

# Inclusive Israel

כִּי בְּצַלְמֵם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם

*"For in the image of God has God made mankind."*

(Genesis 9:6)



## 3 PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL INCLUSIVITY IN ISRAEL

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## INTRODUCTION

By Heidi Krizer Daroff, North America Director

February in Washington, DC usually means shorter days, colder temperatures, and snow. For the past several years though it has meant something entirely different throughout the Jewish World. February is Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month, a time when Jewish organizations, schools, synagogues and the like spend time learning about how to create a more inclusive environment.

Inclusion is a value that we hold in the highest esteem at the Israel Forever Foundation. Indeed, our founding mission was to establish a global Israel engagement organization that was accessible to all Jewish people regardless of where they live, how religious or not they choose to be, or how they vote. Most importantly, it truly does not matter what is in their wallet. Israel Forever prides ourselves on providing dynamic Israel related content year after year at no cost to participants.

So, when we began to learn more about the needs of children and adults with disabilities our team approached this with the same openness and respect. To help bridge the gap between our global Jewish community and people with disabilities in Israel we have published blogs about an array of organizations we have partnered with that strive to ensure a more fulfilling life for all. We have shared stories about the accessible park at **LOTEM**, the bike ride for the kids at ALYN, the incredible employment opportunities for all of Israel's disability population at **ECommunity**, the heartwarming work of **Friendship Circle**, and over the past few springs we invited everyone to help raise money for a therapeutic kitchen through the Swim 4 Sadna, as part of a yearly fundraiser for the students at **Sadnat Shiluv**. When the Israel Forever Foundation opened an office in Jerusalem our team was excited to learn that they could purchase delicious lunches prepared by the adults of **Shekel**.

On my various trips to Israel I make a point of visiting incredible disability inclusion projects going on throughout the country to build relationships between Israel Forever and the people of Israel who are so dedicated to the ideal of inclusion. Last summer, the highlight of my trip was touring **Alah Negev** with its' founder IDF Major General (res.) Doron Almog. Seeing the beautiful village he and his wife created and learning how the state of the art therapeutic facilities helped adults with disabilities as well as wounded IDF soldiers was an experience I will never forget.

We are pleased to provide an ongoing opportunity for employment of adults with disabilities through our VCIREwards program partner **Buy For Good**. Buy For Good is a social impact company making a real difference by empowering adults with disabilities to earn a living.

We are proud to once again attend the Jewish Disability Awareness Month program on Capitol Hill to join with so many other organizations and individuals who are committed to ensuring that all members of the population have opportunities to contribute and build meaningful relationships.

Our goal through these various efforts is to raise awareness of the dynamic organizations in Israel who are pouring their heart and soul into ensuring a welcoming society for all and to inspire similar initiatives in Jewish communities around the world.

In keeping with our mission of connecting people around the world to their love of Israel the team at Israel Forever invites you to write a **Letter of Friendship™** to an individual with special needs living in Israel. We hope that you will participate in extending a hand and widening your circle to include people of diverse abilities.

YOU can help bridge the geographical and social divide and put a smile on their faces with your warmth and kindness.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

Inclusion is given different priority in different societies. Even when it is agreed that inclusion is a worthy goal, the amount of effort invested and the methods applied vary.

How are Jewish values reflected in the ideal of inclusion?

Do you think that the way inclusion is handled in Israel is different than the way it is approached in your community? If so, why?

What can Jewish communities around the world learn from the Israeli approach to inclusion?

In the following packet we have attempted to define what The Israel Forever Foundation sees as the underlying principles of the Israeli approach to inclusion, including examples of specific initiatives.

Our hope is that these will provide inspiration for inclusion in Jewish communities everywhere and provide an additional way to connect with Israel - through organizations that make your heart sing and in the joy of knowing what the tiny Jewish State has achieved.

"If you can dream it, you can make it real."



## Principle 1: No One Left Behind

Society is made up of many parts: different people, from a wide variety of backgrounds, each with their own set of abilities. While people differ in their capabilities, one life, one soul is not worth more than another.

This means that everyone should have access to the same life experiences. Exclusion is not a failure of the person with special needs but of the society that found it acceptable to leave that person behind.

### PARK CHAVERIM RA'ANANA: INCLUSION, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS DO

By Judi Felber

[www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/park\\_chaverim\\_raanana\\_inclusion\\_because\\_thats\\_what\\_friends\\_do](http://www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/park_chaverim_raanana_inclusion_because_thats_what_friends_do)

When I first moved to Ra'anana, a city in the heart of the southern Sharon Plain of the Central District of Israel, everyone told me that I must go to Park Ra'anana. So, I went.

Of course, there were the requisite playground areas, but one area was quite different and special. The Park Chaverim (Friendship Park) is Israel's first fully inclusive and accessible playground. Inclusion is the key word here. The park area is fun for ALL children irrespective of ability. Because of that, ALL kids of ALL abilities play TOGETHER.

On the carousels that can accommodate a wheelchair, kids play together, not just those who use wheelchairs.



Swings are made like hammocks so that even kids with weak muscle tone can play. I personally like the mushroom swing where a few friends can hang together and swing around. It's inclusion in the true meaning of the word.

This covered play area is actually arranged like a clock so that children with visual impairments can orient themselves to where each piece of play equipment is located.

Outside of the covered play area there is a maze where children can play hide and seek or just chase each other around. The colorful painted walls and the varying heights of the walls encourage play acting, which prompts children with communication issues to interact with others at their



*It's not really inclusion.* My friend who has one child with developmental delays and others without says she loves Park Chaverim because **all of her children can play at the same place and have fun together.**

Park Chaverim was spearheaded by Beit Issie Shapiro, which fosters tolerance and inclusive attitudes for all children. Beit Issie Shapiro is a social start-up in the field of disabilities, which started as a school for children with severe cognitive disabilities and grew from there.

Park Chaverim has become the model for many other inclusion parks around the world.

ability and comfort level. Words aren't important here, but smiles are.

The music area is for all children, especially those who enjoy and experience the world through sound. They bang on the different tubes with the attached mallets or with hands. The wheelchair accessible sound platforms make different tones, depending on where on the platform there is pressure (standing, jumping, rolling).

*Anybody can install a few playground swings that are adapted for children with physical disabilities. That's nice, but it separates children by disability.*



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Judi Felber is the Communications Coordinator at Israel Forever.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What is the difference between making sure that there are special facilities on the playground available for children with special needs and creating a playground that is completely adapted to differently abled children?

What does playing in a playground like this teach typical children?

## THE IDF HAS ROOM FOR ALL

By Yossi Kahana

[www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/the idf has room for all/](http://www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/the_idf_has_room_for_all/)

In Israel, the vast majority of typical high school graduates serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) but, did you know that thousands of young people with cerebral palsy, autism, and intellectual disabilities were turned away from service? These individuals had been turned away from proudly serving their country until Special in Uniform opened the door for them.

Special in Uniform is a unique program, now operating in partnership with Jewish National Fund (JNF), integrating young people with autism and other disabilities into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and, in turn, into Israeli society. Its core belief is that everyone belongs and has the right to reach his or her full potential. Special in Uniform focuses on the unique talents of each individual participant to help them find a job within the IDF that is a perfect fit for their skills and in helping keep Israel safe and secure.

Recently, soldiers from Special in Uniform received a warm welcome by Prime Minister Netanyahu at a Graduation Ceremony for Israeli Air force pilots. The graduation ceremony for the new Israeli Air force pilots is a very prestigious event in Israel, it is conducted in the presence of the cadets' families, senior government officials, the Prime Minister, as well as top air force and army leaders. One would never think to integrate disabled soldiers within this kind of occasion – a ceremony honoring IAF graduates. Now, this has become an integral part of Israel identity as a caring society. The strongest members of society are giving over unconditional love and reserves of strength to the most vulnerable among us.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking at the graduation ceremony, underscored the IDF's spirit of inclusion.



"A strong nation is one that does not leave its most vulnerable members behind," Netanyahu said. ***"Israel is the only nation in the world that has a strong army with the ability to include people with disabilities."***

Last summer, my family and I were honored with an invitation to visit an Air Force Base to witness a unit of Special in Uniform at work, among the soldiers was Omer Lahat, a young man born with cerebral palsy whose father served as a combat pilot in the IAF and whose dream was to become a soldier.

After Richard Bernstein, being blind since birth, went on to become the first blind State Supreme Court Justice in the United States he said: "You come to realize that there's tremendous power within you." Richard's accomplishment is an inspiration to all those working to overcome a disability. Also for Omer, physical limitations did not hold him back from attending high school and graduating

with honors, after which point he pursued his dream to serve in the IDF through the Special in Uniform program—Omer was the program's first-ever wheelchair-bound participant and opened the door to many others. Omer story is the story of Israel.

"JNF is extremely proud to have partnered with the Special in Uniform program", said Yossi Kahana, Director of the JNF Task Force on Disabilities, "the program has grown in the amount of participants and there is currently a long waiting list. Over this past year it has expanded its presence to include 15 IDF bases across Israel. From 158 soldiers at the end of 2015 we reached 300 soldiers at the end of 2016! The big vision for the program: to quickly ramp up to 1,000 enrolled participants in the next four years."

Special in Uniform is changing the fabric of Israeli society, helping to create a more caring and inclusive society in Israel by promoting inclusion of people with disabilities in the IDF at the national level.



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*Yossi Kahana is the Director of Jewish National Fund's Task Force on Disabilities, an umbrella and coordinating body for the range of JNF partnership programs that serve people with disabilities throughout Israel. Prior to joining Jewish National Fund, Mr. Kahana worked for 17 years at Aleh, Israel's largest network of residential facilities for children with severe physical and cognitive disabilities. A former paramedic with Magen David Adom, Mr. Kahana works tirelessly to breathe life into the mantra "Everybody belongs!"*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What is the importance of creating a program like Special in Uniform?

People are differently abled. What positions can you imagine someone who is differently abled could fulfill in society and play a significant role? Consider both those who are physically challenged and those who have cognitive or mental health challenges.

## Principle 2: If the Solution Doesn't Exist, Create it Yourself

In a perfect world, solutions would exist for all the challenges of life. We would hope that there would be institutionalized programs that would suit people, according to their differing needs. In Israel, due to lack of resources, there are often holes instead of solutions. That's why most of the Israeli inclusivity initiatives were created by individuals, usually parents who needed solutions for their own children and other times people who saw how their individual efforts could contribute to something greater than themselves.

### MAKING INCLUSION A REALITY

By Michal Moked-Rimon

[www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/making\\_inclusion\\_a\\_reality/](http://www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/making_inclusion_a_reality/)

Israel is known for many things – the land of milk and honey, holy sites, hi-tech, and history but in the past several Israel has been starting to be known for another aspect – a global leader in the field of accessibility. Instead of just dreaming about Israel, today Israel can become a reality for people with disabilities in Israel and abroad. There is still a long way to go but nonetheless the change for the better is evident. One of the leading organizations in Israel who plays an important role in making this change, making inclusion and accessibility a reality is Access Israel.



Access Israel was founded 19 years ago by Mr. Yuval Wagner and his friends. Yuval, was an Israeli pilot when in March 1987, during his military service, he was severely injured in a helicopter crash that left him quadriplegic. While recovering, Yuval realized that not only does he have to overcome the obvious obstacles of his severe injury, but also with never-ending challenges caused by an in-accessible country that constantly created obstacles and difficulties on a daily basis. Moreover, at the time there was no awareness in the Israeli society regarding importance of accessibility and inclusion, which together with the lack of physical accessibility led Yuval to feel as if he was in "house arrest". The frustration encouraged him to contact a fellow Pilot, President Ezer Weitzman to complain about this situation. Following the call, President Weitzman gave a direct command to establish an NGO and make a change. He assured Yuval that he, as the president, would support this important cause. And so - Access Israel was established in 1999.

**Access Israel is the first and only non-profit organization in Israel dedicated to promoting accessibility for people living with all types of disabilities. Our objective is to allow people with physical, sensory, mental and cognitive disabilities to live a full and active life with dignity, respect, equality, safety and maximal independence.**

Over 1.6 million people with disabilities live in Israel today (including elderly), 18% of the total population. Among them, some 700,000 individuals are confronting severe disabilities caused by combat injury, terrorist acts, car and work related accidents, and illness. Every tenth family in Israel requires accessible services. Despite advanced legislation, many locations and services in the country, such as government institutions, municipalities, courts, health clinics, public transportation, cultural institutions and commercial centers remain inaccessible to people with disabilities, causing great distress and hindering them from leading normal lives.

In the past 19 years Access Israel has worked hard on promoting physical accessibility at first, then we introduced the usability accessibility (accessibility of the services provided to the public)

- understanding it is not enough to be able to enter a place, the importance is on ones' ability to receive services like anybody else and be integrated into society as equals. Today we understand and work hard on promoting social accessibility – changing the DNA of our society – of our children in educational programs, of adults in training and awareness by promoting activities and

more. Since it is obvious that the road to full accessibility is still long in Israel and abroad, Access Israel understood the importance of creating a human ramp. This ramp would encourage connection, opportunities to get to know the person behind the disability, providing a chance to see the world from the eyes of those with disability, developing sensitivity and better understanding on how each one of us can contribute to make a difference and together achieve better integration.



One of the most successful tools Access Israel developed is the Feast of the Senses dinner. Over the past five years, Access Israel has been spreading its message around the world, and has been holding "Feast of Senses" dinners, which are a way to stimulate the senses and introduce participants to experiences they never encountered before.

This is a unique experience that promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities. The event that enables participants to experience various disabilities, while getting to know a person

that lives with the same disability – in each course of the meal one sense is "taken away" from you and you are able to experience that course with a disability. This enables participants to feel the challenges - first hand.

The first course – you cannot see, the main course you cannot use your hands and the dessert you have to order without being able to hear the options from the waiter while getting a taste of sign language.

Everyone is invited to join us in spreading the word enabling Access Israel to promote accessibility and enable the State of Israel to reach any place and anyone based on a common denominator of giving, inclusion, patience, and tolerance. Leaving no one behind.

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*Michal Moked-Rimon is the CEO of Access Israel*

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

Israeli Air Force pilots are among the highest of Israel's elite – to become a pilot, candidates must pass grueling testing that includes almost impossibly high standards of physical capabilities. Imagine having proven yourself, enjoying the honor and respect that comes with this status and suddenly becoming a quadriplegic. How would you feel? What would you do if you discovered that many aspects of life were suddenly inaccessible to you?

What do you think about how Yuval coped with this situation? Where can you apply that determination to your life?

## CALEB'S STORY

By Beth Steinberg

[www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/calebs\\_story/](http://www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/calebs_story/)

"No, there's nobody with special needs in my camper group," said 8-year Caleb, a Shutaf day camper.

His mom smiled, and continued to ask him about his camp day and favorite activities. When she called to tell me the story, she asked me, "Is it possible that his group doesn't have any campers with disabilities?" I laughed and said, "Nope, not possible!"



Not only did his group have Shutaf's usual mix of 75% campers with disabilities and only 25%, or, 1/4 of the group campers without disabilities, Caleb's group of campers also represented Shutaf's typical mix of needs ranging from learning challenges to Down syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder, cerebral palsy, emotional/behavioral issues and more.

That's just how we roll, how we include at Shutaf Inclusion Programs in Jerusalem.

The first time it happened, back when we started Shutaf in 2007, we laughed and said, "I

guess that's a fluke." The second and third time? We started taking more careful notes, beginning the process of a data collection process that would show the success of Camp Shutaf's innovative, reverse inclusion model and educational approach.

Mind you, inclusion is not the norm in Jerusalem's overcrowded public schools, religious and secular, where classroom size often exceeds 35 children and 1 overwhelmed teacher. Even children with milder learning and/or emotional/behavioral and social challenges often end up in special education's more restrictive environments because of these very real issues.

That's where Shutaf comes in. At Shutaf we see day camping as the perfect platform for pushing the inclusion envelope. Informal education frees educators and parents from the concerns of school curricula focused on academic excellence and achievement. At camp, children with more limited independent living skills, developmental differences, or more challenging behavioral disorders can all be given the inclusion opportunity.

All are welcome in the inclusive Shutaf camp community.

Like Hallel and her family. First Eliav, and his younger sister, Mia, joined Shutaf. Then, younger brother, Adin. Last summer? Little sister, Hallel, arrived at summer camp. Here's the fun part. Hallel has Down syndrome, her siblings are typical. Their parents chose Shutaf initially because they wanted to expose their older children, who are typical, to difference and disability. Hallel only entered the program this past summer, at the age of 6. Her older siblings? They'd been Shutaf fans for years already.



What's more inclusive and more manageable for families then to be able to enroll all of your kids into one program instead of four? At Shutaf, we're proud of being able to respond to the needs of children, teens, and young adults, ages 6-23. And if a child moves on to another program, we're happy, glad that they had choices available to them that responded to their changing needs and interests. As it should be.

Except that most of the greater Jewish community - and beyond - are still a bit frozen on the subject of inclusion, disability, and acceptance. What seems like the right thing to do, is too often held back by fear, by lack of experience, and by lack of opportunity.

Today, let's start with the first step. Don't know someone with a disability? Find someone. You shouldn't have to look too far given that 15% of the world's population - an estimated billion people - has a disability of some sort.

That's a friend. A friend's child or teen. An older family member. The person you pass on the street. Say hi. Get to know their story. Listen and learn.

Next time? Step 2.



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*Beth Steinberg is the executive director and co-founder of Shutaf Inclusion Programs, offering year-round, informal-education programs for children, teens and young people with disabilities in Jerusalem. Shutaf is committed to an inclusive teaching model that welcomes all participants - with and without disabilities - regardless of religious, cultural and socioeconomic differences. Beth moved to Israel in 2006, from Brooklyn, N.Y. She regularly writes about parenting issues on the Times of Israel, and is the artistic director of Theater in the Rough, creating engaging theatrical experiences for Jerusalem audiences.*

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

Would you send your typically developing child to a Shutaf style program? If not, why not? If yes, what do you think a child would learn when participating in such a program?

## Principle 3: Turn the Disadvantage into an Advantage

Israel is a small country with limited resources. This reality has nurtured a mindset that insist on winning with the tools at hand.

The same mindset that fuels the StartUp Nation, drives inclusivity projects: how can we win with what we have? We look for the strengths in the individual, adapt for their weaknesses and everyone benefits.

### THE FINAL FRONTIER (EXCERPTS)

by Ira Caplan

[www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/the\\_final\\_frontier](http://www.israelforever.org/interact/blog/the_final_frontier)

Ecommunity's Founder and CEO Dani Kogan created the company following inspiration he drew from his young autistic son. He wondered of the world in which his son will grow up, the limited collective understanding around his condition and certainly limited work opportunities. *Dani's son helped him find a new angle - instead of limitations, he saw his son's strengths. It was then that Dani realized the affinity and collective priority inherent in recycling electronics.*



This kind of detailed work with circuitry is generally therapeutic for people with autism and many other special needs. Because unmanaged metals are toxic to our air and water, they can't simply be discarded or land-filled; they must be either refurbished or properly dismantled.



The decent wage, sense of purpose and favorable association of environmental work restore the individual's dignity and develop skills, yielding professional inclusivity with the multifaceted socio educational message now prioritized among top international Jewish organizations. Intellect. Discipline. Constructive purpose. And, as is trackable from Ecommunity's dynamic growth...Power.

A glance of Autismspeaks.org reveals that diagnoses are increasing and with them, the need for understanding and cogent response. It's troubling; it is. We don't fully understand it and we don't have all the answers for it, when both are sorely needed. A 2006 Harvard study estimates the lifetime caretaking costs of an individual with autism at \$3 million per person. Yet Judaism's age old adage stands composed, unrattled amidst the chaos. It states calmly, "The solution is given before the problem."

needs. Of course, we all need this. We just have a different threshold, one considered "normal", which we all know is, uh...what?

Maybe persons with autism and other disabilities are reminding us of the essentials for navigating the storm we're in - where the technology, the content and the agendas driving both move in any given direction at any given time.

Dani and his son, and so many like them, have already given us the answer: At times of utmost change, recognize and hold to what has always endured. Israel's ancient roots and modern re-emergence shine forth with historical continuity.

Environmental values, well rooted, provide continuity. Collaboration, partnership, and calculating for the needs of others provide continuity. And the technology itself, with all family members, friends and members of society involved, can also support well-being and inter-generational continuity: All of these together are an Enterprise, one that can ride out the storm and reach what is ultimately important: the future toward which the Matrixial advancements are heading. The advancements are incredible; they are dazzling and often disquieting.



Dani Kogan, CEO and Founder of eCommunity

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*Ecommunity located in the Misgav Industrial Park is a national, fully compliant electronics recycling enterprise whose workforce is comprised primarily of people with special needs.*

[www.ecommunity.org.il](http://www.ecommunity.org.il)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

E-Community created a win-win situation by creating a workplace for people with special needs that provides a service that is needed by the general population. Are you familiar with other such enterprises? Where do you see disadvantages regarding special needs that could possibly be turned into an advantage?

## AUTISM IN THE IDF: MEET THE SOLDIERS OF INTELLIGENCE UNIT 9900

IDF Blog

[www.idf.il/en/minisites/soldiers-of-the-idf/autism-in-the-idf-meet-the-soldiers-of-intelligence-unit-9900/](http://www.idf.il/en/minisites/soldiers-of-the-idf/autism-in-the-idf-meet-the-soldiers-of-intelligence-unit-9900/)

*Special intelligence Unit 9900 is dedicated to everything related to geography, including mapping, interpretation of aerial and satellite photographs and space research. Within this unit there is a small unit of highly qualified soldiers, who have remarkable visual and analytic capabilities. They can detect even the smallest details, undetectable to most people.*



IDF ✅  
@IDFSpokesperson

Following

#IDF soldiers on the #autism spectrum are given great responsibility. Read their inspiring story:

[idfblog.com/2014/04/10/aut ...](http://idfblog.com/2014/04/10/aut ...)

11:35 AM - 13 Apr 2014

The uniqueness of this elite group of intelligence soldiers in Unit 9900 lies in the fact that they are all diagnosed on the autism spectrum. We interviewed Col. J, the commander of Unit 9900, in order to learn more about this inspiring group of soldiers.



This a soccer field in Gaza. In depicts a before and after image of a hidden weapons Cache.

### First time in history

"After many doubts and expectations the project came to light after almost a year of processing. There were many problems along the way. The actual process took about a year and I want to say that we started with the assumption that this could, should and would succeed," says Colonel J, confessing that the success of this project exceeded the optimistic expectations of its initiators.

"The concerns were understandable, because I knew nothing about autism. The result was a task of trial and error. Everything we did was happening for the first time in the history of the IDF. We planned, worked and focused until we achieved success."

### **How does this group fit in with the other soldiers?**

"They have excellent relations with the soldiers of the unit – from time to time, out of the building where they work I see them sitting with others in the unit, having lunch or just having a cup of coffee. No one forces them to do so. It is very natural, and I think that says it all."

What type of work do they do?

"Their job is to take visual materials from satellite images and sensors that are in the air. With the help of their officers and decoding tools, they analyze the images and find specific things they need in order to allow those who are planning a mission to get the best data of the area."



### **How it all began-The RR Plan**

Mr. V and Ms. S, veterans of the IDF and the intelligence organizations, introduced an idea – to utilize the special strengths of people on the autistic spectrum for the needs of the IDF and Israeli intelligence.

They contacted Unit 9900, who showed great interest in the idea and decided to be a partner for the first trial – interpretation of aerial and satellite photographs.

They then Contacted the Ono Academic College – a private academic institution and registered NGO, which also has a school for health professions. Ono Academic College has a vision of "Changing the face of Israeli society," and therefore its management decided to Join the initiative, and together they set up the RR Program – (Roim Rachok – which in Hebrew means looking far beyond the horizons).

The aim of the RR Plan is to teach people on the autistic spectrum professions that utilize their special abilities, thus creating a Win-Win effect. The courses take place in the Ono Academic College. After the students finish the 3 month course, they join the army, where the RR program is still involved in guidance and assistance of the soldiers and their commanders.

Today, when everyone can see the success of the first trial course graduates, the RR plan is developing two more courses that utilize other strengths of the autistic spectrum. One course is for software quality assurance (QA) and the other is for information management. Both courses are developed in cooperation with Intelligence Units of the IDF, which will eventually be the home units for the course graduates.

### **Unit 9900's special contribution**

It is important to remember that people on the autism spectrum have strengths in music, mathematics, as well as the visual field. These autistic soldiers of Unit 9900 play a major role in intelligence gathering—a role not easily filled due to the difficulty of the task of this unit. The IDF believes in the ability of these autistic soldiers and will continue to work for their advancement in military and civilian life.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

The IDF is one of the most important institutions in Israeli society. What does it mean when such a significant body chooses to find an advantage in a condition normally considered a disability? How does that influence the rest of society?

The Special in Uniform project finds a way to enlist special needs soldiers so that they are not left out of the opportunity to serve and defend our homeland. Unit 9900 has integrated soldiers with autism because the IDF can benefit from utilizing capabilities they have that are more highly honed than that of typical people. What advantages do you see these two different programs as bringing to society?

## INCLUSIVITY ORGANIZATIONS

Israel is full of excellent organizations and initiatives creating an inclusive Israel. In this pamphlet we've mentioned some of the organizations Israel Forever has had the honor of working with:

SHEKEL [www.shekel.org.il](http://www.shekel.org.il)

ALYN [www.lyn.org](http://www.lyn.org)

Shutaf [www.campshutaf.org](http://www.campshutaf.org)

Sadnat Shiluv [www.sadnat-shiluv.co.il](http://www.sadnat-shiluv.co.il)

Ecommunity - now a national, fully compliant electronics recycling enterprise whose workforce is comprised primarily of people with special needs. [www.ecommunity.org.il](http://www.ecommunity.org.il)

Buy For Good [www.buyforgood.biz](http://www.buyforgood.biz)

## ABOUT ISRAEL FOREVER

The Israel Forever Foundation is an engagement organization that develops and promotes experiential learning opportunities to celebrate and strengthen the personal connection to Israel as an integral part of Jewish life and identity.

[www.israelforever.org](http://www.israelforever.org)

