



ON ONE FOOT

A JUDAIC Q & A

WHAT MAKES REENA
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PROVIDING JUDAIC
PROGRAMMING AND A
JEWISH ENVIRONMENT
FOR THE PERSONS WE
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1. Why is Judaic programming so important at Reena?

Reena's philosophy is based on the belief that people with developmental disabilities have a place in the mainstream of Canadian society, close to family and friends. As an agency, we strive towards maximizing the potential of all the persons that we support.

What makes Reena truly unique is our emphasis on providing Judaic programming and a Jewish environment for the persons we support, through which they may develop spiritually and grow to feel a connection and sense of belonging to their roots, culture and community. This makes us different from all other organizations serving individuals with developmental disabilities in Toronto and provides a very special quality to all of our endeavours at Reena.

Reena first began in 1973 through the efforts of a group of Jewish people in the Toronto area, made up of parents of children with developmental disabilities and other concerned members of the Jewish community. They came together to set up a Jewish alternative to the already existing non-sectarian or Christian oriented services being provided to individuals with developmental disabilities in Toronto. Initially their mission was to provide a top quality residential service within a Jewish environment. Jewish parents wanted their children with developmental disabilities to feel "at home" in an environment similar to the one in which they grew up, where Jewish rituals, customs and

traditions were practiced.

It was important to the founders of Reena that this continuity of the Jewish family's rich heritage and values, be ensured in all aspects of programming. In this way, persons supported by Reena would not feel that they had a "double" disability - having a developmental disability and being Jewish in a non-Jewish milieu. Instead they would be encouraged to feel proud of their Judaic heritage, thereby improving their ability to function in both the Jewish and the general community. While Reena has experienced tremendous changes and growth since its inception in the early '70's, this Judaic philosophy and mission has remained the same. Our experience has shown the hopes of the founders were correct. The persons we support who are Jewish have made great strides, improving their functioning in general and increasing their pride in being a part of the Jewish community. At the same time, to the persons we support who are not Jewish, our focus on Judaic programming has brought added awareness of a different culture as well as their own.

2. What is this "Judaic Programming" all about?

Persons with developmental disabilities at Reena learn skills in many areas including self-care, job readiness and life skills. Learning these skills help them to function more independently in the general community. At the same time the persons we support who are Jewish learn "Jewish skills" that will help them to function more independently in the Jewish community. By teaching them about the celebration of the Jewish Sabbath and Holidays and about following the Jewish Dietary laws (keeping kosher) we help them gain more knowledge of their heritage and become more competent and comfortable as participating members of the Jewish community.

The major components of Judaic programming are the celebration and observance of Jewish holidays, the weekly celebration of the Jewish

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AS STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS, YOU HAVE A VITAL FUNCTION IN HELPING PERSONS SUPPORTED BY REENA DEVELOP THEIR SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Sabbath and the daily observances of the Jewish dietary laws.

All of this programming is done within the context of a Jewish environment. Most of our residential programs have kosher kitchens, Jewish paintings, Mezzuzahs on the doorposts, books and religious articles on hand and are situated in Jewish neighbourhoods. There may be Jewish music on the stereo as the persons we support eat their kosher supper, after having said a short Hebrew blessing thanking G-d for their food. After supper they may go to the Jewish Community Centre for some athletic or cultural activity. They may stop in at a Kosher Deli for a snack after their evening program. In this way, we try to include Judaic programming in all facets of their life at Reena.

3. "I don't know anything about the Jewish Sabbath, holidays or dietary laws. How could I work or volunteer at Reena?"

There is no requirement for staff or volunteers at Reena to be Jewish or to have any previous knowledge of Judaism. However, there is a requirement for all Reena staff and volunteers to have an open mind to learning about Judaism, and willingly accept the added challenge to their job of the Judaic component of the Agency's programming. In order to provide ongoing consultation and training in all aspects of "Judaica," there is a wide variety of Judaic reference material at each Reena program site and more extensive resources are available at the main office.

There is an attempt to include as many practical programming suggestions, specific to persons with developmental disabilities as possible, in all Judaic reference materials circulated at Reena. As in any job or life experience, often the most valuable source of information is one's colleagues. Reena staff and volunteers are encouraged to turn to their experienced fellow workers, knowledgeable persons with

developmental disabilities at Reena or supervisors at their work site with questions of a Judaic nature. By far, the most effective and meaningful training format in the area of Judaic programming, as in most other areas of one's work, is "hands-on" training. Certainly any specific help or additional input that is needed in the area of Judaic programming is no more than a phone call away to the Manager of Faith and Cultural Services at the main Reena office.

4. What happens on the Jewish Sabbath?

The Jewish Sabbath or Shabbat in Hebrew is sometimes referred to as Judaism's weekly holiday ... and at Reena we truly encourage the Sabbath to be a "holiday" as well as a "holy day of rest." It is a day which acknowledges that G-d created the world in 6 days, and then on the 7th day He rested...and so too, all of His creations rest. Shabbat is from sundown on Friday evening until after dark on Saturday night.

The entire period is devoted to as much quality time as possible including candle lighting, festive Sabbath meals, Kiddush over the wine or grape juice, traditional egg bread or challah, Jewish songs and stories, prayer services at the local synagogues, study programs and visits with friends and family. This special Shabbat programming at Reena adds greatly to the uniqueness of the day and is widely enjoyed by almost all persons with developmental disabilities and staff at Reena.



5. What about the Jewish Holidays?

There are many Jewish holidays and festivals throughout the year, each with its own rich and meaningful customs and rituals. For almost all Jews, from the least observant to the most orthodox, the Jewish holidays are very much a family time. Many of the persons supported by Reena will want to celebrate at least a part of these holidays together with their extended "Reena family." Before each of these special days, training and/or materials are presented to the staff that will enhance the celebration and provide a better understanding of the holidays to both staff and the persons we support. Some of the holidays are days of rest like Shabbat, while on others we bring added joy to our regular weekdays through various unique celebrations and practices.

6. What is meant by "keeping kosher?"

Keeping kosher refers to all the rules and regulations from the Bible, which guides the Jewish people in what we eat and how we prepare our food. In very simple terms, certain foods, including pork and shellfish, are forbidden. In addition, meat and dairy foods may not be eaten or prepared together.

Keeping kosher is a way of life. Although eating is a universal physical need, Jewish people elevate this common daily function by shaping our diet and methods of food preparation to conform to G-d's dictates. Keeping kosher makes a home a Jewish home - it gives our meals a unique, traditional quality and forges a link with one's family, one's heritage and the grand chain of Jewish history.



WE ENCOURAGE THE EXPRESSION OF EVERYONE'S CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS ROOTS

Again, training and reference materials are provided in order to ensure that a kosher lifestyle is observed at all Reena homes and program locations.

7. "What about the religious / cultural programming for persons with developmental disabilities supported by Reena who are not Jewish?"

At Reena, we formally promote the celebration of only the Jewish holidays and traditions. However, in keeping with our general philosophy of striving toward the maximum potential of all the persons we support, including the important area of their spiritual development, we encourage the expression of everyone's cultural and religious roots, regardless of their background or denomination. For example, at Christmas time our Reena homes do not have Christmas trees in the living room or lights in the window. At that time of year Reena celebrates with menorahs, latkes and Chanukah parties. However, we do actively facilitate the celebration of non-Jewish holidays with family and friends outside of the home and attendance at Church services for any person we support who wishes to attend. Non-Jewish persons supported by Reena who wish to have a Christmas tree or other religious artifacts are encouraged to do so in their private areas (usually their bedroom). Before entering any Reena program, the person with a developmental disability and family are informed of our Judaic policies and agree to accept a place in our service system with a knowledge and understanding of these policies.

8. "How will Judaic programming affect my role as an employee / volunteer at Reena?"

What all of this means is that there is an added dimension or challenge to your job. Part of your daily work will be directed towards helping the

person/s you support learn “Jewish skills.” As a staff person or volunteer, you function as a role model for the person/s. Staff at Reena will add a basic knowledge of Judaism and the practice of numerous Jewish rituals and traditions to their role. Volunteers may wish to learn a little about the Jewish religion, but if they choose not to, a respect for the faith and culture of the person/s they are volunteering with is what’s necessary.

As staff and volunteers, you have a vital function in helping persons with developmental disabilities supported by Reena explore their unique heritage and develop their spiritual identity. It is the responsibility of each staff person at Reena to take on the additional learning of the Judaic component and consult with the Manager of Faith and Cultural Services and/or Reena Judaic training manuals in order to achieve this worthwhile goal. It is not mandatory for volunteers to take Judaic Training, but should they wish to take it, they may make a request through the Volunteer Department.

9. Why is this brochure entitled “On One Foot?”

“On One Foot” refers to a famous story in Jewish legend about a man who was interested in learning all about Judaism. He went to a famous Jewish teacher, Shammai, and asked the teacher to tell him all about Judaism while he stood “on one foot.” Shammai refused the man, explaining that it takes years of study to learn even a little about Judaism. The man then went to the other renowned Jewish teacher of that city, Hillel, and made the same request. This time, Hillel explained that the essence of Judaism is expressed in the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Then he said, “The rest is commentary – now, go and study!”

We can only “skim the surface” in this pamphlet with respect to Jewish knowledge. We are in fact, teaching you “all about Judaism while standing on one foot.” You may therefore have many questions that we would be pleased to answer at any time.

If you accept this challenge – the challenge to strive to be a mensch, a decent, moral human being – and the challenge to study and learn more about Judaism, you will be helping Reena to fulfill its basic purpose as embodied in its name that means “joy” in Hebrew. You will be helping the persons Reena supports to experience the joy of learning new skills that help them integrate more fully into the general and the Jewish community.





Reena is a non-profit organization which promotes dignity, individuality, independence, personal growth and community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities within a framework of Jewish culture and values.

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