

Rochele Hertzal

I'd tell you it's awesome
I'd tell you it feels great
I'd tell you that for 5 PM
On Mondays, I do wait
I'd tell you it's the best time,
The best hour of my week
I'd tell you it brightens
My day when it looks bleak
I'd tell you how good it feels
To see the joy on her face
I tell you that this
Is my happy place
I'd share the satisfaction
Of giving of my own
I'd tell you what it's like
To make sure she's not alone
I'd tell you the impact
It has on me
I'd tell you that this is
What makes me feel free

But if it was about myself
Then it's nothing to share
If it's about myself
Then it's not about my care
It's not to make me
Feel good that I give
It's not about me
That's not how I live
If it was about myself
I'd have nothing to show
If it was about myself
Then I really didn't grow
If it was about the joy
That giving gave me
Then really that isn't
Truly free

It's about the child
The difference it makes
The love that I give her
She knows it's not fake

If it was my life
That was my goal to affect
Then I'd only able
when all was perfect
But some days are hard
And some days are long
Sometimes she's cranky
And all seems to go wrong
But then I remember
Instead of being frustrated
That it's not me
For whom this was created
That

It's about the child
The difference it makes
The love that I give her
She knows it's not fake
It changes her world
Lights up her day
That special attention
Goes a long way
And when I
Am truly free
Then it about her
What she needs
Not me

To all my FC Friends
I gave you my all
I hope you feel it
Because I certainly do ♡

- Rochele Hertzal

Liba Okunov

Friendship Circle to me,
Means everything,
Friends at home,
Means im not alone.
In the cold winter night,
I feel I can still fight.
My friend is there for me,
Caring about my individuality.
In my heart I can see
She's smiling at me.
She may not be with me always physically,
But I know something.
She's there for me, which is really everything!
My friend comes to my home,
So I shouldn't be alone.
She talks to me,
And plays with me.
She really shows me what I want to be,
Even if its hard for me.
Walking done that street is embarrassing,
People don't know me, they stare at me,
I feel so alone, like this world isn't my home.
When I see my friend,
I know home is around the bend.
It's like I belong, I am really strong.
And nothing can go wrong.
My friend cares for me,
She believes in me,
Encourages me
That is all I need,
My friend.

Chaya Gourarie

We walked in on the first day.
Their mother introduced us as the new volunteers.
“They’re just like Nechama Dina and Shoshy,
Do you remember your buddies from last year?”

“Oh great,” I thought,
As I settled down on the floor with a sigh,
“We’re being compared to their buddies from last year,
The bar is being set quite high.”

But despite my initial apprehension
And my fear of the unknown,
I was determined to give it my all
And put my best foot forward.

My two years with Sima and Shaindel have really taught
me so much that I could not comprehend.
I've got to see, play, give, thrive and really understand.

Through them, I have gained so much and I have really
grown.
I also got to make the most amazing friendships,
Buddies that I'm proud to call my own.

We have a blast playing games and doing crafts,
Hours of fun spent.
When the time runs out,
All faces express genuine disappointment.

The time flies when we are together,
It feels like only minutes.
It never feels like an entire hour passes
With the amount of fun we pack in it.

They have really taught me
How not to judge based on stereotypes or how we may
perceive,
But to seek the inner gem in every place
The gifts and accomplishments each person weaves.

They opened my eyes to a whole new way
That different doesn't mean less
They are special, extraordinary and fun,
To know them I am truly blessed.

Menucha Rachel Zelman

I walk through the doors
Peer through the the netting
Press my face to an incubator.
Inside I see
A child
A beautiful one
With something
That sets them apart.
I put on music
I sing
I take the child's hands into mine
And try to make them smile.
Sometimes
When I am lucky
They smile back.
I look at the child's face
And right then I see
I feel
That really
Although I may be called a volunteer
I'm no volunteer.
Because I recognize
That in that child
Is something larger than life
I know
That every moment I spend with him
He gives me
More than I could ever give him.
The child shows me
More than words can ever say.
I go home and
Then I'm sad
Thinking that he
He will never measure up.
He will never be a parent
Never get a job
Even
Never call his mother "Mommy."
And then I think and I realize
Who defined success as these things?
This child
That I love so much
He's beautiful
And more than that
He is successful
Successful at his divine mission.
And it's so high
So lofty
That there's no charts
No textbooks
No way to encapsulate this energy.
No way to define it.
And I learn from this
That success can be a million things
And if I mess up
Can't do this
Can't do that
It doesn't define me.
Thank you.

Rikki Shaul

Hi my name is Rikki Shaul. I want to share about my experience this year at Friendship Circle.

When my partner and I signed up we did not know what to expect. Knowing which family we were paired with made me immediately excited for another great year. The night before we were going to meet the kids I felt a little nervous with all sorts of thoughts spinning in my brain, like a wheel that doesn't stop turning. Questioning to myself what if they don't like me and what if I don't do a good job. It was messing with my brain until I fell asleep.

When we walked to the house that day after school I still had butterflies inside me but I was so excited. We knocked on the door unsure what to expect. The door cracked open, three kids waiting with excitement and joy on their faces. They welcomed us like we were family with open arms that made us feel so comfortable, we were part of something even though we just started. It was an incredible feeling. The moment I walked in, my nerves went away and we had the best visit ever. When we finished, I left feeling like a new person, like a lighter version of myself.

We all have worries but this showed me a new perspective. Let's take a minute to realize though that this family struggles with a child who is constantly in and out of the hospital with constant need for care, yet, this family continues to make memories in spite of their difficult situation. As I was going about my day, I realized something. Going to Friendship Circle is not just about visiting the Friendship circle member but also about the siblings and taking care of them and making them feel special in every single way we can.

Each week when I confirm with my Friendship Circle mom, the mom confirms with a resounding yes; the kids are so excited for you both to come. I always look forward to my time each and every week. I look forward to the never ending chaos and excitement that comes along with every week such as playdough from scratch, playing truth or dare, baking, ice cream trip and games galore. The kids love taking pictures and filling up my phone with no space left (jk, love when they do that). Chanukah was the most amazing unforgettable experience ever with dancing all night, one of the most meaningful nights I had and every week, not realizing how much of an impact we are making. While making ever lasting connections with the kids and giving the parents a break. I can't thank my family enough for giving me a great experience this year and showing me what Friendship Circle is all about.

Rivka Wolosow

This is my second year volunteering for Friendship circle. I have no words to express how amazing and supportive this program is. Walking into Friendship circle touches my heart; it's a scene like no other. A place where every child is seen and treated like a piece of gold, each helped to their own individual needs. The smile on the kids' faces the moment they walk into the Friendship Circle Center is glowing. Everyone is welcomed in a heartwarming way, making them feel at home. Special needs is a unique gift that Hashem has gifted to very few individuals. Volunteering at Friendship Circle has changed my perspective on others. There are many different, unique characteristics that some children were blessed with that I never knew existed. Hashem created us all differently; there are many different challenges people have in this world. We have to accept everyone for who they are; some may look different, may not speak clearly, or may not speak at all. Here at Friendship Circle, each child learns to thrive, be their best self, and shine their light wherever they go. Fulfilling their mission in this world. My aunt Chaya Dagan has Down syndrome. She holds a special place in my heart. Her uniqueness and creativity can brighten your day. Chaya constantly talks about Friendship Circle, how awesome it is, and how excited she is for the upcoming programs. Chaya feels like she has nothing better to look forward to than her friendship circle programs. At Friendship Circle, Chaya feels like she can just be herself, without anyone making fun of her or treating her differently. This is my second year volunteering at Friendship Circle with two different kids. I learned something unique from each one that I now use in my day-to-day life. My first day at Friends at Home last year was pretty rough. I began to think to myself, "That's it, I'm done, this is too hard, this is not what I expected". I thought to myself a little more and decided to give it another shot, "maybe she was just not used to us." I took it step by step, week by week, and I started enjoying the visits more and more. Esther, the girl I was visiting, has a heart of her own. Esther looked forward to the visits every week, and consistently asked her mother when we were coming. When it was time to go home, Esther felt disappointed that we were leaving. "That's it? I want you to stay for longer," as we walked out of the door, Esther walked out with us, "I'm going to walk you home a little". Esther loves to play the role of a doctor. The moment we walked in, we went straight to "the doctor's office," where we met our dedicated doctor, "Doctor Esther." This year, our friends-at-home visits began, and I was feeling a little useless. Oriel is the boy I'm visiting this year. Oriel is non-verbal. I started to feel like I'm wasting my time. Oriel is very active; he doesn't usually like to sit in one spot. Oriel seems very independent when we come over. Oriel likes to do things by himself. Oriel loves throwing his animals in his crib or the sink, etc. I tried to pass him the animals, but he would just take them out of my hands, motioning that he didn't want me to touch them. Or I would take out magnet tiles and build something so Oriel would see how fun it is, and hopefully he will come, but he just walks over, knocks it down, and walks away. At this point, I was getting a little frustrated. Is this what I came here for: to sit and play with myself? My friend and I put on music to dance, and that's when I realized my visit had a purpose. Oriel was running around the house laughing and dancing away. He was so excited that he looked like he had won a grand prize. I'm loving my weekly visits to Oriel. Sometimes, it just takes time for you to adjust, and for the kid to adjust to you. I feel like my visit is worth many gems. To see how excited Oriel is to play not only with music but also with animals and magnet tiles, too. Everyone has a different version of having fun. Some kids enjoy themselves most when someone else builds something, and they have a blast breaking it down. Oriel looks forward to our visits every week and jumps up the second he sees us. Sometimes it may feel like you're not accomplishing much, but the impact you have on your buddy and the love you show them make their day brighter. Volunteering at Friendship Circle has taught me to always look at the bright side. If a child is acting up or saying rude things, it's important to respond positively. Some kids may feel down sometimes. Everyone is doing something or talking, and they just can't communicate properly, so they may give negative feedback and act harshly toward you. I learned to respond with a smile and compliments, so each kid feels heard and loved. When around children with special needs, it's important to respect them and give them boundaries. It's important to treat them like everyone else around you. No one wants to be treated differently from those around them.