



Planning Workshop for  
*Jewish Disability Awareness Month*

February, 2009

*Tachlis* of Inclusion

*Prepared by*

Shelly Christensen, MA  
Program Manager  
Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for  
People with Disabilities

**“For my house shall be a house of prayer for all people.”**

**Isaiah 56:5**

Having a disability should never be a reason to exclude someone from involvement in his or her Jewish community. When someone with a disability is included and involved in meaningful ways, we are blessed with their gifts as a community. We are not whole until all of us belong.

Inclusion is the opportunity for every person, regardless of ability, to participate in meaningful ways in the life of the Jewish community. How do we know what is meaningful to another person? We open our doors, and we take the journey together.

This is our philosophy at the Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities. We do not do things *for* people with disabilities. We do things *with* people with disabilities. That, in simple terms, is how we achieve inclusion and meaningful participation.

But where do we start?

Participation in Jewish Disability Awareness Month will help you get started. In preparing for the weekend you will decide what steps you are going to take. And you will surely want to continue to build on those steps in the weeks and months that follow.

If you are already on that journey of inclusion, this special month of recognition will give you the opportunity to examine other needs in your congregation or organization and create a roadmap to further your initiative.

Inclusion is woven into every aspect of your organization. This guide is a toolbox of useful and inspiring ideas that can be adapted to your organization. Some of the suggestions can be implemented right now, while others require time and energy to develop. Use your creativity!

For additional resources, consider using the Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities. See information at the end of this material.

May you have a meaningful journey on the road to inclusion.

Shelly Christensen, MA

Program Manager

Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities

A program of Jewish Family and Children's Service and the Minneapolis Jewish Federation

# The Tachlis of Inclusion...

## ...In Your Sanctuary

- Using the materials provided today and from other sources, give the sermon on inclusion.
- Tours of the sanctuary. For people who are new to your congregation or who are visiting, offer tours of the sanctuary so they can see all of the ritual items, stand on the bimah, hold the Torah, look at the Torah portion, and find where they will be the most comfortable sitting. Feeling comfortable in new surroundings may help ease anxiety about attending services.
- Announce page numbers from the bimah often. Describe the prayer book and commentary by color and size, in addition to name.
- Ask people with disabilities ahead of time to participate in rituals and prayers during the service. Ahead of time, offer aliyot and help them practice the blessings. Ask people with disabilities and their family members to give the d'var Torah, carry the Torah for hakafah, light Shabbat candles and say the Kiddush.
- If your bimah is not accessible, consider moving the reading desk to the main level of the sanctuary so the Torah itself is accessible to all.
- Use the example of the Welcoming Usher (at the end of this guide) to create your own, and share with the ushers. They are often the first point of contact and this will help them be better prepared.
- Have a congregational discussion during services on ways the synagogue can support life cycle events for people with disabilities.
- Encourage b'nai mitzvah families to hold the ceremony at regular Erev Shabbat or Shabbat morning services, whatever the tradition of your congregation.
- Use the Torah discussion today as a month-long theme during Torah study and sermons. Give materials from today to committee chairs and board president to carry the discussion to their areas of concern.
- Provide prayer books and Torah commentaries in accessible format (i.e. Braille, large print, audio versions).
- Make your worship service accessible to people who have diverse sensory needs, such as sign language interpretation (set seats aside so those worshipers can see the interpreter clearly) and picture schedule of the service order. Include in your service handout the start and stop time of services, the prayer order and the location of restrooms and drinking fountains.

## ...In Your Organization

- Planning a Shabbat of Inclusion. Your planning committee should include people with disabilities.
- Start your Inclusion Committee. This committee can help plan the activities for the Shabbat of Inclusion and continue to guide your congregation afterwards. During the Shabbat of Inclusion, let people know that the Inclusion Committee is seeking new members. (Inclusion Committees are the best way to engage lay and professional leadership in a long-term inclusion plan—see the end of this guide for an outline of things to do to start your Inclusion Committee).
- Identify barriers to participation within the organization. Examine:
  - Architectural barriers
  - Communication barriers
  - Attitudinal barriers
- Review your mission statement. What does your organizational mission statement say about inclusion? If you have an Inclusion Committee, spend the necessary time to create the mission statement of this committee (see end of this guide for examples of mission statements).
- Promoting Inclusion. Every time you advertise an organizational event or program, include an accessibility statement (see end of this guide for examples of accessibility statements). Also, include a simple statement on all of your printed materials and website that support inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Braille signage on elevators, room and directional signs.
- Have a mezuzah ceremony. Place mezuzot at wheelchair height.
- Start an Inclusion or Accessibility Fund to help provide money for accommodations and modifications.
- Evaluate each of the programming areas as well as architecture to identify barriers to inclusion. Use these evaluations to set priorities and goals for inclusion in your organization.
- Before the weekend begins, decide what your organization is going to do next to further inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Write a monthly column for the bulletin on different aspects of inclusion in your congregation.
- Become an Accessible Congregation through the National Organization on Disability (NOD) Accessible Congregation Campaign ([www.aapd.org](http://www.aapd.org)). Place your certificate in a prominent place, and promote this achievement.
- Use language that promotes respect and dignity. For example, Sam is not handicapped or disabled. Sam is a person with a disability. Using People First language is respectful and does not define a person by their disability, rather, having a disability is just one aspect of who they are.

## ...For Jewish Disability Awareness Month

- Host a congregational Shabbat dinner to kick-off Jewish Disability Awareness Month. Invite all members of your congregation, as well as other members of the Jewish community to join you. Put requests for accommodations on the invitation. If someone requests that food be cut for them, do that in the kitchen, not in the dining area. Continue the Shabbat celebration with a special *Erev Shabbat* service. Be sure that Board members are invited.
- Host a congregational Havdallah service with activities. Some congregations advertise this as an Inclusion Havdallah for the entire community, but encourage people with disabilities and their families to attend. The music and the scents of Havdallah provide a beautiful setting for art activities, games and stories.
- Integrate Jewish Disability Awareness Month into other activities:
  - Youth group participation in a community mitzvah opportunity such as bowling with people who live in a group home.
  - The youth group can provide afternoon activities for children with disabilities so parents and siblings have special time together.
  - The Men's Club or Brotherhood could sponsor a breakfast and invite a speaker from the community to talk about disability services (such as training service dogs).
  - Coordinate a program for parents of children with disabilities to bring them together and minimize isolation. Invite a speaker from Jewish Family Services to lead a parent education group. Provide child care.
  - Organize a program for siblings, such as SibShops, or invite a family life educator to come talk about sibling needs.
  - Torah Study can include other citations in our text that help us wrestle with inclusion.
  - Lunch and Learn following Shabbat morning services or on Sunday afternoon brings people together to process what they have learned and experienced from the weekend.
  - Do you have a book club? Choose a book that describes the experience of having a disability such as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* by Mark Haddon. Or choose a book that describes the experience of parenting a child with a disability such as *Grief Dancers* by Susan Zimmermann.
  - Your religious school can have age appropriate programming for students focused on the concept of *B'zelem Elohim*—we are created in the Divine Image. Read books and stories written about children with a diverse range of abilities. Prepare teachers to try a different teaching strategy to engage all learners. Invite parents of students who have disabilities to come to class and share their family's story.
- Be responsive to concerns expressed by people with disabilities and their families. Is there something that would be appropriate to address with programming during the weekend?

# Steps to Developing an Inclusion Committee

Adapted from Temple Israel Inclusion Committee

Minneapolis, MN

Completed	Steps to Develop Your Accessibility and Inclusion Committee
	1. Speak with your rabbi/executive director about the need for an Inclusion Committee.
	2. Speak with your Board president about the need for an Inclusion Committee. Request to be on the agenda for the next board meeting for a brief presentation on the establishment of an Inclusion Committee.
	3. Contact your organization's staff for information regarding its bylaws pertaining to the requirements for establishing committees.
	4. Select individuals to make a presentation to your Board of Trustees. Whether or not you will need approval by the Board to start the committee, you will want to inform them of the need for the Inclusion Committee as well as the approval by your rabbi/executive director, Board president/executive committee. Share information about the Community Inclusion Guide initiative with them.
	5. Get Board approval, if required.
	6. Contact members of your organization who would be interested in joining the Inclusion Committee. Your committee should include individuals with disabilities, family members, clergy, educational leaders and staff, youth group leaders, board member(s), people who are professionally involved in providing services to people with disabilities (i.e. education specialists, psychologists, architects.) Seek as broad-based support of members as possible.
	7. Insist that administrative staff and/or clergy be liaison to the committee and attend all committee meetings.
	8. Set a first meeting with as much publicity as possible.
	9. Establish a Mission Statement for the committee. (This is more important than it seems. It will get the new members focused as a group on the overall goals of the committee);  <i>It might be helpful to have a facilitator run the first few meetings</i>

	10. Submit Mission Statement to the Board for its approval (if necessary).
	11. Schedule a 2-hour visioning meeting to initiate the Community Inclusion Guide Process. The Community Inclusion Program Manager will facilitate the visioning meeting to help you set goals and priorities.
	12. Collaborate with other committees from your organization - You will find that almost all the committees will be connected to your Inclusion Committee - i.e., Social Action, Building, Education, Youth, Worship, Membership, etc.
	13. Funding can be a key concern (and major obstacle). See if there are any endowments or funds in existence that could be accessed. Try to contact members who might fund initial costs. Regardless of the funding resources, proceed with your plan. Often funds become available as needs are identified.

## Inclusion Committee Mission Statements

1. Committee mission statements should reflect the organizational mission statement. If inclusion is not part of this mission statement, consider revising it.
2. Add the Inclusion mission statement to the organizational and committee mission statements.
3. Publicize your mission statement in all bulletins, weekly programs, stationary, etc.
4. Mission statements are often created and put aside. Schedule a month that is devoted to the meaning of the mission statement and use this idea for *Torah* study, sermons, committee *d'verei Torah*, religious school projects, etc. For example, religious school classes can write their own "mission statement" about being inclusive.

### Examples of Inclusion Committee Mission Statements

The mission of the *Adath Jeshurun* Inclusion Committee is to facilitate the accommodation and appreciation of individual differences so that all members of our synagogue community can participate together -- in *Torah* study, prayer and spirituality, and acts of loving kindness to all humanity.

The mission statement for our Inclusion Committee at *B'nai Emet* is....  
To provide the opportunity for full inclusion and participation of all people, regardless of physical, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral ability, in all areas of *B'nai Emet* Synagogue's religious and communal life.

Mission: To enable all people in the Temple Israel community to have the opportunity for full participation in religious and communal life.

Vision: The Inclusion Committee will pursue its mission by: 1) identifying and supporting special needs in the congregation; 2) educating lay leaders, staff and congregants; and 3) facilitating necessary changes by working within Temple Israel and collaborating with the community at large.

Inclusion Committee Mission: Assure that all members of *Bet Shalom* Congregation are able to participate fully in all spiritual, educational, celebratory and life event activities at the synagogue.

Vision: A community where all members share a sense of dignity, empathy, and togetherness; where inclusion is the infrastructure or framework around which congregation activities are centered.

# Communicate Accessibility

## Auxiliary Aids and Services Request Statements

- Invite people with disabilities to attend worship services, programs and events by including an accessibility statement in *all* of your publications.
  - All bulletins, weekly programs, invitations and notices about programs should clearly state that your institution is accessible to people with disabilities.
  - 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 special accommodations to participate in the meeting should contact \_\_\_\_\_ at 222-222-2222 no later than \_\_\_\_\_.  
(name) (deadline if appropriate)
  - Special Needs accommodation requests should be directed to \_\_\_\_\_ at 222-222-2222 no later than \_\_\_\_\_.  
(deadline if appropriate) (name)
  - Direct requests for special accommodations \_\_\_\_\_ 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.*

Materials in this handout adapted from the Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities, published October, 2007 first printing. Reprinted March, 2008 second printing. Copyright Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis. Author: Shelly Christensen.



# JEWISH COMMUNITY GUIDE TO INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

*An essential resource for Jewish organizations  
seeking to provide a supportive and inclusive  
environment for people with disabilities*

- Step by step guide for establishing an Inclusion Committee
- Comprehensive assessments and strategies
- Resources to create a plan of action
- Disability awareness training
- 10 things to know about raising a child with special needs
- Information and resources

*Shelly Christensen, MA, is the Program Manager of the Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities, a cutting edge, award-winning program. As a parent and professional, Shelly has experienced the journey of inclusion from many perspectives. She has assisted numerous synagogues, schools and organizations in creating inclusion programs and is a frequent guest speaker on inclusion and disability issues.*

*“As we all pursue the dream of shalom, wholeness and completeness, the Guide enables every single child and adult to make that journey together.”*  
Becca Hornstein, Executive Director, Council For Jews With Special Needs

*“Written with spiritual sensitivity, it is comprehensive, clearly written and beautifully designed”*  
Ginny Thornburgh, Vice President & Director, Religion & Disability Program AAPD

**PURCHASING INFORMATION ON REVERSE SIDE**  
**Minneapolis Jewish Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities**   
*A program of Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis*

Funded by the Minneapolis Jewish Federation and the Toodie and Frank Trestman Special Needs and Collaborative Education Endowment Fund of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation

## JEWISH COMMUNITY GUIDE TO INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

### SHIPPING AND HANDLING INFORMATION

First book \$8.00 shipping and handling

Each additional book \$2.50 shipping and handling

*Domestic rates for U.S. only. Contact us for international rates.*

**952-542-4838**

Please send check or money order payable to  
*Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis*  
or charge the order to your VISA or MasterCard.

**Mail form below with payment to:**

Minneapolis Jewish Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities  
c/o Jewish Family and Children's Service, 13100 Wayzata Blvd., Suite 400, Minnetonka, MN  
55305

For fax, phone or e-mail orders, only MasterCard or VISA will be accepted.



Detach here

## ORDER FORM

QUANTITY \_\_\_\_ @ \$36 each

SUBTOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SHIPPING AND HANDLING \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

CHARGE YOUR PURCHASE (check one)  VISA  MasterCard

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### PLEASE PRINT

Name and Title \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Shipping Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_