

## **Jewish Delegate Assembly of Greater Pittsburgh Policy Statement on Inclusion and Disabilities**

**Passed: December 3, 2013**

In Genesis 1:27, we read that Adam, and by extension, all people, was created in “the image of God.” This teaches us that there is holiness in all people, regardless of their physical, sensory, emotional or intellectual abilities. Everyone, therefore is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. All Jews can contribute to the community and the world.

Pirke Avot 4:3 says: “Do not despise any person, and do not disparage any object. For there is none who does not have his/her hour and there is no object that does not have its place.” We must provide opportunities for the realization of each person’s contributions and not hinder them in any way. It is our responsibility to remove or mitigate obstacles, as Leviticus 19:14 warns, “Do not curse a person who is deaf and do not place a stumbling block in front of a person who is blind.”

Jewish tradition teaches us to "educate every child according to his way" (Proverbs 22:6) and commands us not to insult the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind, pointing out that by ignoring such needs, we inadvertently place an impediment before them. Our educational needs in the Jewish community are unique because we are committed not only to academic achievement, but also to the development of a Jewish identity, which includes a sense of "belonging" as a community member.

According to a September 2009 report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, “Nearly two-thirds of working-age adults who experience consistent income poverty—more than 36 months of income poverty during a 48-month period—have one or more disabilities. People with disabilities are much more likely to experience various forms of material hardship—including food insecurity, not getting needed medical or dental care, and not being able to pay rent, mortgage, and utility bills—than people without disabilities, even after controlling for income and other characteristics.” The work of creating inclusive communities and an open society is not essentially a matter of resources but how we think about people who have disabilities.

### **The Jewish Delegate Assembly of Greater Pittsburgh:**

**Recognizes** the utmost respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of individuals; Non-discrimination; Full and effective participation and inclusion in Jewish life; Equality of opportunity; Accessibility; and respect for the evolving capacities of children and adults with disabilities and their rights to preserve their Jewish identities

**Urges** all member organizations to draw attention to the abilities of people with disabilities and their right to be recruited, hired, promoted and retained at all levels of work;

**Recognizes** all people with disabilities are entitled to inclusive education, living, employment, and leisure opportunity.

**Recognizes** all people with disabilities have the right to live in their own community and pursue their own lifestyles.

**Believes** people with disabilities should play a central role in the design, operation, and monitoring of the support they receive.

**Believes** all members of the Jewish community share the responsibility to create an inclusive environment.

**The Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh should:**

**Advocate** that members of the Jewish community who are disabled have accessibility to community facilities, agencies, education, and their place of worship.

**Expect, encourage and support** individuals with disabilities to assume leadership responsibilities in all aspects of Jewish community life, organizations and governance.

**Plan** for and include adults with disabilities in the Community Relations Council and for children and adults with disabilities in all of its programs and outreach.

**Urge** the Jewish community to adopt specific plans to create an accessibility study and consult with people who have disabilities or their caregivers when planning and implementing physical improvements, programmatic innovations or schedule changes to Jewish community institutions.

**Welcome** the leadership of individuals with disabilities as Rabbis, professionals in Jewish organizations, and lay leadership;

**Develop** relationships with community organizations that support people with disabilities so that opportunities and areas for cooperation, volunteering and education may be explored.

**Support** advocacy by its member organizations for public policies, programs and adequate funding to benefit the needs of people with disabilities and the common good.

**Initiate** a public awareness campaign designed:

- To nurture receptiveness to the rights of persons with disabilities;
- To promote positive perceptions and greater social awareness towards persons with disabilities;
- To promote recognition of the skills, merits and abilities of persons with disabilities, and of their contributions to the workplace; and
- To foster in all levels of Jewish education, including all children from an early age, an attitude of respect for the rights of persons with disabilities.