

B'SHALOM COLUMN
American Association on Mental Retardation
Religion and Spirituality Division

Reaching Out Over The Internet

"Tikkun olam" means "healing the world." For Jews, it is a primary responsibility, one of our obligations to G-d and the people around us. As the executive director of an agency which provides programs and services to children and adults in the greater Phoenix area, I have had the opportunity to "heal" a little part of the world with each new special education class in Hebrew school, each support group for siblings or grandparents, and each disability awareness workshop for a synagogue youth group. But it's not enough. I need to go beyond the city limits of my own community to address the special needs of more people who have disabilities.

My agency has found the way to reach out to others outside of Phoenix, beyond the Southwest and, in fact, across US borders. We recently launched a web site on which we described our mission to facilitate inclusion in all aspects of Jewish life for children and adults who have special needs. We list the many programs and services we offer, and links to other Jewish web sites which touch the lives of persons who have disabilities. There's a calendar of upcoming events so our clients can plan ahead to attend their favorite activities and order forms for our new Disability Resources Directory and agency videotape. Visitors to the web site are provided with several ways to contact the agency for more information.

Within a month of going on-line, I received e-mail messages from a couple in California considering a move to Phoenix to find a better school for their son who has developmental delays; a woman in the Southeast US looking for a Jewish residential camp that would welcome her three sons, all of whom are disabled; a colleague in the Pacific Northwest looking for help for post-operative care for a client wintering in Arizona; an Orthodox man seeking a Jewish group home for a young man; a professor in British Columbia who wants to exchange articles over the internet; and a doctor in Israel who works with clients similar to mine. Every day there's another message, another opportunity to offer information and referral and, most importantly, another chance to "heal the world." To all of you who are doing equally valuable work in your communities, I hope you will consider reaching out into cyberspace to share your knowledge and expertise. If you would like to visit our web site, you can find us at www.cjsn.org.