



## Opening the Gates of Torah

### *Jewish Disabilities Awareness*

### *50+ Programming and Action Ideas*

The following list as a starting point of ways in which your congregation might participate in Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month and act throughout the year to make your community accessible to all Jews.

- Check out all the resources and ideas at [www.shalomdc.org/disabilitiesandinclusion](http://www.shalomdc.org/disabilitiesandinclusion)
- Assess existing programs and evaluate their accessibility.
- Survey the physical surroundings of your synagogue and evaluate their accessibility for people with disabilities that affect mobility, sight, hearing, and development.
- Do not limit your survey to space used for worship, but extend it to include space used by synagogue staff and volunteers.
- Evaluate your “policies” of inclusion for all Jews, reviewing attitudes conveyed by written policies and unwritten codes of conduct toward people who look or act differently from others.
- Involve people with disabilities and parents of children with special needs in the development of policies and programs that will include all Jews.
- Use people first language in all synagogue publications and other communications.
- Invite people with disabilities to participate in services.
- Establish an accessibility committee in your congregation to address the needs of people with disabilities on an ongoing basis. Include people with disabilities and family members of people with disabilities on the committee.
- Dedicate a Kiddush or Oneg Shabbat in honor of Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month.
- Include special prayers or readings at each Shabbat service during Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month.
- Add a relevant quote to each Shabbat bulletin during Disabilities Awareness Month
- Encourage congregants to celebrate Shabbat and holidays with people with disabilities in the community.
- Provide large print Siddurim and Chumashin and other materials in Braille.
- Make print and taped versions of sermons and other materials available.
- Clear space in different parts of the sanctuary for people who use wheelchairs.



- Invite a speaker – for example, an expert in the field, a person with a disability, or a parent of a child with a disability. The JFGW Disability Inclusion Committee can help find speakers for your congregation.
- Provide educational resources concerning Judaism and disabilities in your synagogue library.
- Have teens as pre-teens serve as big brothers and sisters/buddies to youngsters with disabilities in the congregation.
- Welcome members of the Jewish deaf community by publicizing interpreted services and hire a qualified Judaic interpreter to make those services accessible.
- Have a nursery or religious school class lead and sign a prayer that have learned with the help of a qualified interpreter at a Shabbat service.
- Place a portable or permanent reading table on the sanctuary floor so that people with physical disabilities have greater access for Torah reading and honors.
- Place second mezuzot at wheelchair height on doorways throughout the synagogue.
- Hold religious school, nursery school and/or family education programs to raise awareness and sensitivity to people with disabilities in the Jewish community.
- Designate nursery school and religious school tzedaka during Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month for the synagogue's accessibility fund or to pay for an accommodation that will enhance the accessibility of your congregation. Put a tzedaka box in the synagogue lobby and inside the school entrance during the week so that everyone can participate.
- Make print resources available to your congregation.
- Ensure that people with disabilities are included in regular synagogue activities - Sisterhood, Men's Club/Brotherhood, youth groups, fundraising, social action minyanim, adult and children's education, volunteer activities, aliyot etc. – and provide accommodations to facilitate their participation.
- Consider replacing fixed pews with flexible seating that can be rearranged to accommodate a variety of needs.
- Install long-handled door hardware that is easier for everyone, especially those with impaired hand function, to use.
- Improve your synagogue's air quality by dusting woodwork, brass and other fixtures in the sanctuary, vacuuming with HEPA filter and cleaning air conditioning filters on a regular basis.