Hashanah is clearly what Phyllis Trible calls: A Text of Terror.

We are horrified when we read it—embarrassed and ashamed by our ancestor Sarah's harsh treatment of Hagar—literally referring to her as *amah* (Slave); abusing her (in a word used to describe the harsh labor with which the Egyptians afflicted the Israelites; and eventually banishing her (and her child) from her tent, sending them forth into the barren wilderness. We listen in disbelief to Abraham's acquiescence to Sarah's desire—his willingness to banish his first-born son (whom, only a short time earlier, had been circumcised, entering the covenant with his father Abraham and with God). Our eyes fill with tears as we join Hagar in her desperate crying over the fate of her son—alone beneath a bush awaiting death.

Yet, we are absolutely riveted to this tale, not solely for the drama of the situation—but because we recognize ourselves within it. Who in this room has not—at one moment or another in our lives—felt alone—or experienced the fear, if not the reality of the loneliness of isolation? Who does not harbor even the tiniest bit of fear at the prospect of being abandoned? *Al taazveini Al tashlicheinu*—we cry out on Yom Kippur. – Do not abandon us! Do not cast us away! It is among our deepest fears! Even the Psalm for the Days of Awe contains an allusion to the fear and despair of abandonment by parents: *ki avi v'imy azavuni –v'Adonai ya'asfeini*. (Though my father and my mother leave me, Adonai will care for me)

The Rabbis who established our system of Torah reading for Rosh Hashanah were cognizant of this connection, this relevancy as well. The official explanation for the selection of the Torah reading for today's most hope-filled day—A Day of Recalling the Creation of our world and the

tremendous possibilities born from it—is the statement at the start of the story: *V'Adonai Pakad et Sarah* --the moment when a long-barren Sarah is “remembered” by God. Yet there is another level to the inclusion of this story as well. For the Rabbis who fixed the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah recognized that on this day of celebrating the Creation of Humanity—we can not hide from one of the most basic realities of human existence—the potential for loneliness and isolation. And the Torah Reading for this first day of Rosh Hashanah is about exactly that.

From Hagar and Ishmael we learn that we as human beings have the ability to feel utterly isolated and alone

And from the actions of Sarah, we are reminded that WE have the ability to isolate, marginalize and expel others.

One of the privileges and responsibilities of being a congregational rabbi is to hear and to hold the stories of the members of this community. Because of that, I look out into this room and know that far too many of us—have tasted, have known the sadness, the isolation of Exile—literally or figuratively. We have felt isolated from home, family, or community. The reasons and degree may vary, but the reality of isolation is far too familiar—for far too many of us.

People in this room have been thrown out of their homes for coming out as Gay/as Trans. People in this room today have been kicked out of their community for marrying “out of our faith”. People in this room today have suffered the loss of friends/family as they’ve gone through life.

As a result, I know that we at PSJC recognize the harm done when someone is thrown out due to the color of their skin, their beliefs, sexuality, gender identity, or for so many other reasons. We don’t have to be reminded. And I am proud of the fact that we have long been a community that would be repulsed to be involved in such horrendous behavior. Despite the actions of our ancestor Sarah, we would never consider sending someone out into exile—knowing that they had no place to go. That I know.

As decent, sensitive human beings, our challenge is not an intentional/malicious expulsion. But a potentially more dangerous insidious problem—not outright cruelty, but a lack of attention; not explicit expulsion, but a simple OVERLOOKING of the needs of others ---of inadvertently putting up walls that make our community inaccessible or unwelcoming to others.

Earlier this year, I was reminded how easy it is to be blind to the needs of whole communities of individuals. With all the best of intentions, we as a community (like so many synagogues in America today) have fallen victim to the old adage: *Early to bed, early to rise makes a man Healthy and Wealthy and Wise.*

Honestly, I’m not sure about the early to bed/early to rise portion of the phrase (this is NYC after all), but the Healthy, Wealthy and Wise piece has indeed taken hold.

We (like so many others) focus on people who are Healthy and fit, those who are well-off financially (the Wealthy) , and the Wise (those whose intelligence is immediately clear). (or at least those who present as such). And we do so to the virtual exclusion of all others. Without even noticing it, we marginalize those who are economically disadvantaged, those who have physical or mental disabilities. . . .

To paraphrase Rabbi Sid Schwartz: “It is precisely because our institutions tend to privilege the “abled” that we essentially make those who might not appear as able invisible. Even if the disabled do not experience outright exclusion. . . many feel shunned when they do show up. Staying invisible is just easier for those not perceived to be as able but it doesn’t lessen the sense that the Jewish community is a private club catering to those who are indeed, “healthy, wealthy and wise.”

It is so easy to focus on the “high functioning” people in our midst—We measure ourselves against them—and feel ourselves healthier, wealthier, and wiser simply by being around them. Our focus is so narrow at times that those on the margins are simply overlooked. When it comes to questions of inclusion, it’s not so much what we do—as much as what we don’t do—that is at issue.

Consider the days when forms assumed a couple consisted of a man and a woman. It doesn’t seem like a big thing—and I am sure it wasn’t done maliciously, but for a same-sex couple, that was a clear message that we don’t see you—you do not belong. We changed our forms to address that a long time ago, and recently, we made another change, namely to leave a blank for gender identification (no longer forcing people into a binary definition of gender that may not fit them), finally saying, in a very simple/basic way: You who are Trans are welcome and included here.

It is easy for us to ignore the needs of people we don’t even recognize in our presence. A story was shared with me about a blind man who came to a rabbi of a synagogue to inquire as to whether or not the shul had a Braille Siddur on hand. “No”, the rabbi responded kindly. “We actually do not have anyone who is blind in the shul.” The visitor said: Have you ever thought that you don’t have anyone who needs such a Siddur davka because you don’t offer a Braille Siddur? There are blind people like me all around the neighborhood—looking for a place to pray---if we could only find siddur---and a synagogue --that saw us. “

How often do people just walk away because we inadvertently make them feel excluded and unseen? How simple is it to make sure we have large print siddurim, a braille machzor easily available for those with limited vision, an easy to use chairlift for those with mobility issues? How easy it is to overlook these simple acts—and unintentionally—to make people feel unwelcomed.

Sometimes we feel like an outsider because we are unseen or invisible---

And sometimes it is because we feel so out of place that we are sure everyone is looking at us, like an animal in a zoo.

Consider the story of Kevin Connolly. Kevin was born without legs. Using a sort of leather body boot, Kevin hikes, camps, skis, and lives an active life. The amazing thing about Kevin is that being born without legs is not crippling for him. It is however, as the camera shows, crippling for us. Traveling around the globe by skateboard, Kevin shot photographs of people as they looked at him—32,000 photos. One sees shocked faces, tight lipped faces, angry and confused faces, sad faces, closed faces. Can you imagine what it must be like to be the recipient of those looks, day in and day out? To be made to feel so much on the outside of life—so alien—your being so devalued, so un-embraced by humanity?

And yet. . . that is part of the reality of so many—so often.

And among the most often ignored, the most often overlooked, and the most common recipient of shocked looks---the most often made to feel “OTHER” in our society today are people with disabilities and their families.

Between 34-43 million people have some type of disability

More than 50% of people over age 65 (32 million) have some level of disability

Nine million people of all ages are severely disabled and need personal assistance for daily activities.

70 million adults deal with chronic pain; 4.8 million live with the effects of stroke

Nearly 1 child in every 166 is diagnosed with Autism.

And yet how often do we look the other way? How often do we refuse to adjust our “way of doing things” to make something more accessible for others?

I know a wonderful Brooklyn family who have one child with autism and one neurotypical child. They have created their own custom for one of the days of Rosh Hashanah: They go apple-picking as a family. It’s a beautiful custom. What challenges me is that they came up with this idea simply because they could not find a place that worked for their family (with their autistic child) in any synagogue in the area.

How many families are ostracized, are exiled—like Ishmael?—How many in this shul are made to feel uncomfortable or unwelcomed because the needs of one member of the family are not taken into consideration. How many don’t even try to enter the doors of a synagogue because they simply don’t believe that people can see them through the walls, the barriers we have erected.

This, unfortunately, is the reality in our world today. But this does not have to be the case. And I’d argue that this is our year to find a different way. For this year following Shnat Hashmitah is our year of embracing the Biblical tradition of *Hakhel*—the special once in seven year ritual of bringing the entire community together for the reading of the Torah. This is our year of *Hakhel*, of coming together—of figuring out how to lower those barriers and to create a community inclusive of ALL. This year, we have begun to open our eyes. For 16 months, we are the recipients of an “Inclusion Grant” from UJA-Federation of New York (a grant designed to help us

become more aware of the needs of those with disabilities—and more intentional about becoming a more inclusive community. Through this grant, we receive funding and a great deal of support and training to teach our leaders, our teachers, our community as a whole how to be better aware and to more effectively meet the needs of those with disabilities and their families here at PSJC.

You may have noticed some early experiments/steps/adjustments we've made already.

- 1) Enlarging the font size on the weekly flyer
- 2) And increasing the size of names on name tags for those who need visual support.
- 3) Presenting clear signage to make people aware of what IS available
- 4) Working on improving and regularly confirming the sound quality—for those with auditory needs.
- 5) Making special seating available for those with mobility issues
- 6) Training the *madrichim* and teachers in our Hebrew School about teaching children with special needs
- 7) Providing resources for ushers to support requests for special accommodations to meet the needs of members of our community.
- 8) Creating a special sensory-sensitive Rosh Hashanah service at 3pm today with Aileen and Abe.
- 9) Addressing the quiet space needs of our community—by providing a quiet room downstairs to support sensory needs in addition to the quiet space in the library and a more private nursing space downstairs.

Critical to this effort is the establishment of a formal Inclusion Committee chaired by Shelly Klainberg to address the needs of people with disabilities. This Committee is off to a great start. Thanks to Shelly, Aileen and all who have already dedicated so much time and energy to this effort

Each of these actions—and so many more--- is important—but above all, the task of this committee and those who are guiding/supporting us with this grant—is to teach us, as a community, to Open our Eyes; to become more aware.

To understand what it might mean to be a truly inclusive community.

To become a place where people with disabilities—physical, mental, emotional—feel welcome and know they belong.

We understand that there are some limitations—and there are some things we will not be able to do immediately. We are not yet able to build an elevator, (unless someone wants to give me the 2 million we would need after services)-- but there is so much we can and must do.

We can change our language. We can learn how to be truly supportive. We can understand the real needs that exist in our community...we can open the walls of this synagogue as wide as can be. This year will demand a great deal of patience from us. We are willing to experiment, and we may make mistakes, but we will learn. What works for some may be a little uncomfortable for others. But we will come to understand (on a much deeper level) what it

means to be a community-- making space for the needs of others, and trusting that our needs will be addressed. We will learn how to truly listen to others; how to grow our empathy. We will struggle to listen well, to understand a little more about what it means to live with a significant disability. We will learn how we might better use microphones, how to make our chairlift most effective, how to help (but not over-help) those in need of physical support, how to provide assistance in an effective and respectful way. We will learn how to make space in our hearts and in our sanctuary for children with special needs---children whose neurological or physical makeup prevents them from relating to the world in typical ways.

We will learn to LISTEN deeply to people's needs--to not assume we know!

I think back to our member, Dylan's Friday night talk earlier this year when he shared with us that as a man with autism, he was not comfortable shaking hands and that clapping was difficult for him. I watched people literally sit on their hands at the end of his talk, striving to be responsive to this new information—no matter how much they wanted to applaud. From Dylan, we learned to listen a little better and learned how to make our synagogue a little more welcoming.

You see, so often, we just don't stop to listen—So many people go through life like Hagar and Ishmael, feeling alone, believing that their needs, their voices are going unheeded. Abraham and Sarah may have been deaf to the cries of Ishmael and Hagar. And Ishmael's own mother was almost overwhelmed by his tears. But his cry did not go unheeded. God heard Ishmael's cries and answered him: *Ba'asher hu sham*---exactly as he was in that moment.

Abraham and Sarah may not have heard—but GOD heard—and now WE too will hear! And this year, our task as a community is to say to ourselves and to every Ishmael in our midst—those here today and those still in the wilderness—that we are committed to sharpening our ability to hear. . . . (whatever your cry might be)-- because all belong to this community. . . .wherever you are at this moment.

While the Book of Leviticus makes it appear that one must meet some mythic notion of physical perfection to approach God, (suggesting that *"No man of your offspring throughout the generations who has a defect shall be qualified to offer the food of his God"*)-- the truth is: No one of us need be perfect—we all have our abilities/we all have our disabilities. We learn in Midrash Numbers Rabbah that *"When the Jews left Egypt, almost all of them were disabled. How did that happen to be? They had been working with bricks and clay, climbing to the tops of buildings. Those doing the construction work would get to the upper levels of the building and a rock would fall on them and cut off their hands, or a beam or some clay would get into their eyes, blinding them. That's how they became disabled."*

Seldom do we know the true abilities, the internal life, the heart of the people we encounter. Those who look like they have the "perfect life" could very easily be struggling with personal

demons. And those who would quickly be defined as a “person with disabilities” —have brilliance hidden within.

I once had the privilege of listening to Jacob Artson, the severely autistic son of Rabbi Brad Artson. With the help of an assistive technology device, Jacob (who can not speak) gave one of the most thoughtful, insightful talks about Jewish life and life in general that I’ve ever heard. When asked how he developed such brilliant thoughts, he said: Because of my autism. Everyone else is speaking all the time. I just listen, and so I’m able to think more clearly. No one expected such brilliance from Jacob, but when he was given an opportunity—and we were willing to listen—it was amazing to see what we had been missing.

On Rosh Hashana, we celebrate the Creation of Humanity and we recall that each one of us was created *B’tzelem Elohim* (in the Image of G). Thus, at the start of this new year, we remind ourselves that it is our task to listen well, to look with attentive eyes and an open heart—so that we can recognize the *tzelem elohim* in each and every person who enters this community.

One of the most beautiful teachings within Judaism is that upon encountering someone with a disability—we must immediately acknowledge that our diversity is an expression of sacredness— by offering the blessing: *M’shneh et Habriyot*. Blessed are You, Adonai, Creator of all—who varies creatures. In saying this blessing, we are reminding ourselves of the varied and beautiful images of G we can encounter in our community and in our world.

In just a few moments, we will recite the Amidah and listen to the blasts of the Shofar at *Malchuyot, Zichronot* and *Shofarot*. The Mishnah asks: Why do we sound the shofar at Musaf and not (as one might expect) at the Shacharit service earlier in the day? Why? Because the call of the Shofar is the central sound of Rosh Hashanah—and we can not do it early in the service because we need to wait for all to arrive—those who can easily enter and those who are challenged by the doorway of our shul.

As we hear the cry of the Shofar this year—in this year of *Hakhel*—this year of coming together--may we have a true coming together as a community. May we open ourselves and trust ourselves and those around us to be truly inclusive...

May its call open us to see the beauty, the strength, the value of each and every person in our midst—may it open our hearts to know the *Tzelem Elohim* in each person we encounter—and to celebrate the diversity of the community we are creating together.

Amen/ken y’hi ratzon

3. Temple Beth Emeth

The Truth--Rabbi's Message
Rabbi Heidi Hoover
Temple Beth Emeth
May 2015

We are between the festivals of Passover and Shavuot, in the period called the Omer. During this seven weeks, we count the days. The counting began on the second night of Passover, and ends on the 50th day after the beginning of Passover. That day is Shavuot. We remember the Exodus on the first night of Passover, and Shavuot is when the Israelites received the Torah at Mt. Sinai. The time in between, when we are counting the Omer, is when the Israelites were journeying through the wilderness from Egypt to Mt. Sinai.

The idea of journeying through wilderness is a powerful metaphor. Most of us can probably think of a time--or many times--in our lives when we were not sure how to proceed, when we were encountering the unknown, learning as we went, and hoping to reach some goal or destination safely. Growing up, parenting, starting a new career, moving to a new place--any of these situations and many more can be accompanied by the feeling of traveling through a wilderness.

When we see that we are different from others around us, that can feel like a personal wilderness. It can be lonely, confusing, and difficult. Those who learn differently or have different needs in a classroom than others in the group may feel that they're in the wilderness. Those with physical abilities that are different than others', or whose health has changed so that their physical abilities are not what they used to be, may feel that they're in the wilderness.

In one of the readings in our Shabbat prayerbook we say we believe "that there is a better place, a promised land; that the winding way to that promise passes through the wilderness. That there is no way to get from here to there except by joining hands, marching together."

In our congregation one of our goals is to reach out to one another so that we do metaphorically join hands and accompany each other on our journeys. Many of us have experienced the warmth and concern of others in our synagogue community. Whether it's making sure everyone has a ride home after Friday night services, paying a shiva call, or smiling at small children who are not being quiet during services, we try to make each other feel supported and less alone.

I'm excited to share with you that we have been chosen by UJA-Federation of New York to be part of the Synagogue Inclusion Project. For the next 16 months, we will benefit from extensive consulting through an organization called RespectAbility. There will also be some funding. The goal of the project is to work with us to increase our ability to fully include people with various types of disabilities.

As is said in the disability community, there are those who have disabilities, and those who don't have disabilities—yet. Our strong commitment as a community to be open and a comfortable place for everyone, as well as the fact that if we're each not directly affected by disabilities, we likely will be one day, mean that this is a wonderful opportunity for us. In many ways we already successfully integrate children with special needs in our religious school and services, and we've already been able to take some steps that are helpful to both adults and children with special needs or disabilities in our congregation.

Our consultants have already worked with us to do a walk-through of our building. We will likely not be able to undertake major changes to our building to increase accessibility, but there are many other ways to enhance our inclusiveness, from training of religious school teachers to the language on our website.

In the next few days you will receive a survey that will invite you to share your impressions of our success and our areas of opportunity for inclusiveness of people with disabilities. I know you've already received a survey recently regarding adult learning at Temple Beth Emeth—please fill out both of them. They are each going to be very helpful in different ways, and your input is valued!

A representative from the Synagogue Inclusion Project will speak at the May Board of Trustees meeting. If you're interested in learning more and are able to attend the meeting, that would be a good time to do so. If you cannot attend the meeting and would like to work with the Synagogue Inclusion Project team or find out more about what's happening, please contact me.

Our involvement in this project will help us identify more ways to go forward by “joining hands, marching together.” None of us want to leave anyone alone in the wilderness. I am grateful for this opportunity, and look forward to our community's becoming ever more inclusive and wonderful. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Temple Beth Emeth

Rabbi's Message

Rabbi Heidi Hoover

December 2015

Inclusion Update

As the days get colder and shorter, the warmth and light of our congregation are even more valuable. Many of you know that we have been participating in the Inclusion Project, funded by a grant from UJA-Federation. We are part of a cohort of congregations working to improve our ability to include children and adults with disabilities in our congregational community. The project includes consulting services from an organization called RespectAbilityUSA and some grant money.

For years, it has been part of the culture at our temple to be open to anyone who comes. Our participation in this project, which is now more than half finished (though our commitment and movement toward greater inclusion will continue after the conclusion of this grant), is intended to help us examine ways that we can enhance our ability to make a greater number of people comfortable with us. Also, as it is said, some of us are not disabled—yet. Nearly all of us will be disabled at some point in our lives: perhaps temporarily, with a broken bone or an illness, or permanently, either from birth or due to age or lasting effects of illness. Our participation in this project will also help us remain a comfortable place for our community members whose level of ability changes.

We have been busy and have already made progress. One of the greatest obstacles we face when it comes to inclusion of those with some kinds of physical disabilities is our building itself. We do not have a realistic way to make our function room accessible to those who cannot navigate stairs. A year and a half ago, before we were even part of the Inclusion Project, we reclaimed a room on our ground floor as a *Chadar Kehillah* (Community Room) when we transitioned to a new tenant in our building. Because we are able to hold Friday evening Torah study and shiurim (lessons), other meetings, and Friday onegs in this room, those who cannot get to the function room can still participate. This has helped a great deal, though we still must use the function room for larger events. For the Yom Kippur break-the-fast this year, tables and food were set up in the Chadar Kehillah as well as in the function room downstairs, and everyone was able to enjoy it in the way that worked best for him or her. We are continuing to think creatively about how to use that room to help us accommodate more people.

In the sanctuary, the new sound system has helped make it easier for everyone to hear. The railing added to the bimah stairs (before the start of the Inclusion Project) has made it easier for some to come onto the bimah, and those who cannot come to the bimah are always welcome to participate by leading blessings from their seats. Our new sound system includes portable microphones that can be used anywhere in the sanctuary, so it is not necessary for people to come to the bimah in order to be heard.

Our wonderful building custodian, Jean Vital, has begun to fill in cracks in the sidewalk outside our building, which will make it safer for pedestrians—both those who can easily walk and those who cannot.

The children in our community who have disabilities mostly have needs that are related to learning and social interactions. In order to serve them—and all our children—better, as well as adults who may have these kinds of special needs (these disabilities are often invisible), our religious school director, Bryna Bilanow, our Jacqueline Smith memorial rabbinic intern, Lizz Goldstein, and I have attended two conferences at Matan, an organization dedication to inclusion of children with disabilities in religious schools. We've learned about ways to help students feel more comfortable and learn more easily.

The basement of our temple building, which is mostly unused right now (we have one religious school classroom there), was at one time the temple gym, but for 20 years it was used for office space and occupational therapy by our previous building tenant. It is divided up into many small rooms that, besides our one religious school classroom there, are not usable. The Inclusion Committee, which has also formed as part of this project, has decided to devote our grant money to help pay to reconfigure the temple basement into religious school classrooms. Of the four religious school classes that meet on Saturday mornings, two of them meet in classrooms that are used the rest of the week by the preschool which is our building tenant. This means that young children, some of whom have attention-related special needs, attend their religious school classes while surrounded by enticing toys they are not allowed to touch. Needless to say, this is difficult for all the children, regardless of special needs. One of our religious school classes meets in the community room, which, while less enticing, is not set up as a children's classroom. Only one of our classes has a dedicated room. By reconfiguring the basement into classrooms, we will be able to enhance learning for all the children by creating the environment we want and that our children need. Furthermore, having larger rooms in that space will give us more flexibility to use them for other activities when the religious school is not using them (though physical accessibility will remain a challenge).

Other inclusion tasks are also in the works, including efforts to obtain one or two copies of our prayerbook in Braille, update our website to highlight our inclusiveness, get higher toilet seats in the upstairs bathroom (these earthy, practical things really matter), and put into place systems to help our religious school teachers become more skillful at working with children with special needs.

Judaism is for everyone, and it is our responsibility as a community to do all we can to make it possible for anyone to participate who wants to be with us. Our commitment is strong and our attitude is good, as we work to do even better. I am grateful to those who are serving on the Inclusion Committee: Bryna Bilanow, Phyllis Schweiger, Nancy Frost, Monica Beyer, Sheldon Jonas, Madelon Jonas, Robin Bass, and Patti Cohen. If you are interested in joining the committee, or have ideas to contribute, please let me know. I look forward to seeing you soon.

4. Union Temple

Rabbi Linda Goodman

During these weeks we are reading the Book of Exodus. Within the very first sidra of this book, God appoints Moses to stand up to the Pharaoh and bring the Children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. But Moses is reluctant - he doesn't think himself the best spokesperson for God or the people. *But Moses said to the Eternal, "Please, O Eternal, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." And the Eternal said to him, "Who gives a man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Eternal?" (Exodus 4:10-11)* Many take this to indicate that Moses must have had some sort of speech impediment. Whatever it means exactly, it would appear that Moses experienced problems in getting his words out, and thus felt unworthy of fulfilling the task with which God had charged him.

A speech impediment is only one of the myriad disabilities that challenge us as human beings. Whether we have issues with our walking, our hearing, our sight, our social adjustment, our reading, or what-have-you, disabilities are part of the experience of being human, and our tradition goes out of its way to protect people among us with disabilities.

I would like to recall some of the remarks I made in my E-Blast just before Thanksgiving, because I believe they have direct bearing on this subject.

On the weekend of November 14-15 almost thirty of us ventured on a bus trip to the Hudson Valley for a weekend excursion. Our first stop was the FDR Home in Hyde Park, NY. One of the newsreels I have seen of President Roosevelt that stands out for me most vividly is that of him and his wife Eleanor seated at the head of a Thanksgiving Day table, as he carved a turkey with great skill, ostensibly, and his characteristic good humor. The dinner took place in Warm Springs, GA, the site of Roosevelt's home, known to many as "The Little White House." Roosevelt built the house there because the water from the springs had a salubrious effect during his rehabilitation from polio. Roosevelt used a sizable portion of his own personal fortune to build the Warm Springs Infantile Paralysis Foundation, and this Thanksgiving was also Founders' Day of the institute. Roosevelt felt particularly comfortable at Warm Springs in the company of children and adults of all colors and creeds who were bound together by their affliction. They were all dealing with polio or similar conditions that caused levels of paralysis and disability. Roosevelt felt a special kinship to his friends in Warm Springs and much more free-spirited with the people with whom he shared this special bond. It is, of course, a bond that every single one of them would have wished they didn't have. But they found support, help, love and acceptance in each other's embrace, and that included the President of the United States.

We at Union Temple have been focusing on making our congregational home, and the programming within it, more accessible to people in our community who live with various kinds of disabilities, whatever they may be, and some are more readily apparent than others. As many of you are aware, the people at "Respectability" and UJA-Federation are helping us through a generous "Inclusion Grant," which comes not only with a financial award but also

with expert advice from professionals in this field, many of whom have gathered their expertise through personal experience.

February is Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month. We will be looking at ways to expand our accessibility and hospitality. At our First Friday Family Shabbat on February 5, we will have a little exercise that will open the discussion among us. Maimonides taught us: *Every member of the people of Israel is obligated to study Torah: whether rich or poor, physically able or with physical disability.*" (*Mishneh Torah, The Laws of Torah Study, chapter 10.*)

In our daily activities, we often tend to take our health and abilities for granted. But we never know what awaits us around the corner, and it behooves us to enhance our personal sensitivity and the accessibility of our congregational home, so that *everyone* can feel truly at home.

Rabbi Linda Henry Goodman

5. Westchester Reform Temple Cantor Amanda Kleinman

K'doshim Introduction 5776

For my brother, Adam, accomplishing the most mundane activities required an almost superhuman effort. Adam was born with a host of physical and developmental challenges that complicated his ability to perform the tasks many of us take for granted. Growing up, household conversation often centered around the most detailed minutiae of everyday tasks: how would Adam get from the parking lot to the front door of his school? Could we find a car seat that would meet his needs? How would he get up that flight of stairs?

My parents faced an uphill battle in meeting Adam's basic, everyday needs, and that battle often drained them of every ounce of energy they had to give. Still, for my parents, just getting Adam dressed, fed, and through the doors of his school (as Herculean a feat as those tasks often were) was never enough. They would ask: how could we help Adam achieve his unique mission on this earth? How could we enable him to contribute to and benefit from our world? What did it mean for someone who didn't know what Passover was, for whom being called to the Torah would never be in the cards, to be part of a Jewish community? We were unable to answer all, or even most of these questions, but I don't believe that in any way lessened the importance of asking.

This afternoon's Torah portion, K'doshim, contains our most well-known Jewish text in support of inclusion of those with disabilities: "You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind." We must ensure that those with disabilities do not face those stumbling blocks that will keep them from coming through the doors of the synagogue – stumbling blocks like stairs leading up to the bima, or inaccessible bathrooms.

However, these iconic words, that give people with disabilities an entry point into the Jewish community, are followed soon after by a passage that stops them dead in their tracks: a mere two chapters later, we read about those who are disallowed from serving as priests: the Biblical text reads: "No man of your offspring throughout the ages who has a defect shall be qualified to offer the food of his God. No one who is blind, or lame, or has a limb too short or too long; no one who has a broken leg or a broken arm; or who is a hunchback . . ." By removing those physical stumbling blocks, we have enabled people with disabilities to come through our doors. But, what good is getting through the door, if once inside you're denied the chance to engage in a meaningful way?

The contradiction is troubling. How can we welcome people into our communities, only to relegate them to the fringes once they arrive? Rabbi Jack Reimer, who served as President Clinton's rabbinic advisor, points out that, in fact, our Torah was quite progressive for its time; other ancient cultures denied people with disabilities even the most basic rights; he notes specifically the words of the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, who went so far as to question the right of the person with a disability to live at all. This comparison does not mean we should be content with our Torah's *chiddush* – its positive innovation. Rather, it teaches us that becoming an inclusive community is a process. Our ancestors took a very important first step, and it is up to us to take the next ones: to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy not only physical access to our communities, but the ability to engage deeply and fully once they get here.

Here at WRT, values of inclusion are woven deeply into the fabric of our community. We had in mind the words of Leviticus 19 when we constructed our new building: wheelchair-accessible ramps flank both sides of our bima, and the elevator to our second-floor religious school classrooms ensures that not a single part of our building is inaccessible to our children. Values of inclusion also infuse our programming and educational choices: we are one a very small number of congregations with a full-time Learning Differences Coordinator, and each year we bring speakers to educate our teens for Jewish Disabilities awareness month.

Yet, being a community committed to inclusion requires us to evaluate our practices regularly. Are our playgrounds fully accessible? Should we have Braille prayer books available at all services? Are there families with children whose needs are not being met, whose stories we need to hear? To that end, WRT is honored to have been chosen to participate in the UJA Synagogue Inclusion Cohort. Over the course of the year, we will be working with consultants from RespectAbilityUSA to evaluate and improve upon our practices in the area of inclusion. Our work is already being led by our Inclusion Task Force, headed by our dedicated leader Susan Weiner. I would invite anyone who is interested in this work to join our task force; additionally, please come and share your own story with us. It is by hearing from you that we will know where best to focus our attention.

The UJA Synagogue Inclusion Cohort is subtitled with those famous words from the Book of Isaiah: “For my House shall be called a house of prayer for *all* people.” Let us all work together to actualize this vision of inclusivity in our own community.

B. Example Letter from Shaareinu on Sharing Inclusion Efforts with a Congregation

Friends –

I am writing to update you on TBT's new and inspiring initiative, "*Shaareinu: Our Gateways*." Since its inception at the end of November, over 40 congregants have stepped forward to share their passions and professional expertise, putting us on a clear path to creating the most accessible and welcoming congregation in Rockland.

We must learn to see past one's disabilities and to see the Jewish soul within. This is a process of breaking down physical as well as attitudinal barriers, and we at TBT are poised to begin this important work. Enabling all to access our community is not an act of charity, it is an obligation that benefits our entire community.

All four of our task forces are comprised of volunteers with a wide range of expertise and experience in relevant fields, both professional and personal. They have been meeting and setting achievable, concrete goals, lead by chairpeople who are taking their place as significant lay leaders of our congregation. A summary of each task force's progress follows:

- Our Education Task Force members are developing relevant release forms and protocols, establishing individualized plans for diagnosed students, training aids and teachers, providing additional one-on-one Hebrew assistance, etc. They even discussed providing support for undiagnosed kids who are struggling and could benefit from additional assistance. Mara Lewin, our Director of Education, will distribute a letter to our Religious School parents within the next few weeks with further details.
- Our Technology Task Force, led by David Greenberg, has been meeting regularly. The installation of the hearing loop, as described by Rabbi Beal during his Yom Kippur morning sermon, is just about completed. Joshua Beal will be raising more than \$8,000 as his mitzvah project so that TBT will not bear any cost for this installation. The committee also has been evaluating equipment for a new A/V system, which will allow streaming of services to homebound congregants. Their third project will be to install message boards in the building to include everything from upcoming events to how to use the loop and all of our gateways to inclusion.
- Our Mental Health Task Force members, led by Steve Levy, have joined together for the benefit of our TBT community. Following the Newtown tragedy, it was this task force that hosted a discussion about how to talk with children/grandchildren about what took place. A variety of tasks have been prioritized, including outreach to various 12-step programs, personal contact with congregants following the period of bereavement as well as those who are ill, development of a resource list of programs that already exist in the wider community, and a support program for caregivers of ill friends and relatives.
- Our Chesed Task Force, co-chaired by Judy Levy and Helene Gelman, will assist families during the immediate period of bereavement by arranging for shiva minyanim, offering a meal, and providing congregational condolences. They are expanding its previous mission by developing a schedule for visiting ill and homebound congregants, offering a

kind presence and an open heart on behalf of TBT. They also hope to create a way in which to celebrate joyful occasions with congregants.

Traditions have to start somewhere, and this is the beginning of a new culture of inclusion at TBT. Through this initiative, we will be working towards the goal of welcoming all who wish to enter into our spiritual home, a process which will be an ongoing one for many years to come. As Jews we always strive to repair our little corner of the world, and to endeavor to lessen the burdens of those among us. If we can welcome others into our spiritual home in a more inclusive and complete manner, then we are furthering God's work.

I look forward to hearing from you (xxxxxx@yyyy.com) if you'd like to participate in this sacred work.

C. Signage and Graphics
1. Accessibility Graphics

Signage helps raise the level of awareness that the congregation is being inclusive of people with disabilities. These clear signs can provide information about important locations, such as restrooms, the quiet room, water fountains, emergency exits, and the sanctuary, plus any accommodations specifically for people with disabilities. Here are examples of signage that might be helpful to use in your synagogue.





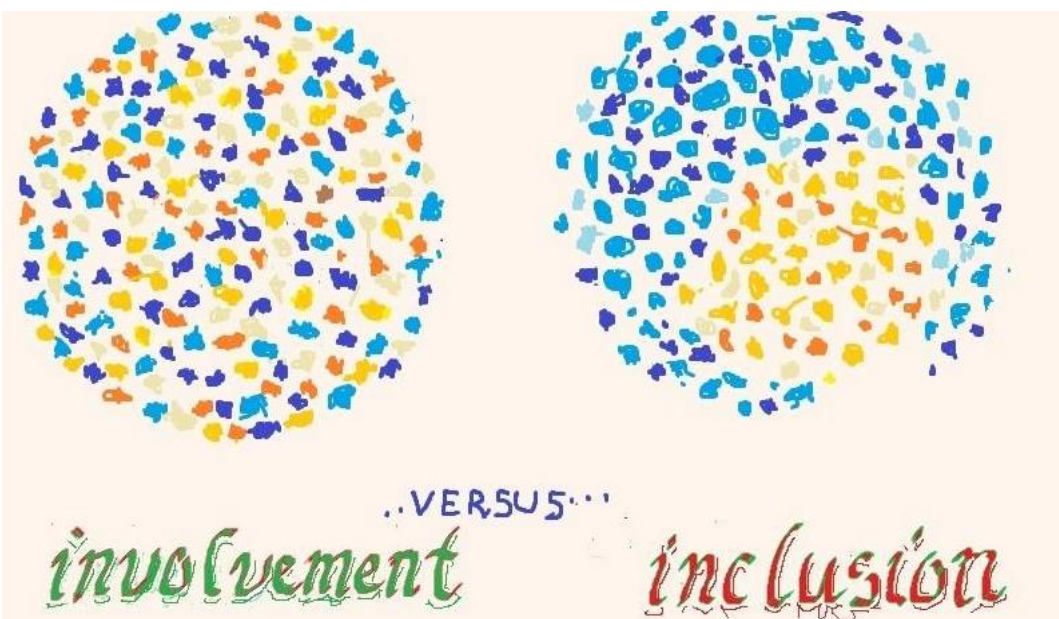
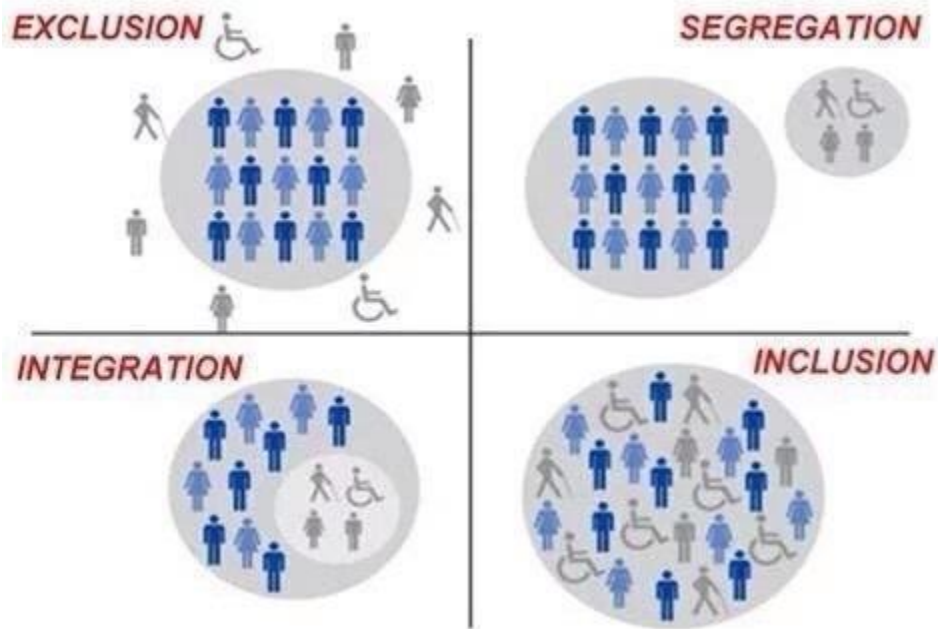
We Welcome People Of All
Abilities!



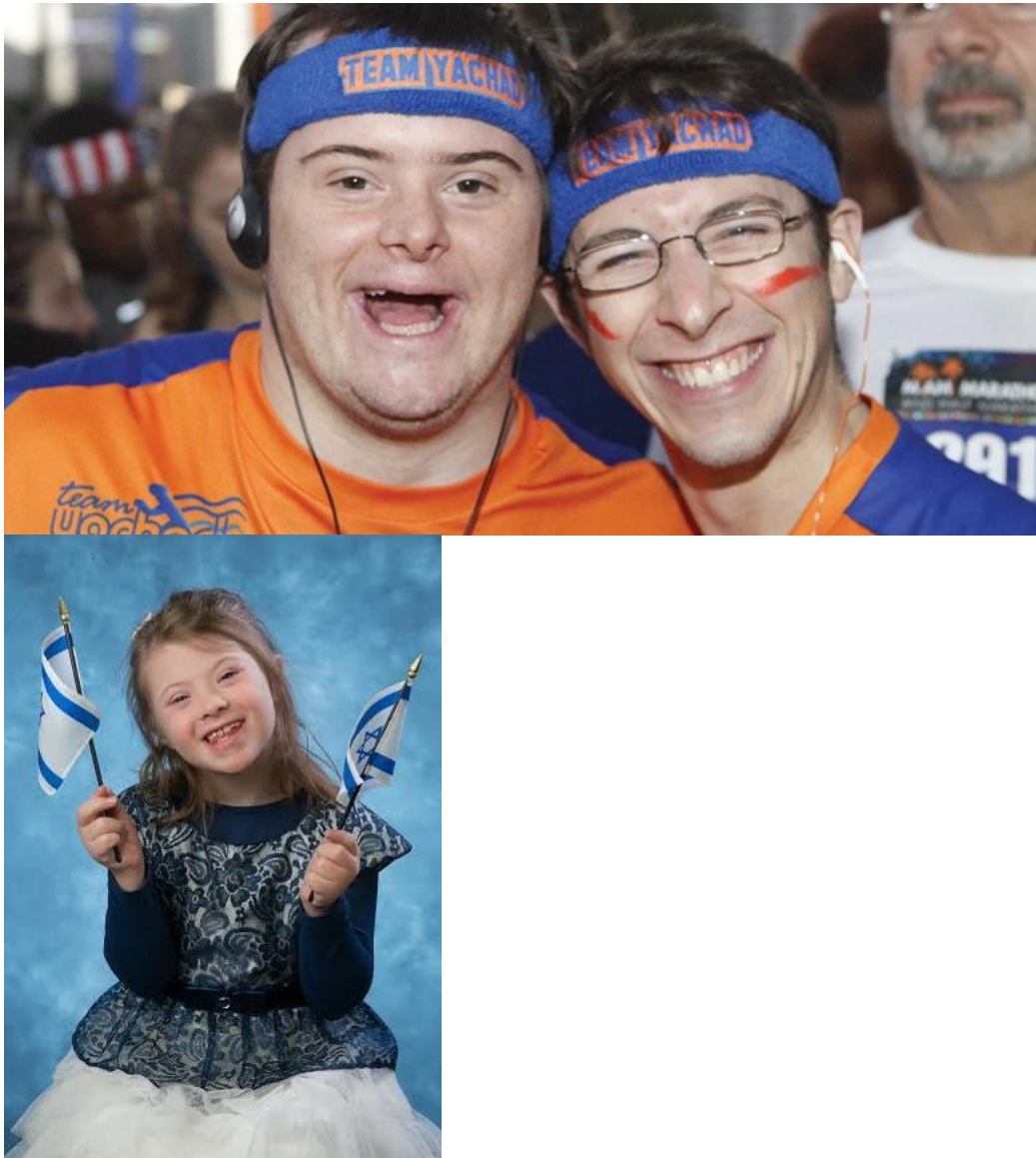
2. Alternative and Moveable Accommodation Items



3. Inclusion Graphics



4. Research Tested Pictures





III. Physical Accessibility

A. 360 Degree Evaluation

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 wheelchairs?				
3. Does exterior signage clearly indicate the location of wheelchair-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, etc.) 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 (exceptions, descriptions, challenges)
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?				

B. Assistive Devices and Information for People Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Types of Accommodations for Hearing Impairments - Sign Language Interpreters and Closed Captioning for Temples with Live Streaming and/or Screens
Both can be available upon advance request

The **Jewish Deaf Resource Center (JDRC)** provides interpreters fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) to translate the service. JDRC partially reimburses the cost associated with hiring an interpreter for Jewish events. Please contact:

Jewish Deaf Resource Center (JDRC) - <http://www.jdrc.org/>
Attn: Naomi Brunnlehrman
P.O. Box 318
Hartsdale, NY 10530
Voice or Text: 917-705-8941
Video-phone: 866-948-1771
Email: INFO@JDRC.ORG

We suggest that in your mailings about the High Holiday services, you print on the bottom that ASL interpreters are available on request and provide contact info for a point person in your office.

The firm **Total Caption** provides individuals with hearing loss who are not fluent in ASL Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), also known as captioning, for services that are live streamed. Due to the high volume of requests for CART services during the High Holidays, Total Caption would appreciate your making requests at least three (3) weeks in advance of the service(s) during which the accommodation will be needed. Please contact:

Total Caption
Attn: Lauren Schechter
315 Pearsall Ave.
Ridgewood, NJ 07450
Phone: (201) 301-2435
Email: lauren@totalcaption.com

C. ADA Accessibility Resource Guide- The Chicago Community Trust

<http://www.cct.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2015ADAComplianceGuide.pdf>



IV. Practices and Policies

A. Inclusion Coordinator Job Description

The Importance of the Jewish Inclusion Director/Coordinator

Every synagogue needs an experienced inclusion director/coordinator. This person does not need to work full time. But this person does need to be available as needed. Some congregations use highly qualified volunteers. For others this is a paid position. There are many educators/therapists/social workers who work in public school or other institutions who are available on a part-time basis. Below is a sample job description that can easily be adapted for your synagogue.

Qualifications for inclusion director:

- Teaching Certification (Special Needs / Special Education) and/or MSW or other appropriate credentials
- Ability to **effectively assess children** on multiple levels (social, educational, academic, physical, psychological, medical)
- Ability to effectively **design and implement individualized learning and inclusion plans** for each child that meet their needs and the needs of the community
- **Experience with and knowledge of a variety of special needs/disorders**, including (but not limited to) the following: Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder, Tourette's Syndrome, Bipolar Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, Down's Syndrome, Autism, social difficulties, behavioral challenges, cognitive disabilities, emotional challenges, and physical limitations
- Ability to work in a team environment, and to **collaborate effectively** with a number of different stakeholders (parents, teachers, Rabbis, administration, etc.)
- Experience in working with parents of children with disabilities and people with disabilities alike
- Trustworthiness and ability to keep private issues confidential
- Empowering and upbeat attitude

Responsibilities:

- Work directly with the synagogue leadership and staff
- **Establish, in collaboration with the synagogue leadership, the policy and procedures of an inclusion program** for students/members and staff with special needs to ensure their safety and success
- Process applicants (for events, membership, religious school, etc.) who have special needs. This includes:
 - Create forms and questionnaires to obtain information
 - **Direct liaison with parents, teachers, and outside agencies** (i.e.; medical professionals and government support agencies)

- Review questionnaires and determine eligibility
- **Maintain parent/caregiver contact** before, during, and after the program or school year regarding **preparation, implementation, and follow-up evaluation**
- **Recruit staff members** to support people with special needs
- **Develop modifications to programs and activities** to accommodate children with special needs which could include a learning disability, Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder, Tourette's Syndrome, Bipolar Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, Down's Syndrome, Autism, social difficulties, behavioral challenges, cognitive disabilities, emotional challenges, and physical limitations
- **Provide ongoing training and support** to teachers, specialists, faculty, etc.
- Involvement in the organization/synagogue crisis management plan
- **Document all aspects of the inclusion program and maintain ongoing written accountability** regarding information gathered, anecdotal notes, scheduling, programming, outside contacts, responsibilities, and follow-up
- **Create and implement behavior contracts** as needed
- Provide short- and long-term support of staff members working with people with special needs
- **Design individual work placements for staff with special needs** and ongoing task analysis
- **Work collaboratively** with leadership on a number of issues including inclusion, health and safety, member/student issues, and staff morale
- **Model and advocate acceptance and understanding** for campers and staff with special needs

B. Example Mission Statement and Inclusion Policy

SAMPLE TEXT:

There is a lot more to a mission statement than text on a website. This is a matter for your inclusion committee and your lay and professional leaderships. Our research has shown that people respond very well to these four inclusive statements below. Thus, feel free to use them in your mission statements or other parts of your website, or to find things in your own voice:

a. **We are at our best when we are welcoming and respectful of the talents, experiences and perspectives that diversity can bring to table.** People who have been historically disadvantaged—due to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or disability status, all comprise the larger society in which we live. Inclusion means promoting justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions, systems and communities. All people should be able to be seen as equal human beings and for the talents and gifts they have.

b. **We are a stronger community when we live up to our values: when we are welcoming, diverse, moral and respect one another.** We want our children, parents, grandparents, and other family and friends with disabilities to be able to have an equal opportunity to fully participate in our community.

c. **People with disabilities and their families have the same hopes and dreams as everyone else, even if they face different challenges.** We should ensure that everyone knows that his or her presence and participation is welcome and meaningful to us all.

d. **Through inclusion, we can understand that, though everyone is different, all people were created equal and in the image of G-D, “b’stelem elokim bara oto.”** The Torah teaches us that some of our greatest leaders had disabilities—Moses had a speech impediment, Jacob had a limp, and Isaac became blind.

As mentioned above, mission statements are very personal to each congregation. Here are two sample inclusive synagogue mission statements from other congregations:

a. *The Temple is located in midtown Atlanta and is one of American Judaism’s most historic religious institutions. Founded in 1867, it is the city’s oldest and most diverse synagogue. Recently, The Temple was named by Newsweek Magazine as one of the most vibrant and dynamic Jewish congregations in the country. For a century and a half, it has built a tradition of social justice work and a commitment to broadening people’s access to a full Jewish life.*

The Temple now counts more than 1,500 families as members, hosts a vibrant and inclusive religious school and one of Atlanta’s most respected early learning centers. We are proud of how each member brings his or her own story to our diverse community—such as those who have a multi-generational history at The Temple and those new to Atlanta or The Temple, those who identify as interfaith, LGBT, have children with physical or learning needs, and those of all ages and backgrounds who are seeking a Jewish community – a place to call home.

- b. *As a congregation of about 1,000 households, we are large enough to serve you with dynamic services and programming but small enough to know you and foster a real sense of community.*

Our clergy lead services, teach classes, provide pastoral counseling, visit the sick and officiate at lifecycle events. Our many social action programs reflect our deep commitment to Tikkun Olam, the "repair of the world". We are also a caring community that reaches out to each other in times of celebration and sadness. We invite you to join us. Our members are Jews by birth, Jews by choice, interfaith families, and those wishing to learn more about Judaism. Our congregation includes singles and families of all configurations. We welcome all cultural backgrounds, ethnic heritages and sexual orientations. We strive to be an accessible congregation – welcoming those with physical and learning disabilities. We welcome all people on their Jewish Journey.

- c. *We honor and value the uniqueness of every Jewish journey and try to provide many points of entry and opportunities for connection. Torah (Learning), Avodah (worship) and Gemilut Chasadim (acts of loving kindness) remain our most precious gateways to spiritual sustenance. Our vision is of a community like no other in your life.*

We dream of a warm, caring and inclusive community dedicated to nurturing a vibrant spiritual Jewish life. We strive to use our unique gifts and offerings to help develop our synagogue community as a place of discovery and meaning. At TBE you will be part of an environment where you are surrounded by blessing and you are never alone.

TBE is ..

- Where Torah learning is alive, lived, and embraced by lifelong learners, woven into the very fabric of our culture, informing every action and decision and expressed through our worship, meetings, conversation, and social action*
- Where we demonstrate our commitment to excellence and innovation, with ongoing self-reflection and evaluation, and through an integration of formal and informal multi-generational and multi-sensory learning*
- Where you will find a strong partnership of lay and professional leaders, and actively participating members*
- Where Jewish values are learned and lived in all aspects of synagogue life, evident in the way we speak with and care for one another*
- Where prayer is diverse and meaningful, rich with music and song, inspiring continual spiritual growth and reaching all generations*
- Where you will find a community to support you in your times of need, and to celebrate with you in your times of joy*
- Where you feel a connection to Israel as home and family, especially through our continually deepening relationship with our two sister congregations in Haifa*

- *Where you feel a sense of belonging as you are warmly greeted at a Shabbat service, or remembered by name by fellow congregants and clergy*
- *Where you tell stories and share yourself and are welcomed and embraced Where you are surrounded by blessing and*
- *Where you are never alone*

Temple Beth Elohim welcomes individuals with all abilities to our services and functions. It is important to us that everyone is able to participate fully as a member of our congregation or as a visitor. The building is fully wheelchair accessible and hearing assistance devices are available. If you or a family member has special needs, please let our clergy or the ushers know. We would be happy help!

C. Potential Accommodation Language

The following examples support the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and are provided by the Great Lakes ADA Center. These statements may be used to communicate that you are an inclusive organization and invite individuals to let you know about their need for special accommodations. The regulations implementing the ADA do not require specific language to be used in notifying the public. The obligation under the ADA is for entities covered to provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services in order to allow for individuals with disabilities to participate in the programs, activities or services.

Individuals needing accommodations to participate in the meeting should contact _____ at 222-222-2222 no later than _____.
(name) (deadline if appropriate)

Accommodation requests should be directed to _____ at 222-222-2222 no later than _____.
(name) (deadline if appropriate)

Direct requests for accommodations to _____ at 222-222-2222 no later than _____.
(name) (deadline if appropriate)

Requests for sign language interpreter or materials in alternative format should be made no later than _____ to _____ at 222-222-2222.
(deadline if appropriate) (name)

Individuals with disabilities requiring additional services to participate in the meeting should call 222-222-2222 by _____.
(deadline if appropriate)

Additional language may be added to state that requests for accommodations made after the advertised date will be honored to the maximum extent feasible.

D. Non-Discrimination Policy

This synagogue provides equal employment opportunities (EEO) to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability or genetics. In addition to federal law requirements, this synagogue complies with applicable state and local laws governing nondiscrimination in employment. This policy applies to all terms and conditions of employment, including recruiting, hiring, placement, promotion, termination, layoff, recall, transfer, leaves of absence, compensation and training. This congregation expressly prohibits any form of workplace harassment based on race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, age, genetic information, disability, or veteran status

E. Resources to Hire People with Disabilities

1. Just One Job Manhattan JCC

<http://www.iccmanhattan.org/special-needs/just-one-job/employers/>

JUST ONE JOB: ADAPTATIONS JOB SERVICES

Creating job opportunities for capable, dedicated young adults with disabilities. Our mission is to prepare candidates for successful job placements in supportive environments by matching skills with employers' individual needs. We know how the right hire helps an organization leverage talents and increase productivity, building a positive workplace culture.

We support employers. We know how the right hire can help you leverage talents and increase productivity, building a positive workplace culture.

Why partner with us as a hiring resource?

We assess your workplace needs and strategize to find efficiency through hiring the right candidate.

We know our candidates well.

We screen and assess our candidates thoroughly and observe them on the job, as well as during evening and weekend social and recreational activities.

We provide on-site support (job coaching, supervisor training, diversity training in the workplace, and mentorship).

Experience the benefits of hiring an individual with disabilities

Increased staff productivity

Low turnover

Enhanced employer brand

Demonstrated commitment to social responsibility and the community

Opportunity for tax benefits

Wage reimbursement available for training and internship experience

What characteristics do our candidates have?

They are highly attuned to routines and systems.

They have strong visual pattern skills.

They have strong logical reasoning and analytical skills.

They have a high level of independence.

They have a strong desire to work.

They are reliable and loyal.

They are highly productive in structured environments.

They seek long-term employment.

Here's how we do it:

We get to know you, the employer. We set up an introductory meeting to discuss our program and our candidates and learn about your company to explore potential partnerships. We identify opportunities within your organization where our candidates could add real value.

We find the right fit. We match potential candidates with tasks or position(s) within your organization based on the work environment and our candidates' strengths, skills, and personalities.

We provide on-site coaching. Once a candidate is hired, a coach will aid in the transition and orientation to independence in the workplace.

We lead staff training. We can provide diversity training and strategies for your staff on building a culture of inclusion and collaboration. We offer supervisory training as well as a mentor program.

We develop an ongoing partnership. We stay committed to our employer partners through ongoing communication and support with your managers and our coaches. We are here for you if something is not working out or if you are ready for us to place a second candidate.

Our partners/employers:

Baseball Center

Bed, Bath & Beyond

BOND360

Jewish Journey Project

Johns Hopkins

Matisse

MBAF

MSD Capital

Museum of Chinese in America

NY Pals

Shefa School

Simons Foundation

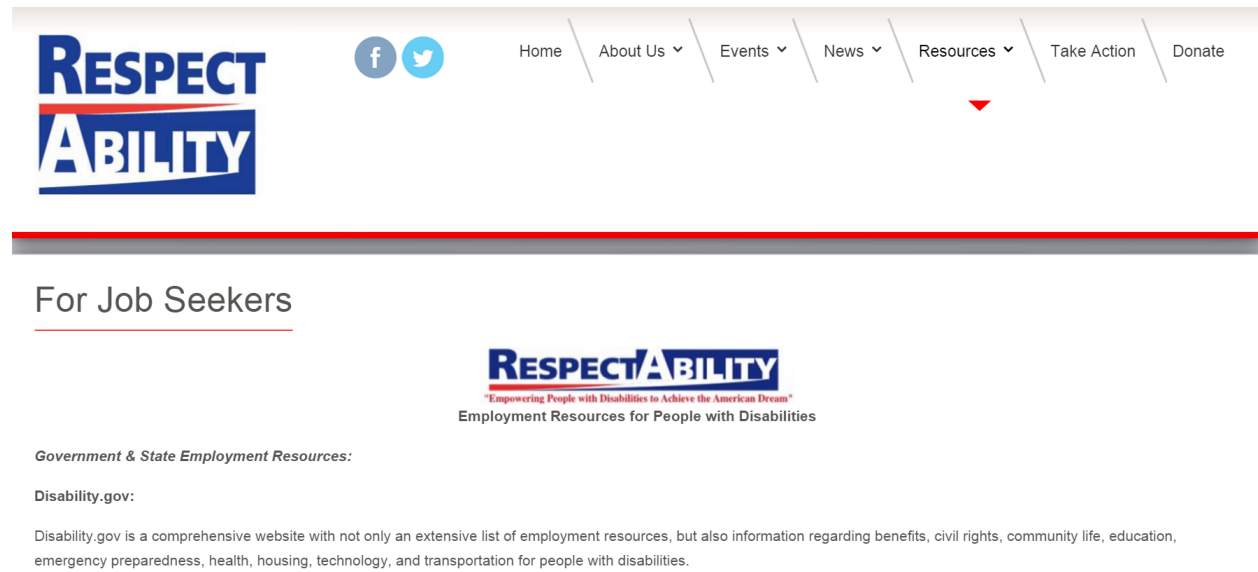
Temple Emanu-el

TLB Music

West Med

2. RespectAbility Resources for Job Seekers

<http://respectabilityusa.com/resources/jobs/>



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the RespectAbility website. The logo is on the left, followed by Facebook and Twitter icons. The navigation menu includes: Home, About Us (with a dropdown arrow), Events (with a dropdown arrow), News (with a dropdown arrow), Resources (with a dropdown arrow and a red triangle icon below it), Take Action, and Donate. Below the navigation bar is a red horizontal line. The main heading is "For Job Seekers" with a red underline. Below this is the RespectAbility logo and the tagline "Empowering People with Disabilities to Achieve the American Dream". The section is titled "Government & State Employment Resources:". Under the heading "Disability.gov:", there is a paragraph stating: "Disability.gov is a comprehensive website with not only an extensive list of employment resources, but also information regarding benefits, civil rights, community life, education, emergency preparedness, health, housing, technology, and transportation for people with disabilities."

V. Programming
A. Event Checklist

PROCESS	
Invitation/Notification of Event	
Does the invitation clearly indicate that people with special needs are welcome?	
Do appropriate icons appear e.g., physical access, sign language interpreter available etc.?	
Is the writing clear, in an easily legible font and size?	
Is the information embedded in an email as well as an attachment?	
Do the visual images depict inclusion, e.g., people with special needs?	
Have you included a contact name and number for inquiries regarding special accommodations?	
Is notification of the event on the website as well as in hard copy?	
Facilities	
Is the facility accessible – for wheelchairs, walkers, scooters?	
Are the bathrooms accessible?	
Are there designated information/rest areas available?	
Is there handicapped parking?	
If transportation is being provided, is it accessible?	
Is the lighting appropriate for people with visual impairments?	
Are there special viewing areas set aside to ensure people are able to see, hear etc.	
Is the signage appropriate?	
Communication	
Will there be a sign language interpreter?	
If there are videos, will there be subtitles?	
Will there be assistive listening devices?	
Have you made sure that signers, etc. will be visible to those in wheelchairs?	
Is the website where the event is posted accessible?	
Is the event available as a webcast?	
Staff/Volunteers	
Have you arranged for volunteers?	
Have they received orientation/sensitization and training to respond to inquiries?	

B. Op-Ed on Inclusive Hannukah Programming- Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi

Happy (accessible) Hannukah to you!

10 tips for hosting a Hannukah party that people of ALL abilities can attend

By Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi and Alie Kriofske Mainella, *IndependenceFirst*

Holding a party where all the guests – with or without disabilities – can have fun isn't tough if you plan ahead and think things through. Here are some tips to ensure you are being inclusive, thoughtful and welcoming to all your friends!

1. The RSVP. By including a line about accommodations in the invitation's RSVP, you are *already* letting guests know that everyone welcome. If it's a party for children, parents can tell you, right off the bat, what their child's needs might be to attend the party. They will be happy you asked! *"We want everyone to have fun – please let us know if you have dietary restrictions or require other special accommodations to attend! We will do our best to meet special needs."* Note that you aren't promising to meet all needs – if you can't find a sign language interpreter at the last minute or there is another issue, for example, you will be able to let your guest know in advance. Indeed, they may be able to help you find a solution!
2. Physical Access. If your party is at a venue that is not physically accessible to all, move it to a place that is. Venues should have a ground level entrance or ramp, an elevator if it's upstairs, and accessible bathrooms. Many places that have rides and activities (bowling, video games, etc.) will have accessibility options. Just check with the venue ahead of time.
3. Reading, Cognitive Access and Vision Issues. Children and adults with cognitive, learning disabilities or vision impairments might not be able to read the menu, instructions for a scavenger hunt or a game score sheet. Pictures and verbal instructions are useful, as well as pairing children with those who can help. It's always great to have an extra pair of reading glasses around if you are inviting seniors. But you can always tell someone who can't see or read what they will need or what to know.
4. Special Diets. Anyone can have allergies, celiac disease or lactose intolerance, but you won't know unless you ask on the invitation RSVP. Making sure there is an option for cake, snacks, treats and other food for these guests can be as simple as picking up a gluten free cupcake to serve with the cake. It is thoughtful to have refreshments that everyone can enjoy.
5. Theme and venue. If you are hosting at a particular venue (restaurant, synagogue, bounce house, swimming pool, private home etc.) you can call them ahead of time to make sure there can be access for everyone at the party. Hotels, sports facilities and pools are usually equipped for people with disabilities.
6. Addressing attitude. Kids and adults can be daunted when encountering a someone who is different from them. If it's a children's event you can talk to the group at the start of the party about kindness and respect for each other and each other's differences. A party is a great opportunity for kids to learn about one another.

7. Involving parents. Parties can be exhausting for the hosts. Asking a parent or two to volunteer to help at the party, particularly if it's a big group, can lighten the load for the hosts. Parents may feel more comfortable if they are invited to stay or help as an option.
8. Sensory overload awareness. Parties can cause sensory overload for any child or adult. But for a person with autism or a sensory processing disorder, a party can be really overwhelming. Offer opportunities for guests to take a break, perhaps in a quiet room away from the crowd. Some venues may have options for turning down music or minimizing stimulation – and that is useful anywhere there are a lot of kids! Latex allergies (balloons) and chemical sensitivities (use of highly scented cleaners or staff wearing perfumes) are real issues. Solutions: Use alternative mylar balloons. Ask people to not wear strong scents, and choose unscented cleaning products.
9. Communication. If a guest attending the party is non-verbal or communicates in other ways such as American Sign Language or a communication board, talk about it with the guests. Having an interpreter can be worth the cost, as all the people can communicate and maybe learn a little sign language! Remember to speak directly to a child whether s/he is verbal or not.
10. Have fun! Parties are awesome. For parents, parties of any kind can be stressful, but don't let inclusion stress you out. If you are reading this list and considering these tips, you're already doing more than most! Stay positive, smile and throw that PARTY!

Special thanks to Alie Kriofske Mainella, the Lead Youth Independent Living Services Coordinator at IndependenceFirst – one of the nation's largest independent living centers.

C. Additional Holiday Programming Ideas

Purim - Order a powerpoint of Megillat Esther to show during the megillah reading to enable deaf, hard of hearing or visually impaired to follow megillah reading. Contact Batya Jacob at [212 613-8127](tel:2126138127) or Batyaj@ou.org

Large print megillat Esther for Purim are available through the Jewish Heritage for the Blind at 1655 24th St. Brooklyn, NY 11229

How to think about approaching Purim for children with sensory integration issues:

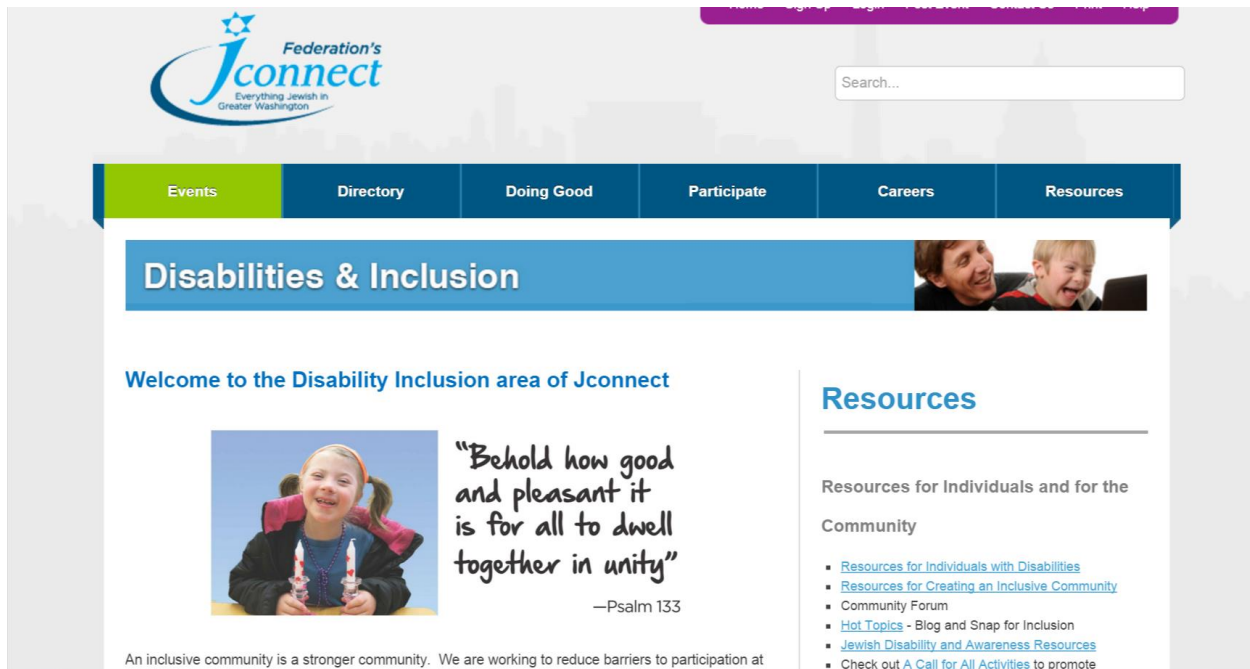
<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/when-hearing-haman-hurts/>

Passover - Large print Haggadahs for usage in communal services are offered by The Jewish Heritage for the Blind at [800 995-1888](tel:8009951888) or at services@jhbinternational.org

Shavuot - Start thinking about sermons and divrei torah about the holiday of Shavuot and inclusion of people with disabilities:
<http://www.shalomdc.org/omer/>

VI. Training
A. Comprehensive Resources on Inclusion from the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington

<http://www.jconnect.org/Home/Special-Needs>




Federation's Jconnect
Everything Jewish in Greater Washington

Search...

Events Directory Doing Good Participate Careers Resources

Disabilities & Inclusion

Welcome to the Disability Inclusion area of Jconnect



"Behold how good and pleasant it is for all to dwell together in unity"
—Psalm 133

An inclusive community is a stronger community. We are working to reduce barriers to participation at

Resources

Resources for Individuals and for the Community

- [Resources for Individuals with Disabilities](#)
- [Resources for Creating an Inclusive Community](#)
- Community Forum
- [Hot Topics](#) - Blog and Snap for Inclusion
- [Jewish Disability and Awareness Resources](#)
- Check out [A Call for All Activities](#) to promote