

PRESS RELEASE

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BJBE Named a URJ Disabilities Inclusion Exemplar Congregation

DEERFIELD-- At the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) Biennial Convention, Congregation B'nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim (BJBE) was named a URJ Disabilities Inclusion Exemplar Congregation for the ongoing pursuit of inclusion of all people in congregational life.

At BJBE, inclusion means that all people, regardless of their ability, have the right to be a valuable and participating member of their community. In connection with our Jewish values and Congregation BJBE's mission, we have an active Inclusion Committee, which is dedicated to creating a welcoming and accessible community for people with disabilities and their families. The purpose of this group is to ensure an inclusive worship, educational, and social experience in a supportive environment.

BJBE's Inclusion initiatives include having a Special Needs Coordinator on staff at our Jewish Learning Center, the temple's supplementary school; being a proud member of HUGS (Healthy Understanding, Growing Spaces), a collaborative effort of Chicago north suburban synagogues that offers meaningful holiday celebrations for children and adults of all ages with special needs; creating opportunities for families who have a child with special needs and would benefit from quieter, lower-stimulating experiences; and more.

"BJBE has checked off a list of accommodations that includes providing large print books, offering educational programming about disabilities and inclusion, creating a sensory friendly Purim carnival, and providing teaching assistants for students needing extra support," says Dr. Jennifer Gendel, chair of the BJBE Inclusion Committee. "Some necessary work of the inclusion committee has been to be more intentional at communicating all of the inclusive opportunities offered at BJBE. Some members do not know that we provide transportation services to those in need, modify Bar and Bat Mitzvah services, and employ an experienced special education specialist to help provide adaptations and accommodations in the religious school classrooms. Although completing this check list is noteworthy, the most important accomplishment of the inclusion work is to ensuring that everyone in our congregation feels welcome and that they belong."