



Orr Shalom

Bar and Bat Mitzvot for **Israeli** **Children-at-Risk in** **Out-of-Home Care**

Orr Shalom Head Office
Ganir Center, 2 Hahar Street
Har Tuv Aleph Industrial Estate
Beit Shemesh 99067, Israel

tel: 972-2-993 6900 ext 112
fax: 972-2-5337074
info@orr-shalom.co.il
www.orr-shalom.org.il

Orr Shalom Bar/Bat Mitzvah Educational Activity

This educational activity explains the importance of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah to Orr Shalom children-at-risk in out-of-home care. Please feel free to print it out and run it in your schools, synagogues, or youth groups and then contact Orr Shalom at info@orr-shalom.co.il to find out how to get more involved!

Aim The aim of this session is for the participants to understand the vital importance of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah for Orr Shalom children-at-risk.

Session

- 1. Introduction Circle** – The participants introduce themselves and note the most meaningful thing that they remember or are hoping for from their bar or bat mitzvah. The facilitator encourages them to focus on the Jewish experience, family, identity, memories etc, not gifts. (20 mins)
- 2. Letter** – The facilitator reads a letter from Tomer (16) living in a Therapeutic Family Group Home, who was removed from his biological home at the age of 6. Tomer talks about his life in the Orr Shalom home, about Orr Shalom’s work in general, and about why his Barmitzvah was the most important and meaningful day in his life. (10 minutes)
- 3. Discussion** – The facilitator then leads a discussion about why it is so vital for every Jewish child to have a meaningful bar/bat mitzvah and why in particular Orr Shalom bar/bat mitzvah aged children deserve and need a good celebration as much as any other child. What is “meaningful” for an Orr Shalom child? Does it include things that you might take for granted like having your family there? (15 minutes)

4. Huddle Time – The facilitator splits the participants into four groups and explains the problem that they need to solve (20 mins)

\$2,000 provides an Orr Shalom child with a bar/bat mitzvah but there are four children who now need a bar or bat mitzvah. We only have enough money to give one child a meaningful bar/bat mitzvah. They need to decide who is highest priority.

Discussion afterwards about how hard it is to prioritize giving bar/bat mitzvot and how all Jewish children, including all Orr Shalom children, deserve this rite of passage.

5. Summary – The facilitator summarizes the request and asks for support. (10 minutes)

When they next come to Israel, they are invited to visit Orr Shalom

6. Informal time - any teen who wishes writes a personal bar/bat mitzvah card to an Orr Shalom child. We then scan the cards and put them up on our website. We also ask invite the participants to join Orr Shalom's Facebook group.

75 minutes

Letter from Tomer

My name is Tomer. I am now 16 years old and I have lived in an Orr Shalom Therapeutic Family Group Home since I was removed from my family when I was just six. I was removed from my home because my parents weren't able to look after me because they were not well themselves. I remember that when I was very young my parents were hardly at home and I was left on my own a lot. I was always hungry when I lived at home, and one day some people found me looking for food in the garbage, and that is when I went to live in an Orr Shalom Home.

Translation
of a letter
from a boy
who wants
to help other
children have
a Bar and Bat
Mitzvah.

When I got to the home, I had to start going to school as I was six already. But my parents had never sent me to a kindergarten or to school and I didn't know what to do there. I was so scared of everyone and everything that I used to hit the other children and the teachers and I didn't have any friends. Also, no one had taught me anything at home. I was six but I didn't even know how to count to ten. In my new Orr Shalom home, I couldn't believe it at the beginning - there was breakfast, lunch and dinner. It was clean and nice. My new parents, David and Ella, taught me to brush my teeth, wash my face and have showers - things that my real parents never did.

The home that I have lived in for the past ten years is called an Orr Shalom Therapeutic Family Group Home and there are 24 of them in Israel. Each of them cares for up to 11 children aged 6-18 who cannot live with their families. Each Home has a married couple who are the house parents, as well as a psychologist and social worker and a tutor who helps us catch up with our school work.

In my Orr Shalom home, I really feel at home. I share a room with another boy who is an orphan and we are like brothers. I do still see my biological parents sometimes and I am encouraged to have a good relationship with them but I totally understand why it's better for me in an Orr Shalom home than with my biological parents who just can't take care of me properly.

Orr Shalom has done everything for me. They made sure that I had a warm, loving home with caring parents. They helped me catch up in school. They helped me overcome my violence and make friends with other children my age. They helped me learn to play guitar which I love and, even paid for me to join a soccer club.



They are helping me now think about what I am going to do when I leave school. They have been real parents to me.

They were the ones who gave me a Bar Mitzvah when I never thought that I was going to have one. My birthday is at the end of the school year so I saw all my friends having amazing bar mitzvahs with their family and friends. They were learning to read from the Torah, having parties and getting presents. I was getting upset because I knew that my biological parents couldn't make me a bar mitzvah, but I shouldn't have worried. Orr Shalom had already thought about it. They gave me an amazing bar mitzvah that I will remember for the rest of my life.

Orr Shalom arranged a tutor for me to teach me how to read from the Torah. They bought me special clothes for the day, and organized a lovely ceremony and reception in my honor. I couldn't believe it. They invited all my friends from school and from my soccer club, as well as the neighbors. Of course, my House Parents David and Ella and everyone in the Orr Shalom home came to celebrate. They even invited my biological parents and some of my aunts and uncles and cousins who I haven't seen for ages, which meant so much to me. It was the most significant day of my life - I still can't believe that Orr Shalom did so much for me. My House Parents spoke about how much they love me and how much I had changed from the angry, lonely six-year old I had been when I joined the Home. They spoke about how proud they are of me and how they know that I will succeed in my life. The whole bar mitzvah made me feel really special and helped me grow up and connect to my Jewish heritage.

Now I am 16, I am doing well. My grades are pretty good, I have a lot of friends and I volunteer in the firefighters - I really want to give back to the community that gave so much to me.

If you can help other Orr Shalom children like me to have a bar or bat mitzvah, please do. Having a bar mitzvah was just so important to me - it really made me feel loved and wanted, and connected to my Jewish roots, like every other Jewish kid of my age.



**Sigal
lives in a
Therapeutic
Family
Group
Home in
Be'er Sheva**

Sigal arrived at Orr Shalom's Therapeutic Family Group Home in Be'er Sheva at the age of 10. She had been removed from her home and placed in an emergency shelter because her home was not a safe place for her. When she came to Orr Shalom, Sigal behaved very badly at the beginning, with frequent outbursts of anger at everyone around her.

Orr Shalom staff worked with Sigal intensively, giving her positive feedback and helping her understand the harmful effects of her behavior. A volunteer and a tutor worked with Sigal and helped her catch up academically. Thanks to the dedicated work and consistent professional care at the Group Home, Sigal has made significant progress and her behavior is much calmer.

Sigal's bat mitzvah is coming up. She would love to celebrate it like all her friends.



**David,
mentally
challenged,
lives with
Foster
Parents**

David was never really accepted and loved by his biological family because he is mentally challenged. He was neglected by his biological family and his case came to the Ministry of Welfare's attention following reports that he was sleeping on the streets. For the last three and a half years, he has lived with a foster family just outside of Jerusalem. He studies at a special education school, where he enjoys a range of activities, including gardening, electronics, and cooking.

For his Bar Mitzvah, David wants to lay tefillin in synagogue. Because of his learning difficulties, he is unable to read from the Torah like other children his age. Despite this, he insists on holding the ceremony in a synagogue, seeing it as an important step on his Jewish journey.



**Dana
lives in a
Therapeutic
Family
Group
Home in
Eilat**

Dana was referred to Orr Shalom following neglect. There was no food on the table and her mother was unable to raise her properly. She is now living in an Orr Shalom Therapeutic Family Group Home in Eilat. Since she moved there, she has developed in many directions. She is doing well at school and her self-esteem is growing rapidly. Now she is learning to take care of herself and be a responsible young woman. She wants her Bat Mitzvah to be a shared celebration, in the presence of all her friends and the other Orr Shalom children living in Eilat. Dana is extremely excited about the idea of having a Bat Mitzvah - it is the first real celebration in her life.



**Yonatan,
born with
shortened
legs, lives
with a
foster
family**

Yonatan, was born with shortened legs. His biological parents refused to take him home from the hospital. The Ministry of Welfare began looking for a family for him through Orr Shalom, and located an extraordinary couple who fell in love with him the moment they laid eyes on him, taking him home to their own five children. Yonatan has become an integral part of the family, showered with constant affection and attention. He is surrounded by a loving foster family and a special counselor who works closely with him. The counselor, too, was born with shortened legs, and sets a wonderful example for Yonatan.

Yonatan's Bar Mitzvah is next year. He is already looking forward to it.

