

"Nothing About Us Without Us"

BY JENN DIRECTOR KNUDSEN

Sarit Cahana described herself as "passively disabled" until her junior year in a public high school. She had an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) until her academic success in school led administrators to determine she didn't need it anymore. Hard of hearing, Sarit had accommodations like priority seating at the front of the class removed; such an accommodation had allowed her to hear classroom lessons, fellow students and instructions.

She began "attending" classes sitting in the back, unable to hear clearly enough to understand lessons and conversations around her.

Journal in hand, she opened it and began writing, creating a proposal enumerating what the school should do differently to integrate her and students like her – and those with other disabilities – into the classroom.

She presented her thinking and her work to a school vice principal.

"She gave me a pat on the back and sent me on my way," Sarit, now 23, says. "That was the beginning of my advocacy work, and I've done it since then."

Sarit and Kiel Moses recently shared their stories on a Zoom-based panel for Jewish professionals as part of national Jewish Disabilities Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM). Jewish Family & Child Service and JPro PDX convened the panel, "Understanding Jewish Disabled Experiences," as an opportunity to raise awareness and learn about and from the lived experience of two members of our Jewish disabled community. JDAIM was established in February 2009 by the Jewish Special Education International Consortium.

Shayna Sigman, MSW, CSWA, manager of JFCS' Disability Support Services program, moderated the panel that included Q&A from the two dozen participants.

Sarit, who identifies as disabled, is JFCS' DSS administrator and is pursuing a master's in disability studies through City University of New York. She has served as an access consultant for organizations such as the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education and created all of the visual descriptions for an ongoing Washington, D.C.-based exhibit called FUTURES, mounted in a Smithsonian Museum called the Arts + Industries Building.

Kiel, 44, who identifies as an "empowered person with disabilities," is a disabilities advocate, activist, academic (with various master's

Disability Support Services at JFCS

Jewish Family & Child Service's Disability Support Services program provides advocacy, education, programming and resources in February and every month.

For more information, visit jfcs-portland.org/services/disability-support-services/ or contact Shayna Sigman: ssigman@jfcs-portland.org or 503-226-7079.

degrees) and also a first-degree black belt in two forms of martial arts. He founded Disability Leadership Academy, created its curriculum and tutors students.

Throughout the panel's hour, co-presenters Sarit and Kiel shared experiences from their past and today. They discussed how individuals and organizations can become

aware, change and improve themselves and their practices so people with disabilities always are integrated into school, work and society.

Both Sarit and Kiel emphasized the slogan "[Nothing About Us Without Us](#)," meaning that policies should only be decided with

the full and direct participation of members of the disabled community, estimated to be 10% of the general population. That means that here in Portland, home to roughly 35,000 Jews, it's likely that some 3,500 of those individuals have a disability of some kind.

Too often, being disabled equals being isolated. "I want people to understand that this community feels so left out, left behind, unconsidered," says Sarit.

Kiel, who has a number of disabilities including physical and visual disabilities, says that even an invitation to a group event is fraught. He must call the venue ahead. Is the lighting dim? If yes, Kiel can't attend. Is it accessible only via a narrow, poorly lit staircase? If yes, again, Kiel is out.

Often accommodations are made on a one-off basis, forcing disabled people to make their request again and again. It's exhausting, insulting and unnecessary.

Acknowledge us, Kiel says.

Put us on your boards, in leadership positions, on your staff and pay us equitably, Sarit says.

"Plan accessibility from the start, so it's not an afterthought," such as tacking on an "A" for "Accessibility" to your Diversity, Equity and Inclusion statements and policies, Sarit adds.

See ACCOMMODATIONS, next page



Krembo Wings is Israel's only youth group that integrates children with disabilities with their able-bodied peers.

Supporting inclusion in Israel

BY DEBORAH MOON

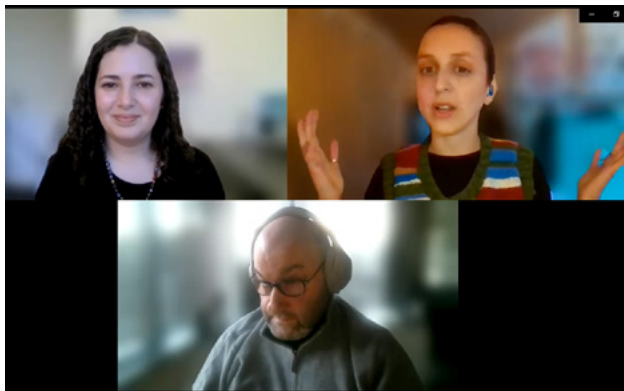
Jewish Disabilities Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month has been observed in February since 2009. The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland has long promoted inclusion, both locally and in Israel.

For the 2021-22 fiscal year, the JFGP Overseas Special Projects Committee awarded \$12,000 to Krembo Wings to support the Lakiya chapter for Bedouin youth.

"We are so proud of our longstanding relationship with Krembo Wings, which is Israel's only all-inclusive youth movement for children with special needs, enabling children with severe psychological, motor and cognitive disabilities to enjoy the benefit of a structured social environment with their able-bodied peers," says JFGP Director of Community Relations and Public Affairs Bob Horenstein, who staffs the OSP committee. "It was important to our Overseas Special Projects committee that we help start a Krembo Wings chapter in Lakiya for Bedouin youth, because they are such an underserved population and the need is great."

The Overseas Special Projects Committee accepts proposals from Israeli nonprofits that help the country's most underserved, vulnerable or marginalized populations, among them victims of

See KREMBO WINGS, page 16



JFCS Panel on Understanding Disability: Top, Shayna Sigman, left, and Sarit Cahana; and bottom, Kiel Moses.

CAMPS' GIFTS (continued from page 1)

Duitch lists seven challenges the pandemic has imposed on youth: prolonged isolation, traumatic stress and loss, social and emotional disconnection, negative self-talk, reduced physical activity, unhealthy emotional regulation (the ability to exert control over your own emotional state) and diminished emotional resilience (the ability to adapt to a stressful situation or crisis).

“Camp combats those stresses and reminds campers what is like to be a kid, to be social, to be away from parents and be led by different role models,” says Duitch.

This year, BB Camp plans to focus on mitigating Covid-19 risks and rebuilding campers’ social skills, connections and communities.

Solomon Schechter uses “Camp Builders” to help campers work on self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsibilities for decision making.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

A recent JCamp 180 survey of Jewish camping senior professionals found their top concerns for this summer are “high levels of anxiety and mental health challenges among campers” as well as among staff.

“Mental health issues have been growing at summer camps over the last number of years and completely accelerated during the Covid pandemic years,” JCamp 180 director Sarah Eisinger told eJewish Philanthropy for a Feb. 7 article by Ben Sales.

BB Camp has used resources from the Foundation for Jewish Camp and Blue Dove Foundation to tailor staff training to provide mental health first aid, universal design and other resources to help campers succeed. BB Camp also has a group of mental health professionals who volunteer at camp and serve on the Mental Emotional Social Health Committee.

Solomon Schechter reaches out to families year round to learn about any trauma or loss children have experienced, which gives staff a peek into the needs children might have at camp. The camp has camper care professionals who can come in for one-on-one time with kids needing additional support.

“We also hired a therapist to help when campers’ needs are beyond what counselors can cope with,” says Duitch. “That is where the industry (camping) is headed – to make sure we have the right support at camp.”

INCLUSION

All four Jewish overnight camps in the area (see pages 6-7) strive to be as inclusive as possible.

“We want to say yes more than no,” says Duitch of Solomon Schechter. “But we want to set up campers to succeed – to make sure we have great plans in place for success ... for the kid and the camp community.”

ACCOMMODATIONS (continued from previous page)

Kiel adds, “Most accommodations cost very little and are easy. You just have to be a little creative.”

Both panelists offered a litany of accommodations in various settings, such as better lighting; use of to-the-point language and visual cues; ridding vocabularies of insulting clichés like “falling on deaf ears” or “turning a blind eye”; providing printouts in advance of pertinent documents like sermons and meeting agendas; automatically turning on closed captioning; and making available see-through masks, called clear masks.

While many accommodations can be implemented without cost, others require hiring outside professionals. Examples are American Sign Language interpreters and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) that provides extremely accurate captioning. By contrast, live captions provided via artificial intelligence technology introduce myriad errors, especially with proper nouns or

“We try to accommodate as many campers as we can,” says Spivak of Camp Keshet. “This can play out with providing specialized meal plans as well as a large variety of activities for all types of campers.”

Despite being a small organization, Sephardic Adventure Camp has a very diverse camper base including neuro-diverse campers.

BB Camp is accessible to all children, regardless of abilities. The camp participated in and successfully completed the National Inclusion Project accreditation program in 2019.

Amir-Brownstein says the accreditation process recognizes and confirms that “our program is intentionally and successfully serving individuals with and without disabilities. Our focus is on allowing everyone to be part of the BB Camp community in the way that works best for them.”

“Success plans look different for all campers, and we establish accommodations with campers’ success in mind,” she adds. “We offer additional support through our Individualized Camper Plans, similar to a student’s IEP, setting up all campers for success.”

“Our commitment to inclusion is illustrated through our buildings, professional staff, staff development and programmatic accommodations,” she says. BB Camp’s Assistant Director of Community Care and Inclusion trains teams to understand camp’s community care philosophy, create camper accommodations and develop programming that welcomes all children. BB Camp also has rebuilt its campus with all camp buildings now ADA accessible and has designated sensory areas available for children throughout camp.

STAFF SHORTAGES

BB Camp reports that the tight domestic labor market and the challenge of securing visas for their visiting international staff have made summer camp seasonal staff recruitment more challenging than in years past. For more information on available positions, visit bbcamp.org/employment.

Solomon Schechter has focused on retention, competitive wages and ensuring staff understand the life skills they develop at camp – “the emotional paycheck.” In partnership with the Samis Foundation, this year the camp is offering signing, retention and referral bonuses to make jobs more attractive. Check out openings at campschechter.org/about/employment/.

Sephardic Adventure Camp is always competing with other programs for staff and invites those interested to check out sephardicadventurecamp.org/info/join-our-staff/.

Camp Keshet has not seen a staff shortage for this summer.

Duitch says he hopes that this summer will be easier on staff than last year. “Last year, we created a bubble and staff was not able to truly refresh and recharge. We hope with everyone fully vaccinated, staff will be able to go home on session breaks and refresh.”

when a person with accented English is speaking.

You can help observe JDAIM this month by joining JFCS and Congregation Shir Tikvah on Feb. 27 for a screening of the documentary “Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution.”

“My hope this month and beyond is to raise awareness and engender coalition-building,” says Sarit. “If you’re passionate, get in touch with JFCS and help make our community more accessible together.”

National Disability Resources

For more about Jews with disabilities on a national scale, read the November 2021 Jewish Funders Network presentation on Spotlight on Disability in the Jewish Workplace, respectability.org/2021/11/unprecedented-new-findings-jews-with-disabilities/. Another national resource is RespectAbility, respectability.org, which fights stigmas and advances opportunities.