



November 2009

Update: Third Quarter 2009

Dear Friends,

As you read this Update, we hope you can appreciate the diversity of JDC-Ashalim's work over the last quarter. The following stories highlight how our programs facilitate change in at-risk children and youth's lives through different means, such as using Jewish learning to bridge generational and cultural gaps between Ethiopian and Israeli families, or creating venues for disadvantaged youth to cultivate their natural talents and abilities.

Another focus of our work that builds directly on JDC-Ashalim's accrued expertise in program development is our growing involvement with the Israeli Government's National Program for Children and Youth at Risk (which is based on the Schmid Commission's recommendations). Currently we are involved with the National Program on multiple levels – in planning early intervention services, in replication of programs and services, and in developing professional training modules for use by the National Program.

JDC-Ashalim's involvement with the multi-year National Program presents an opportunity to improve the care for thousands of children and youth at risk throughout Israel.

Sincerely,

Charles Ribakoff, Chair
JDC-Ashalim Sub-Committee

Dr. Rami Sulimani, Director
JDC-Ashalim

From the Field

If You Can't See Feel!

JDC-Ashalim recently launched the **Beacons in the Dark** program for the blind and visually impaired. **Beacons in the Dark** seeks to create a safe-space and a comfortable social environment where blind and visually impaired children can learn valuable social skills, build self-confidence, and form lifelong friendships. Based on the youth movement model, the program meets regularly in small groups with activities facilitated by a group of dedicated young volunteers.



Blindfolded campers participate in activities organized by **Beacons in the Dark** participants.

Sara, a 16-year-old visually impaired teen from Jerusalem, is thrilled about the social opportunities that **Beacons in the Dark** has created for her and her peers.

"Before this program I never attended social events. Initially I was afraid that it would be difficult for me to take part and that the sighted youth would not understand me, I didn't have any means to interact with other visually impaired people after school or on the weekend."

One of the program's goals is the integration of visually impaired or blind youth with their sighted peers. To this end, the program established a special branch of the national Scouts

Youth movement so that program participants would be able to take part in mainstream social and recreational activities.

On the Scouts movement's annual summer camping trip, **Beacons in the Dark** campers created a course where campers could experience some of the challenges the visually impaired encounter on a daily basis. At stations along the course, blindfolded campers tried to pair socks of different colors, put together a puzzle while wearing glasses that distort vision, and decode a brail message. They wore T-shirts with a message to the campers in English and Braille: "If you can't see feel!" The encounter was a success, with participants reporting, "*I learned more in a one-hour activity than I would have learned in years of study.*"

Beacons in the Dark has already attracted sixty participants, and participation is expected to reach almost one hundred youth this coming year.

Closing Cultural and Generation Gaps with PACT

For the **PACT** (Parents And Children Together) program that helps narrow gaps between Ethiopian-Israeli children and veteran Israelis in the education system, one of the challenges is helping these immigrant families find their place in Israeli society.

To this end, the **PACT** program runs group learning activities, in collaboration with the non-profit Yahalom (Hebrew acronym for Children & Parents Learning). To date, some 500 parents and children have participated in these family learning communities. Together, they study Jewish traditions, engage in creative activities and visit significant historical sites. A highlight of the program was the four-day retreat in Jerusalem this summer for groups from all around the country.

For Ethiopian Olim, family learning communities help them foster closer relationships with their kids, carry on family traditions to the next generation, and strengthen their identity as an Israeli family.

Although most groups are composed solely of immigrant families, there were a number of mixed groups consisting of Ethiopian Olim and veteran Israelis who live in close proximity or whose children are classmates. For most participants in these mixed groups, this was the first time that they had an opportunity to engage in meaningful interaction with families from different backgrounds. Thus, in addition to addressing inter-generational issues, the groups serve to bridge gaps between veteran Israeli and immigrant families.

JDC-Ashalim Youth Serve as Israel's Ambassadors Overseas

Nine teens from JDC-Ashalim programs were invited to attend a non-Jewish summer arts camp hosted by the European Youth Education and Meeting Centre (EJBW) in Weimar, Germany in July.

Judith Kirschbaum, JDC-Ashalim's program manager was approached by the EJBW to organize a group of at-risk Israeli teens to participate in the arts camp. She conducted a rigorous selection process from among a pool of participants in JDC-Ashalim youth programs, based on the kid's progress in the program and their willingness to serve as ambassadors.



Pictured: Israeli participants with Judith Kirschbaum (second from left).

Those chosen for the delegation came from across the country - from Hatzor in the north to Kiryat Malachi in the south. Some are from immigrant families and others from veteran Israeli families. While they each faced individual challenges, they shared a common interest in developing their

artistic talents that they discovered through their participation in JDC-Ashalim programs such as the Youth Excellence program.

Judith described what this trip meant for these underprivileged teens: "*Not only were they required to make use of their talents in an intensive arts camp and to overcome cultural barriers getting to know peers from France, Germany and Russia, but they also had to shoulder the responsibility of serving as representatives of Israel and the Jewish people in a foreign country.*"

"*This experience will stay with me for life,*" said Shalev, one of the nine JDC-Ashalim kids who traveled to the International Arts Camp. At the end of the trip, Adit said that she is now certain

that she would like to be an artist.



Pictured: Exhibit of artwork created by arts camp participants at one of the workshops.



Pictured: Traditional Shabbat candle lighting and Kiddush with fellow participants on Friday evening a mere fifteen minutes away from Buchenwald, which the Israeli and European teens visited earlier that day.

The arts camp included workshops in a wide range of areas, including plastic arts, photography and drama. There were also social and cultural activities such as tours of the city and opportunities to share in each group's cultural heritage. The Israeli delegation represented their country through food, dance and ethnic dress.

Turning Point: Youth at Risk Lead Recreational Activities

JDC-Ashalim's **Turning Point** youth employment and entrepreneurship program gives high school drop outs, delinquents, or troubled teens a second chance to rebuild their self-confidence, develop life skills, and learn what it takes to be a productive member of the workforce.

One of the ways that this program engages these youth is through the opportunity to work in *It's a Deal* youth-run business ventures. In the course of their work, program participants, who would typically feel socially marginalized, learn to interact with people from various sectors of society who they meet as customers or suppliers of the business.

This summer, two *It's a Deal* ventures, *Wing of Love*, located in Kfar Menachem southwest of Jerusalem, and *Ein Yael*, located in Jerusalem, opened their doors to the general public offering activities for summer camps and for families. Program participants led activities and conducted guided tours for hundreds of visitors. The positive interaction was an important step in their re-integration into mainstream society.

Avi, a 16-year-old delinquent reflected on his experience at *Wing of Love*, where he has been a participant for only six months. His work in the business venture has made him rethink his priorities in life and turn himself around. Avi believes that he now has more self-confidence, and he is appreciative of the help he has received along the way. "*I used to be a quiet, introverted kid and now I speak up more readily. I've met many people here who care and are helping me move forward in life. Now I work instead of stealing. I earn my money honestly.*"

JDC-Ashalim program partners, led by the First International Bank of Israel, assisted in publicizing family recreational activities in the Israeli press and ran a direct advertising campaign for the above-mentioned programs.

New Residents Help Revive Better Together Neighborhoods

The **Better Together** program, which began in 2004 and now operates in fourteen cities countrywide, focuses attention and pools resources in order to address the needs of children and youth growing up in blighted neighborhoods. This community intervention continues to revitalize severely disadvantaged neighborhoods by forging partnerships between local residents, schools, police, municipalities, community centers and social service providers. These joint efforts are resulting in new programs and better services for children and youth of all ages in the neighborhood.

The latest indicator of **Better Together's** progress is the willingness of young educated, motivated adults with a strong social conscience to move into **Better Together** neighborhoods and take part in the program.

The most recent example is in Dimona where a group of young adults returned together to their hometown after completing their university studies. Another example is a group of young, modern Orthodox families who moved into the Hadar neighborhood in Haifa. As we have seen in the past, these groups will develop their own projects within the framework of **Better Together**, filling the void where social services are lacking.



Simchat Torah Festivities organized by the New Young Adult group in the Hadar neighborhood of Haifa after the holiday.