

# The Disability Inclusion Hero Awards

<http://www.paulkipnes.com/the-disability-inclusion-hero-awards/>



*Cross posted on [Jews & Special Needs](#) blog  
of the Jewish Journal*

As the new calendar year begins, we are entertained by those Year in Review lists and Person of the Year awards, both inside and outside of the Jewish communities. [Time](#) magazine aptly chose the Pope Francis as its Person of the Year for his calling for a church of healing. *T'ruah*, The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, honors its [T'ruah Rabbinic Human Rights Hero Award](#) including (deservingly) LA's Rabbi Dara Frimmer (Temple Isaiah). Perhaps most uniquely, Jewrotica, the self-declared "hub for Jewish sexual expression," listed the [Sexiest Rabbis of 2013](#), in three categories: The Smarts, Getting Some (social) Action, and Bad Ass/Sex Appeal. (Blogger's Confession: To ensure complete objectivity for this blogpost, I disallowed any consideration of myself for the Jewrotica lists.)

We can argue whether these lists or others (like Newsweek's cynical Top Rabbi's lists) are unnecessary and inappropriate. Ranking rabbis inserts the very same vapid values of power, prestige and self-importance that the rabbinic profession and religious pursuits strive to ameliorate.

Still, this time of year led me to wonder whether the Jewish community might create lists to shine light into important contributions to the inclusion world. Inclusion Awards might honor those who strive to include people with disabilities into our community. Too many Jewish institutions and organizations have dragged their feet either because of ignorance, tightfistedness or self-focus. Too many people with special needs and their families languish on the outskirts of the Jewish community, unable to break in because the randomness of life's lottery that gave them or their child certain challenges that many others do not have to face. Jewish communities that embrace them deserve recognition and investment.

We could create as the highest honor, a special category of award, perhaps called The Inclusion Hero, which would be awarded to

parents and grandparents who refocus their lives to embrace the challenge of a child with special needs. (Simultaneously, we might create an Exceptionally-Abled Person Honor to be awarded to Jews with special needs, who embrace their challenges and work extra hard to accomplish what others can do almost automatically. More on that in another Jews and Special Needs post.)

Parent and grandparents balance worry and wonder, frustration and far-sightedness, inspiration and incredible inner strength – all in the pursuit of giving their loved one the best chance possible. They may have argued with family members who did not believe that this “kid can do it.” They probably have battled repeatedly with school systems required by law to assist children with special needs but which in practice often stonewall, playing cynical games with children’s lives. They have sacrificed rejuvenating social time with spouses or partners, their other children and longtime friends because the needs of this one child cannot be ignored or postponed. Yet, when life dealt them a set of cards different than what they were expecting, they took it in stride – perhaps after some anguish and tears – and played the best way they knew how. Yes, they are the “rock stars” of our world!

On second thought, perhaps this is not really a good idea. Because the very process of choosing which individual or family deserves The Inclusion Hero honor creates a hierarchy of giving and sacrifice that demeans the loving work that every such parent or grandparent does.

Instead, let’s repurpose existing awards. All parents of people with special needs deserve to be named Person of the Year because they transform the lives of their loved ones. They all deserve to be T’ruah’s Human Rights Hero for ensuring the human rights of their special needs child are not trampled. And because caring for loved ones makes people really sexy – good looks may fade, but kindness endures – they each should be applauded by Jewrotica for

their smarts, social activism, and Bad Ass/Sex Appeal.

Next time you read a Top 10 list honoring special people, think instead about the people who care for their children of any age with special needs. Then call or email them, praising them as your Inclusion Heroes. They undoubtedly deserve it and most assuredly will appreciate the recognition.