



# INSIGHT

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## Part of the Community — Integrative Activities at JIB



One on one

"We are opening ourselves to the outside world, and our students are benefiting from every minute of our new programming," explains Moshe Ben-Mocha, Director of Residential Facilities at the Jewish Institute for the Blind. Pointing to a full calendar, Ben-Mocha checks to see what is on every student's busy agenda. Art activities at the Israel Museum, afternoon judo classes at the Institute's Sports Center with sighted participants, volunteer work at a Jerusalem hospital — these are just a few of the scheduled activities.

Community integration is the key to the new open atmosphere that prevails at the Jewish Institute for the Blind. "Not only do we give to the community, but we get quite a bit in return," explains Ben-Mocha, a longtime educator who realized the advantages of opening the gates of the Institute to the surrounding Jerusalem community.

The first-class Sports Center of the Institute was constructed with the idea of integrating Jerusalemites into activities with the Blind at the pool, ball courts, exercise and weight rooms. Questions were raised that perhaps in the interest of integration, the blind and partially sighted pupils should participate in local sports arenas and pools with sighted youngsters. On several occasions, however, local public swimming pools turned away groups of blind and partially sighted students when they learned of their visual handicap.

"Not only did we protest this unwarranted discrimination, but a few years later we were able to begin complete one of Jerusalem's finest sport centers, and now people from all over Jerusalem come to us," explains JIB director Chaim Reshelbach. The facilities are used free of charge by the blind and their families, and commercial rates are collected from other groups and individuals. And in addition to the students who enjoy the Sports Center, activities abound for people of all ages and walks of life.

### Educational Excursions

Recently, one of Jerusalem's most prestigious schools, the School of Arts and Sciences adopted several Institute students and weekly, they go to the high school campus where they are helped individually in computers, science and art. Not only are these activities enriching on their own, but they are important in helping the students of the Institute socialize with these talented high school students, developing their social skills outside the walls of the Institute.

Although a synagogue is located on the Institute's campus, many students like to pray in the nearby Kiryat Moshe neighborhood synagogue. Students oftentimes join B'nei Akiva, the local religious youth club. Many neighborhood families visit pupils at the Institute, and invitations abound when the students spend the Sabbath at the JIB.

Institute pupils have always been educated to be important contributing members of society, and today more than ever, they are an integral part of their surroundings. With careful planning, other institutions are opening their doors to JIB students, and several students volunteer in a nearby hospital this year, and they certainly realize the importance of giving as well as receiving.

Shimon Azar, acting principal of the Institute's school this year, is constantly amazed at the positive feedback he receives from the community. "Our pupils that volunteer are filled with pride, and they are providing important services to society as well," explains Azar. As the students learn in an institutionalized framework, it is vital to expose them to all facets of society, helping them to become self sufficient and

productive citizens. This year, a true feeling of openness and connection to the neighborhood and society exists.



JIB pupils enjoy art activities at the Israel Museum