

I'm Josh. I'm 16 years old, and I have a diagnosis of Asperger's, dysgraphia, and anxiety. Sometimes, being in places with a lot of people is a challenge for me. There are all these strangers – some might be judging me or thinking I'm doing something wrong. Some might even be praising me, which can be just as scary – what does that mean for next time?

I've found Temple to be a comfortable place for me and for all of my family. I went to the confirmation class here, and then have participated in Mofty for the last two years. I go to Torah Study and help out at the Torah School by working with a kid on the Autism Spectrum. What makes this place OK? I guess that it's interesting and interactive. There's a solid, regular structure making it clear what happens next, but there's also a lot for me to learn and to do. I like study, and Rabbi Grushcow always makes sure to make it interesting. I like seeing the various people – kids, older people, everyone, smiling and participating and having a good time. And of course, there's food. I'm so glad we get a proper lunch at the end, and not just a little Kiddush.

I also enjoy being able to help out. It's great to be able to help someone else succeed. I like the fact that just by watching a kid read – doing something that anyone can do, really – I can make a difference for him and for the whole class.

When I was in the Torah School, I was really impressed with Andrea. She is a very good teacher. She helped me to feel a part of the group even though I was new. We had very interesting classes and we all got to talk about issues. It was like an enrichment class where I learned a lot about the Holocaust and Jewish History. Also, there was lots of Challah.

Mofty has occasionally been really cool too. Everyone is really friendly and the activities are fun. They try to make sure everyone is included but it's difficult. Kids are organizing it and they want to have a good time, not necessarily look after other people. Sometimes, if things are less structured, it's hard for me to know what I'm supposed to do or how to behave. Other people may be chatting easily with friends, but I'm trying to figure out who to talk to. I think it would be good if they had an event with more structure, more Jewish content and more study – I'd find that fun, though everyone else might be bored. Don't get me wrong – I really like Mofty. It's a good program. It's good to engage with your community. They have a lot of great events and I attend whenever I can.

Temple has a really good school for the kids. It's a place where kids can be part of the Jewish school and Jewish community. This place is pretty open to all sorts of people and so my family is pretty accepted, despite our unusual family structure. All of us enjoy participating in the Shul activities, and I like that they have something for many different ages – kids, teens and adults. Some of us are part of the Purim Spiel for example. That's going to be fun. My older sister and one of my Moms help run the drama program and my brother and younger sister are in Torah school. My Mom works as a shadow for my brother because he's on the Autism spectrum too. The kids are really comfortable here. They go on their own all over and feel like this is their place. My older sisters sometimes sing as part of services, my oldest sister babysits here in the summer and has helped out at events and two of my Moms are on the Special Needs Working Group. That's how I ended up here making this speech. It's great to be so much a part of this place. I like the way that there's something for each of us who want to participate.

I think Temple needs more for people in Cegep and university – people between the ages of 17 and 25. That's near the end of Mofty, but it's a bit young for Next Dor. I'd like to see services designed for teens and young adults too – maybe one they helped run, held later in the day, and with interactive and current issues. I really liked the Holocaust service that we did with Andrea in confirmation class. I'd go to something like that.

For the kids too – Torah school is great, but maybe if there were more kids, there'd be more cool stuff that they could do with Hebrew – group projects and interactive activities. I only see the Hebrew class, and it's hard to have groups and projects when there's only a few kids and they're all at different levels. I'm glad there's shadows for those who need them. It definitely helps. It might be fun to have a Mofty like group for younger kids too – then they'd have something social here. Mind you, I think it's fantastic that there's a Torah school at all and one that takes us in.

On the whole, I think Temple is great. They have some terrific programs and they welcome everyone. They welcomed us! I like the food, the people, the Torah study. I am glad I get to be a part of Judaism and part of community, and Temple provides that for us. Thanks so much for listening to me – I hope this lets you see Temple the way I see it, as a warm, interesting and welcoming place, where people can grow and have a good time, no matter who they are.