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Photo credit: Doron Hafif

Image description: Photographed is a boy with short curly brown hair wearing a “Chicago” sports top signs “peace,” flanked by two boys in yarmulkes; girls and Rabbi Yehousha Soudakoff play in the background.

Building Bridges, Bringing Joy at Chushim Ben Dan

By Rabbi Yehoshua Soudakoff

On Friday morning, July 11th, 2025, over 75 Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and their families gathered from across Israel for a special day of fun, connection, and community. This vibrant and fully accessible event, made possible thanks to the generous support of the Jewish Deaf Resource Center (JDRC) and the UJA Jewish Federation of New York, was a meaningful example of how shared experiences can bridge the gap between Deaf and hearing members of the Israeli community.

Held in a fully accessible environment, the event offered an assortment of indoor and outdoor games tailored for children and young teens. From group competitions to quiet play zones, every child had the opportunity to participate fully, regardless of their ability to hear. Deaf counselors and sign language interpreters moved among the big crowd. The joyful atmosphere was enhanced even more by the sweet treats—Belgian waffles, slushies, and ice cream with a variety of toppings—all served up with smiles and lots of laughter.

Coming in the heels of the Iran-Israel war that had nearly the entire country sheltering daily in underground safe spaces and reinforced rooms, the event provided more than just entertainment. It gives children a rare and precious chance to be with peers who understand their experiences, and whom they rarely have a chance to interact with face to face, as they come from across the country. In a time of ongoing uncertainty and the ongoing threat of conflict and seemingly never ending missile attacks, this day offered them a chance to simply be kids—carefree, connected, and joyful.

JDRC President Susan Cohen notes "Our partnership with Chushim has shown how powerful it is when Deaf and hearing Jewish individuals come together to create inclusive communal spaces. Especially during a time of crisis - when a sense of normalcy, connection, and spiritual grounding is so desperately needed - these accessible Jewish experiences help ensure no one is left on the margins. This is the heart of belonging in an organic way. We thank Rabbi Yehoshua Soudakoff for his leadership and example in making this vision a reality."

Parents shared their heartfelt appreciation. Maya, one of the mothers at the event, said, "It's important to me as a mother to see my deaf kids interact with other children. Chushim brings children together and makes this happen. Thank you!"

Another parent, Hodaya, added, “I want my children to be exposed to Jewish values. I appreciate events like this—they keep us connected to our roots.”

Chushim thanks the kindness of donors. This day was more than an event; it was a celebration of inclusion, identity, and shared community. It brought joy to all those who participated: the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and hearing children and their families.

When asked how he enjoyed the event, 9-year-old Liam, who travelled over an hour from Haifa to come with his sisters and father, summed it up perfectly with a toothy grin: “It was so fun!”

Jewish Deaf Resource Center
P.O Box 318
Hartsdale, NY 11530
www.jdrc.org
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