



# Update . . .

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*A Jerusalem boy bonds with his family during art therapy.*

## **Art Opens the World to Autistic Youth in Jerusalem**

*by Gila Sack*

Have you ever imagined what it would be like to live in a world in which you cannot communicate and you don't understand others' communication; in which every sight, sound, and touch is potentially painful because of an overloaded and dysfunctional sensory system? Dekalim School in Jerusalem serves exactly this population: adolescents with autism and severe cognitive and developmental delays, often accompanied by epilepsy, deafness, or Cerebral Palsy (C.P.). Our students live in a terrifying and incomprehensible world and cope by withdrawal or reacting in terror to this, our world.

In Jerusalem, schools for special-needs students are named for trees, emphasizing growth. Our school is Dekalim meaning "date-palm". It's a long, difficult, and

often painful climb to reach the fruit of the date-palm, but well worth the effort.

Our long-term goal for the students is to be contributing members of their communities. We do this by intensive work in the area of daily living skills and social skills - maximizing their independence. Providing alternative modes of communication and adapting the activities and the environment to meet the sensory needs of the students are crucial to our work. Experience has shown us that the creative arts - painting, sculpture, music and movement are often the most accessible and successful communicative channels for our students. Donna Williams, an author who is herself autistic, writes of art: "It is an indirect language that addresses the senses as well as the mind. Art finds ways through doors blocked by the mind."

In addition, arts and crafts often become vocations for our students. Many of our

graduates help to support themselves through their crafts in workshops.

We need your support in order to develop programming for bi-monthly "Family-student artistic happenings". Because of the severe disabilities of our students and the overwhelming stress those disabilities place on their families, most of our students no longer live at home; rather in group homes, often from age 13! This presents a real challenge to family relationships. Often the family is at a loss as to how to connect to their child and is dealing with difficult emotional issues regarding the child's placement. We feel that the creative arts can provide positive and affirming avenues for maintaining connections between families and students.

We would be very grateful for your support for these important projects. It is an opportunity to touch a child's life in an extremely significant way.

**Gila Sack** is the new principal of Dekalim School for Autistic Youth in Jerusalem. She was the school's therapist for 13 years before her promotion. Many of these kids have grown up with Mrs. Sack as a meaningful part of their lives. Her new position as principal will hopefully give her a stronger voice to advocate on behalf of these precious youth.

**Editor's Note:** The Love for Israel Relief Fund has been sponsoring art projects at Dekalim School for nearly six months. We love how these art projects open the world for the kids. With your help, we plan to continue sponsoring these art projects while supporting the development and expansion of the school's creative arts and art therapy programs.

As the article mentions, most of these students no longer live with their biological families. The Love for Israel Relief Fund and Dekalim School for Autistic Youth want to sponsor extra-curricular art retreats for students, parents and caretakers. School faculty will oversee the programming. This is a great community-based way to restore and strengthen family bonds. Please consider sponsoring one or more kids. Together, we can help open the world to these treasures from Heaven.

**You can donate online at:**

<http://love4israel.org/donate.html>

**On behalf** of the Israelis you help - Todah Robah!

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Send checks to:

**Love for Israel Relief Fund**  
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Suite 445  
Washington, DC 20006