

Heart of Benjamin Special Needs Program



extracurricular educational programs for their age groups within their communities.

The Heart of Benjamin Special Needs Program was established in 1998 to assist special needs children and their families, living in the 33 communities of the Benjamin Region, overcome a myriad of educational and social challenges. The program was initiated by parents of children suffering from a variety of disabilities, as well as chronic and genetic diseases. These include Downs and Williams syndromes, autism, cerebral palsy, brain damage, paralysis and retardation.

The Benjamin Region is in Israel's heartland, north of Jerusalem, and includes the modern-day communities of Ofra, Talmon, Dolev, Kochav Yaacov, Psagot and Neve Zuf. Since the outbreak of the war of terrorism in 2000, meeting the needs of these children has become even more of a challenge. In fact, some of the children in the Heart of Benjamin Program are direct victims of terrorism, and have become special needs children as a result of either the physical or the emotional damage caused by these terrorist acts.

One of the most formidable challenges for these families and children is the 3 week-long spring vacation from school before and during the Passover holiday. This time is especially difficult for parents, as they juggle job schedules and care for their other children for such a long period.

The summer vacation is another complicated time for these families, with the days stretching ahead of them, overwhelmingly long and empty. The

School's out and you're sitting with a second cup of coffee, enjoying the quiet, knowing that the kids don't have to be woken and rushed out the door. But soon the phone starts ringing with plans for the day and the house comes alive. Pool bags are packed, money is begged for the mall, and the stereo and television compete at full volume. Makings of sandwiches and late morning snacks clutter the countertop and the front door slams as traffic streams in and out. The blessed mess and noise of a normal household with healthy children.

But what happens during school breaks and vacations when there is a special-needs child in the family? The responsibility for caring and providing meaningful enrichment for these children, beyond school hours, falls solely on parents and family. Routines can't be relaxed; therapies can't be ignored; attention must be paid. While most of these children are enrolled in special education school programs, they cannot participate in regular supplementary enrichment and social activities during school vacations. These special children are unable to integrate into existing

challenge of filling them productively and creatively is a daunting task. And worse than the challenge is the constant ache of knowing that your child’s existence will always be a difficult one, limited by suffering and pain.

The “Heart of Benjamin” program operates camps for the children during the spring holiday and summer break. The activities are structured to closely resemble the youth group activities of their peers and siblings, with outings and nature hikes, and visits to children's attractions, such as amusement parks, zoos and recreation & activity centers. They also enable their parents to work and carry on with their regular routine. “Heart of Benjamin” offers an exciting recreational experience, including excursions, bulletproof transportation, food and supplies.

The weekend programs provide an essential service as well. The Family Shabbat weekends enable families to go away for a weekend together, a luxury they would

normally not be able to enjoy. Personal counselors care for the special child and for his or her siblings, so the parents can take part in seminars and have the therapeutic chance of talking with parents who share similar issues. The mini-vacations provide weekend programming for the special children, enabling parents to have a much-needed break to devote extra time and attention to themselves and to their other children.

CFOIC has been asked to help “Heart of Benjamin” brighten the lives of the special children in Biblical Benjamin, and help the brave parents provide their children with the educational, social and therapeutic structure they need. *CFOIC Heartland has already raised \$21,140 towards this amazing project!* This means that the costs of the Passover Camps have been completely subsidized. With your continued help and generosity, so much more good can be done.

Passover camp	\$13,890
Summer camp	53,410
Family workshop weekends	12,200
Six mini vacations	21,620
Money Raised by CFOIC	<u>-21,620</u>
TOTAL FUNDS REQUIRED:	\$80,000

To participate in this project:

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