

THE JCA PARTNERS WITH BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF ISRAEL

by Cynthia Schlachter

Director of Resource Development, BBBS of Israel



BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS

The Jewish Community Alliance recently awarded a grant allocation to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Israel (BBBS).

Accredited through Big Brothers Big Sisters International, BBBS has been matching adult volunteer mentors with children from isolated single-parent families in Israel for the past six years.

This exciting partnership began when Emily Chaleff, JCA executive director, and Judy Bertam, JCA Campaign chair and Aronson Young Leadership award winner, visited BBBS while in Israel this past November. BBBS has branches in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Gush Etzion as well as a Clubhouse for activities in Jerusalem.

Libby Reichman, BBBS founder and executive director remarked, "We are thrilled to be one of JCA's partner organizations. This grant allocation will allow us to support a very special Big Brother/Little Brother pair - Rafi and Solomon (pictured). Rafi and Solomon have been together for the past two years and the change in Solomon is astounding. An adult male role model is what is making all the difference for Solomon who lives with his family in a one-bedroom apartment."



Solomon and his BBBS mentor, Rafi.

An industrial designer who works for a private studio that develops life support products for the Ministry of Defense, Rafi, 30, lives in Jerusalem with his wife and one-year old son. In his spare time, he designs Judaica and thinks about how he can make Solomon's life more manageable. "My wife is a doctor who worked in the Ethiopian community. After hearing how challenging their lives can be, I decided that I would like to help out one child in the community but I didn't know how. Then I saw an ad from BBBS two years ago, and after going through the screening process, luckily the staff knew exactly what would be best for me and for ten year old Solomon. Sweet, gentle and motivated, Solomon is growing up with his mother and four sisters and he yearned for a man in his life."

"Slowly, I learned the story of Solomon's life. His mother got divorced after surviving the long journey to Israel by crossing the deserts of Sudan by foot, and then Solomon was born here in Israel. When I met him, he wasn't able to read that well at all, and although his family is vibrant, supportive and very loving, they have very few resources. He sleeps in the living room and spends most of his time on the streets. When I met him, I had no idea how difficult his life was, but I felt how desperate he was for a Big Brother."

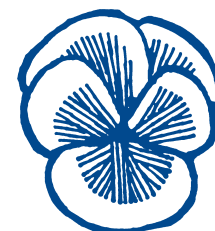
"When we meet together once a week, we do different activities together such as playing soccer, and now that I taught Solomon to swim, we also go to the swimming pool. In addition to doing fun things when we are together, I also try to inspire him to dream about things outside the range of his normal activities. For instance, he totally loves to dance to American hip hop music and he's really good too, so I hope that I will be able to sign him up for dancing lessons this fall."

"When I first met Solomon, I saw that he was having difficulty in school. His teacher told me that he is a natural leader and a very positive child. Luckily, I

Continued on page 16

MIKVAT SHALOM

by Anne Bergman



Mikvat Shalom was recently created as a new non-profit organization dedicated to keeping a kosher mikvah available for all our Jewish community. A *mikvah* is a ritual bath used for a variety of Jewish *halachic* (pertaining to the code of Jewish law) and non-traditional uses. As a primary tool in Jewish practice, use of the mikvah in Jewish tradition is several thousand years old.

Our board is a diverse group of individuals and together we represent a true spectrum of local Jewish practice. Few communities have created this type of mikvah governance, and while board conversations aren't always easy, with mutual trust and respect we have overcome several significant hurdles.

We're proud to share all we've accomplished in just a few short months. To begin, we have completed incorporation paperwork and are now a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. We're currently finalizing our lease with Congregations Shaarey Tphiloh, in which Mikvat Shalom will take on responsibility for maintenance and beautification of the mikvah.

We have received a generous budget appropriation from the JCA and have a seed budget from the original mikvah account held by Shaarey Tphiloh. We began with an aggressive mold abatement program and are now hard at work making repairs including installing essential elements of a HVAC system. Wallboard and tile installation are planned for the near future.

Our mission and by-laws took a lot of hard work and detail-oriented discussion. Our mission: "to operate a kosher mikvah and to provide educational opportunities on the use and benefits of mikvah." Our vision is progressive and inclusive of the many types of Jewish observance and practice in our community. The *mikvah* will operate with halachic integrity under Orthodox rabbinic supervision, and will meet the *taharat hamishpacha* (family purity laws) needs of the Orthodox user. It will be available for a wide array of non-traditional uses.

New practices are growing out of the wish to incorporate the mikvah into our lives in unconventional ways—to observe and distinguish life cycle and other important events. In our lives. Increasingly, women and men are creating new ritual practices related to conversion, births, deaths, illness and recovery and various other simchas and transitions.

One of the most critical aspects of our mission will be our educational activities. In 2010, we plan to get several educational programs underway so that all members of our community can learn more about mikvah and how to enhance the celebration of critical life events with the use of the mikvah.

Our board includes Anne Bergman, President; Ellen Froncek, Vice President; Kim Williams, Treasurer; Richard Buckberg, Secretary; Susan Cummings-Lawrence, Chair of Resource Development Committee; Rosie Wohl, Chana Wilansky, Beth Strassler and Eber Weinstein.

Please feel free to contact a member of the board directly, or visit us at our website: www.mikvatshalom.org for more information. ■



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