



## SELECTED RESOURCES & NEXT STEPS



### For families needing assistance

**HaMercaz:** Your One-Stop Special Needs Resource for Families with Children with Developmental Disabilities and Special Needs (from birth thru age 22)

Vera Gisis, LCSW, Program Coordinator

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[hamercaz@jfsla.org](mailto:hamercaz@jfsla.org)      [www.hamercaz.org](http://www.hamercaz.org)

HaMercaz is a collaborative program of The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles and Jewish Family Service, and 7 other local Jewish non-profits, and offers ongoing assistance, advocacy and support for families and teens with special needs, and developmental disabilities including Autism Spectrum Disorders, from birth through age 22, as well as a *warm-line* providing telephone support, information, individualized referrals and follow up. HaMercaz's staff provides support for individual families, including in-home visits and care management. HaMercaz makes available social and recreational programs, including: play days and sibling programs, Jewish holiday celebrations and multi-generational events. HaMercaz also has an educational series with local experts on key topics.

### For Jewish Special Education questions

#### **Builders of Jewish Education – Special Education Resources**

Terri Barach, Coordinator, [tbarach@bjela.org](mailto:tbarach@bjela.org), (323) 761-8622

6505 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 300, Los Angeles, CA 90048 ♦ (323) 761-8614

[educate@bjela.org](mailto:educate@bjela.org)      [www.bjela.org](http://www.bjela.org)

BJE offers a range of services to special needs educators working in Jewish schools through its Special Needs Community of Practice, which offers educators professional development, resource sharing and skill building opportunities. In addition, the agency works closely with congregational Religious Schools to enhance the work being done to increase access to Jewish education for children who learn differently.

## **Selected Local Volunteer Opportunities**

### **Vista Inspire Program at Vista Del Mar-Vista Del Mar; Vista Inspire!; Nes Gadol (non-denominational)**

Elaine Hall, Director, [Elainehall@vistadelmar.org](mailto:Elainehall@vistadelmar.org)  
3200 Motor Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90034 ♦ (310) 836-1223 ext. 615  
[www.themiracleproject.org](http://www.themiracleproject.org)

Volunteers are needed to help with the Nes Gadol special needs b'nai mitzvot program designed for children with autism and other special needs. Using music, dance, singing, visual arts, and theater. B'nai Mitzvah celebrations are customized to each child's ability and held at either the family's home synagogue or at the sanctuary at Vista Del Mar. A post bar/bat mitzvah class is also held. The Miracle Theater classes offered at Vista Del Mar also need volunteers for Monday and Wednesday afternoon classes.

### **Friendship Circle LA**

Rabbi Michael Rav-Noy, M.A., Director; Miriam Rav-Noy, Program Director  
9581 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90035 ♦ (310) 277-3252  
[michy@fcla.org](mailto:michy@fcla.org)      [www.fcla.org](http://www.fcla.org)

Volunteers are needed for Sunday Circle, martial arts classes for children with behavioral or attention issues, Holiday Celebrations that accommodate families with special needs children and summer/winter day camp programs, as well as the on-going Brian Sobol Friends at Home Program which pairs of teenage volunteers with participating children for weekly visits in their homes, offering friendship and sharing activities.

### **Friendship Circle of the Conejo**

Rabbi Moshe Bryski and Chanie Melamud  
30345 Canwood Street, Agoura Hills, CA 91301 ♦ (818) 865-2233  
[staff@friendshipcircleca.com](mailto:staff@friendshipcircleca.com)      [www.friendshipcircleca.com](http://www.friendshipcircleca.com)

Volunteers are needed for a wide range of programs including Sunday Circle, Friends at Home weekly visiting, gymnastics, sports, holiday programs, swimming, music programs and more.

## **Additional Resources**

***Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities*** by Shelly Christensen, MA, published by Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis, with support from the Minneapolis Jewish Federation. This step-by-step guide for transforming communities and education programs into inclusive congregations can be purchased from their website dedicated to inclusion of people with disabilities, [www.jfcsmpls.org/inclusionresources.html](http://www.jfcsmpls.org/inclusionresources.html)

**Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning** created a resource guide for Jewish communities and synagogues to help improve inclusiveness for Jews with disabilities. It is available in PDF format at: [www.jsped.org/JDAM%20Resource%20Guide%202008-2009%20cover.pdf](http://www.jsped.org/JDAM%20Resource%20Guide%202008-2009%20cover.pdf). As part of Jews with Disabilities Awareness Month, PJLL has created a webpage with information on other programs and events: [www.pjll.org/content/disabilitymonth](http://www.pjll.org/content/disabilitymonth).

The main congregational movements have also provided educational and practical resources on inclusion and disabilities:

### **Jewish Reconstructionist Federation**

- Kol Ehad: Jewish Reconstructionist Federation Committee (JRF) on Inclusion of People with Disabilities has developed an inclusion booklet to help those who need information. Formed by the JRF board in January 1994, Kol Ehad consists of three Task Forces: one on inclusion for people with disabilities, one on inclusion of gays and lesbians, and one on inclusion of intermarried people. The document below concerns the Task Force for Inclusion of People with Disabilities. The Task Force is made up of people with and without disabilities who have personal and/or professional knowledge about special needs. The document can be found at [www.jrf.org/resources/files/JRF-Taskforce-Disabilities.doc](http://www.jrf.org/resources/files/JRF-Taskforce-Disabilities.doc).

### **Orthodox Union**

- The Orthodox Union has developed a program called Yachad, The National Jewish Council for Disabilities. National Yachad provides ongoing Jewish programming and experiences in educational, recreational and social settings throughout North America. National events share the *inclusive design* for people with disabilities that makes Yachad programming so unique. There are also various Yachad locations in New Jersey, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Connecticut and Baltimore. [www.njcd.org/index.php/njcd/about/C1137/](http://www.njcd.org/index.php/njcd/about/C1137/)

## **United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism**

- It is vital to be able to welcome people with disabilities into synagogues. View the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's checklist of how to do so at [www.uscj.org/Checklist\\_Welcoming\\_7514.html](http://www.uscj.org/Checklist_Welcoming_7514.html).
- United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's Committee of Inclusion of People with Disabilities commissioned a High Holiday information packet designed to provide information and resources focused on enhancing inclusion and meaningful participation of congregants with disabilities. The packet can also be used when considering inclusion on a daily basis. [www.uscj.org/Accessibility7508.html](http://www.uscj.org/Accessibility7508.html)

## **Union for Reform Judaism**

- The URJ has a document to guide congregations through the first steps of inclusion: [urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=document&item\\_id=11643](http://urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=document&item_id=11643). Their Communicate! database is also full of searchable ideas from congregations, individuals, and experts, on inclusion and working with people with special needs: [esite.urj.org/comm/index.asp](http://esite.urj.org/comm/index.asp).
- Contact Rabbi Richard Address at the URJ for a copy of *Al Pi Darco*, a manual for creating bar/bat mitzvah for Jews with special needs. For more information visit [urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=article&item\\_id=3500](http://urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=article&item_id=3500). Rabbi Address' office also has bookmarks and a brochure on seven ways a congregation can create a disabilities program.
- The URJ website has information about low-cost or no-cost changes and modifications. There are many things we can do to make our synagogues, schools and organizations more accessible and open to those with special needs. The following is a list of some examples of things that can be done: [urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=article&item\\_id=3499](http://urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=article&item_id=3499).