



# Insight

news from Jewish Institute For The Blind, Jerusalem

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## Life With COVID-19 at Jewish Institute for the Blind



*Matar, the Institute for Emotional Therapy at the JIB*

The corona pandemic has been a nightmare for mankind. Every country has met its challenge, and until the vaccine is widely distributed, we are all faced with the disease's exponential growth and toll. Today, Israel's population is quickly being vaccinated, and hopefully, it will be one of the first countries to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

As in most of Europe and North America, commercial businesses and schools have been closed, but life has continued. At the Jewish Institute for the Blind, although school was halted in the spring, activities resumed through Zoom classes and one-on-one virtual activities. Although Israel is a small country with a population of just under nine million, and nationalized medicine affords people a high standard of medical care, populations at risk are still suffering from COVID-19 and its ramifications.

The blind actually deal with mobility issues on a daily basis, but when social distancing is added, life is much more difficult. Social isolation and depression also affects the blind, perhaps even more than other groups in society. If people are studying and working from home, they are much more isolated than in pre-COVID times, and they have much less contact with the outside world. Throughout most of this difficult period of almost a year, the Institute has been open, serving as a lifeline for many of our students and greater community. Matar, or the Institute for Emotional Therapy at the

Institute in Jerusalem has been fully operational, helping the visually handicapped and their families deal with these difficult times.

"People are turning to the Matar clinic for help with feelings of isolation and helplessness during the COVID-19 pandemic," explains Matar director Yachel Pozillov. Children as well as adults are treated and entire families are benefitting from the availability of subsidized therapy offered at the Matar Center at the Institute. "Although the fees are greatly reduced, cost is still a deterrent for even greater usage of the therapeutic facilities," she says.

"In addition to standard meetings with individual therapists on a one-to-one basis, Zoom or video calls can also be helpful for those that are geographically far away. "Students have learned to work remotely using assistive technology with specialized software," explains school principal Menucha Trop. Classes have become even more individualized or were held virtually and most of the pupils were present even if they were off screen. Zoom classes or video calls still enable students to have connections with their educators and social contact with fellow classmates. Social workers are in touch on a person-to-person basis, and students as well as the entire visually handicapped community receives assistance as well as moral support from the staff at the JIB. Despite the obvious difficulties, Institute staff and students alike are learning to cope during the coronavirus pandemic.



*Art activities are oftentimes preferred to verbal therapy for young people*

# Institute's Recording Studio Fulfills Important Roles

His mellifluous voice proceeds him in the hallway of the recording studio at the Institute. Tzvi Florenthal has a distinct honeyed tone, full of character. At the Institute he heads the recording studio, and although he records religious texts for the visually handicapped, his voice is widely recognized in Israel.

Maybe it is that Florenthal sounds a bit like the prophet actually speaking from the mountain. His title is Coordinator of Religious Books, and when he reads from the Bible or leads daily prayers, his voice is inspirational. He even tells a story of being in line at a medical clinic speaking with a nurse when a visually handicapped patient heard him and spoke up remarking that "I prayed with you this morning".

Florenthal has had a career in Israeli radio and television, but today he is happy in his job for the Central Library for the Blind and Reading Impaired at the Jewish Institute for the Blind in Jerusalem. He knows that he and the staff of readers open and enrich the world of the blind, enabling them to study, acquire knowledge and even pray.



*Tzvi Florenthal at recording studio at Institute*

## A Glimpse at One of the Institute's Employees Yachel Pozillov

A clinical social worker for many years, Yachel Pozillov has been a guiding force to the blind and their families at the Institute for almost 25 years. She has helped to initiate many projects at the Institute and watched as youngsters of all ages find their independence through their activities at the JIB. Today she is case manager for Matar, an acronym for the Institute for Emotional Therapy, an organization that offers therapies of all types for the blind as well as their entire families.

"During these days of the coronavirus, the visually handicapped of Israel have shown remarkable resourcefulness," explains Pozillov, "but loneliness and isolation are taking their



*Yachel Pozillov*

toll. Families of special needs children are also turning to Matar for counseling and assistance. "At the JIB, we are available at Matar to help the visually handicapped population and their families in these trying times of social isolation.

Pozillov is not surprised to see the increased interest in the therapies that are available at the Institute. In addition to frontal counseling, art, music and drama therapies are also widely used

with young people to help them express themselves. She has high hopes that after emerging from this difficult pandemic year, the students will have the resilience to overcome other challenges that they may encounter in the future.

# Spotlights

## 🌸 Graduation

The graduation ceremony at the Institute last summer was a small but meaningful event for students and their families. Although they couldn't meet in person as the corona virus raged through Israel, a Zoom ceremony featured music, personalized addresses and a sense of closure for the students after their years of high school.

## 🌸 Birding at the Institute

A new afternoon activity has opened up at the Institute which takes advantage of the migration of birds near the campus. Israel is known as a migratory capital as over 500 million birds pass through the country in the autumn and again in the spring on the birds' path between Eurasia and Africa. According to Oren Ganor in the Institute's Department of Community Services, the birding activities are led by a zoologist and take advantage of the sharp hearing abilities of the visually impaired. "It's actually easier to hear a bird and differentiate between species than it is to see one," explains Ganor. "Our participants are learning to recognize dozens of birds by their calls and voices, and they are enjoying this very interesting hobby.

## 🌸 Play Room

The donation of a new play room equipped with dozens of new educational games and toys is a real cause for celebration at the Institute. Not only is the new room specially equipped with educational tools for the blind, it is accessible to all and f-u-n! This beautiful new play room is a real benefit to the students whenever they have free time or a guided recess or play activity.



*New therapeutic play room is educational and fun*

# Director's Corner



Despite the corona pandemic, the Institute is working overtime for the blind and partially sighted of Israel. We are doing our utmost to see that each and every student gets as much individual attention as possible during these difficult times. In Israel the severity of the situation was grasped early last March, and strict lockdown measures were taken. By the end of February 2021, Israel administered at least one doze of the Pfizer vaccine to more than 45% of its population of 9.2 million. At present, Israel has the highest per capita rate of vaccinations in the world, and just as we are protecting our elderly and front line responders, we must vaccinate our educators. Our entire staff at the Institute has been present for our students, and we are proud of the work being done during the COVID-19 pandemic. We strive to give the blind community the tools to continue in their educational as well as their day-by-day activities during this period, and we help to relieve the loneliness of these difficult days.

As we go to press, may we wish you and your family a happy and healthy 2021, and may we soon see the end of this difficult period. This summer we will be excited to launch the festivities of the 120th anniversary of the Jewish Institute for the Blind. In the meantime, may you enjoy a beautiful spring and a lovely Passover holiday.

Shabtai Deutsch, Director

# Sports Activities in Wake of Pandemic

Although government regulations have all but forced the closure of the Sports Center at the Institute, swimming and some rehabilitative sports activities are still a part of the curriculum of the student body. Tandem bicycling is still a weekly activity at the Institute, and there are paired blind and sighted runners exercising on the track of the nearby Hebrew University or on marked trails in and around Jerusalem. International Olympic as well as Paralympic games have been rescheduled due to the pandemic and international competitions that were

to take place in Tokyo in 2020 will now be moved to Kobe, Japan in 2022.

The art of bicycle maintenance is becoming an important pastime at the Institute as Daniel Shachar, a blind Jerusalem volunteer, maintains and repairs the tandem bicycles weekly. as they undergo a lot of wear and tear. Blind bikers from the community are joining Shachar and also learning the skills of bike maintenance. In this new and well equipped workshop at the Institute, Shachar is teaching an important tool to the blind and partially sighted.

## COME TO VISIT US

On your next trip to Israel  
we would like to welcome you  
to our campus,  
situated at the entrance to Jerusalem

8 Degel Reuven Street  
Kiryat Moshe

To arrange a visit  
please call: 02-6599501/11



*Excitement as Shmuel Taharani finishes tandem bicycle bike ride near Jerusalem*



### Bi-annual Newsletter

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Jewish Institute for the Blind

serving Israel's blind, visually impaired,  
and multi-handicapped

For over 100 years

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*Interested pupils also are learning the art of bicycle maintenance from Daniel Shachar at the Institute*