



INSIGHT

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Carpentry for the Blind A Visionary Idea that Works

Itai runs his hand over the surface of the newly handcrafted end table. Finding a rough spot, he carefully begins sanding once again. His work of art will soon be ready to take home to his family. Itai is one of many Institute students as well as adults that enjoy the carpentry workshop, despite the dust and the clamor of machinery. The workshop at the Jewish Institute for the Blind is in a large room – a room of individual accomplishment, hard work and work well done.

In one corner, a lovely oak shelving unit is being completed, and Yossi is finishing a small phone table that still needs to be varnished. A large two-story doll house will most certainly delight a little girl and her friends when her proud father brings it home.

Carpentry has become one of the most popular workshops at the Jewish Institute for the Blind. Students learn the basics of woodwork, begin working on a project of their choice and become so involved that they don't want to leave. Not only have blind and partially sighted students become fond of woodwork, but adults who are independent in every facet of



Adults enjoy carpentry in afternoon classes at the Institute



Students learn to handle tools and acquire independence

their lives still come back to the Institute's afternoon classes to learn carpentry in the controlled workshop.

The idea for the carpentry shop at the Institute germinated after an Israeli television program featured a blind carpenter in the late 70's. Ariah Ben-Israel, 81-years old today, was blinded in the War of Independence in 1948. He developed a love for wood and design during his rehabilitation, and he still works in carpentry today in his Haifa workshop. JIB Director Chaim Reshelbach remembers being so impressed with Ben-Israel's story on t.v. that he went to visit him at his home in Haifa, seeing firsthand how carpentry had become such an integral and satisfying part of his life.

"Ben-Israel was happy to meet with me, and he had lots of advice on how to set up a carpentry department for the blind," explains Reshelbach. "We opened the carpentry workshop and the first instructor, Eli Dahan helped to establish its professional base." Today, after two decades, the Institute's carpentry workshop still provides creative and educational enrichment for students and adults.

According to instructor Maimon Biton, the JIB is keeping up with the times, and the department has state-of-the-art equipment. "It is exciting to watch the students develop such independence in their work," adds Biton, who has taught at the Institute for over 20 years (see Outstanding Employee column on pg. 2).