
Service With a Smile

When Ya'ara Balsbalg decided she wanted to serve her country after high school, she knew where to look. This serious 19-year-old from the Golan Heights came to Jerusalem and was accepted as one of eight Sherut Leumi or National Service volunteers at the Institute. Although she traded her army uniform for an intense year at the Institute, she is proud of her contribution.



Daphne and Ya'ara give from the heart as volunteers at the Institute

"I assumed that I could make more of an impact here than in many other locations," explains Ya'ara. "And I have been amazed at the students and their perseverance. Daphne Greenboim was also chosen out of dozens of applicants for a position with the Institute. This year of volunteer work has helped to convince her that a career in special education, social work or psychology is the path she would like to pursue.

The days of the volunteers are long but fulfilling. Wake-up call comes early, and the volunteers are at breakfast with their charges by 7:30 a.m. Students that study outside the Institute are escorted to their frameworks, and very often a student needs to visit a neighborhood doctor or nurse. Individual help

is given during school hours, and afternoons are very busy with homework assistance, informal activities such as folk dancing, therapeutic horseback riding, independence skills or even helping a curious girl try out a new hairdo or experiment with makeup. The volunteers plan evening activities as well as holidays, and even after lights are turned out, there is oftentimes someone that wants to talk or needs a kind word before bedtime.

Not only have the girls mastered braille, they have learned the heartbreak of trying to help a child cope with a deteriorating disease that will rob her of her sight. "Every day is different at the Institute, and every student has his own full world," explains Daphne. She has invited pupils to her parents' home for an occasional weekend away.

"The students come here from such different backgrounds, but they are so unified that the 'group' really helps them cope," explains Daphne. Both volunteers feel like they have gained tremendous insight into the students, their strengths and flexibility. "This year at the Institute has certainly been one I will not forget," she adds.

One of the Institute's Outstanding Employees

Her friendly smile and calm demeanor have greeted students and staff alike at the Jewish Institute for the Blind for well over a decade. As guidance counselor at the Institute, she not only helps decide which new students to accept, but she also assists students to make decisions which will affect their entire lives.

"In addition to helping each pupil achieve his academic goals, we hope to prepare them for the independence that they will need as young adults," Trop says. "We are proud to say that every student has his or her individual program of study, and we are constantly monitoring our achievements as well as those of each student."



Menucha Trop

Trop moved to Jerusalem 20 years ago and began working as a teacher at the Jewish Institute for the Blind. She echoes many other staff members as she explains that "the Institute pupils are like our oxygen, and once someone begins working with them, it is hard to ever think of leaving." Today in her position as counselor, she helps students, educators, and even the volunteers that contribute so much at the Institute. "The Institute is a vital and changing place," she adds. "It is a challenge to meet the needs of the students, helping to prepare them to be independent young adults."