



RUDERMAN SYNAGOGUE INCLUSION PROJECT



Personal Testimonials

1. Cara Coller, Temple Emanuel

My name is Cara Coller of Temple Emanuel. We have a 14-year-old son, Jourdan, with autism; a 10-year-old daughter, Isabella, who has multiple medical complexities, including visual impairment; and a 5-year-old son, Brady. With the help of our synagogue and Gateways, Jourdan became a bar mitzvah – but I wasn't sure if it would be possible for Isabella. **Before** the Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project, Isabella loved coming to temple, but no matter what service we attended, the service was either too loud for her, or she was too loud for the service.

Now, because of RSIP's partnership, Temple Emanuel has held multiple inclusion and sensory-friendly programs as well as an Inclusion Shabbat, with softer music and allergy-friendly foods.

For the first time, Isabella felt included in the Shabbat service. She sang with the clergy and danced in my husband's arms while our entire family smiled and shed tears of joy! Thanks to RSIP, the dream of Isabella becoming a bat mitzvah is now possible.

2. Rebecca Winters, Temple Isaiah

My name is Rebecca Winters, and I'm the inclusion specialist at Temple Isaiah. **Before** the Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project, we did not have a formal structure to address inclusion. Many congregants told us that they didn't feel fully included in our congregational life.

Now, thanks to our partnership with RSIP, Temple Isaiah's collaborative Inclusion Committee is building a community where all are valued and feel welcomed.

At our inclusion Shabbat, congregants with special needs shared how they have experienced an inclusive community. Sam spoke about how proud he is to serve as a high holiday usher and to blow his shofar. Zach enthusiastically noted that helping at mitzvah day is his favorite activity.

We want everyone to feel joy and know they're at home at Temple Isaiah, and now our congregants tell us they feel heard.

3. **Ben Finkelstein, Temple Shalom**

Hello, my name is Ben Finkelstein. I have been coming to Temple Shalom my whole life, and now I work there every Thursday.

I have three very important jobs that I do each week. First, I put all the Shabbat and Minyan name tags in alphabetical order and replace them in their boxes for services. Second, I prepare all the yartzeit letters for mailing. And lastly, I put all the books away in the library. I also do special jobs like count the cards for mitzvah mail or stuff envelopes for special mailings. I am friendly with the rabbis and office staff.

I work very carefully at my job, and like being helpful. I love being at Temple Shalom, where I know I am included.

4. **Ernest Aupperlee, Temple Ohabei Shalom**

I'm Ernest Aupperlee of Temple Ohabei Shalom. After my conversion to Judaism last year, I was unable to commute on Shabbat. My priority in searching for the right synagogue was to find a place where I could actively participate.

At Temple Ohabei Shalom, I knew I had found a place where I could fully participate in religious life and diverse social activities. **Before**, the Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project had already helped the community integrate their mission to be inclusive and help congregants with disabilities like me. **Now**, not only do I benefit from the project, but I also serve on my synagogue's Inclusion Committee.

With the help of RSIP, we work on creating a structurally barrier-free environment, as well as a spirit of closeness and community. I benefit a great deal from the awareness of inclusion and want to do the same for others who join now and in the future.

5. **Mira Tamir Spiegel, Temple Beth Shalom**

I'm Mira Tamir Spiegel, and our synagogue, Temple Beth Shalom, is very welcoming and

inclusive, but we didn't think about sending our daughter Zoe to our synagogue's religious school program. Zoe is autistic, and we were afraid she would tax their system.

Before, we were afraid we would have to compromise when considering a bat mitzvah for Zoe, but our temple's leadership reassured us that it should be as meaningful and authentic as it would be for any other child.

Now, thanks to RSIP and the partnership between our synagogue and Gateways, Zoe attends the mainstream religious school. This past December, she stood up and confidently read Torah in front of our family, friends, and the entire community.

We were so grateful to our inclusive Temple Beth Shalom as well as the Ruderman Family Foundation for the enormous role they played in making that incredible day possible.

6. Lisa Stephani, Temple Sinai

I'm Lisa Stephani of Temple Sinai, and I was thrilled to join Rabbi Vogel and our community on two separate trips to Israel. Our rabbi made sure that we went as a community and acted as a community no matter what our abilities were.

Because of Rabbi Vogel's encouragement, I successfully completed my adult bat mitzvah, even though I had to learn everything in a unique way from the rest of my classmates.

Now, I am proud to say that I am on Temple Sinai's board, where I'm included in many important decisions, particularly as we plan the renovation of our building. Thanks to RSIP, there is a strong awareness of the need for accessibility, and I'm proud to be able to lend my voice to this effort.

7. Rabbi Noah Cheses, Young Israel of Sharon

Hello, I'm Rabbi Noah Cheses of Young Israel of Sharon. **Before** the Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project, our daughter Adina often made noise during the service. She is 7 years old and, like most kids her age, has a limited attention span. She likes sitting next to my wife, but often used to end up creating a disruption which forced my wife to leave shul with her.

Now, thanks to RSIP and our amazing inclusion team, there is a big basket of toys to fidget with at the entrance to the sanctuary. Each time Adina enters the sanctuary, she carefully chooses her fidget and then reports to me about the ones she enjoys. This helps her stay inside longer, and it also helps her feel that she belongs in our sanctuary and in our community.

8. Shira Lobron, Congregation Dorshei Tzedek

Hi, my name is Shira Lobron. My mom, Alison Lobron, is the inclusion coordinator at Congregation Dorshei Tzedek's religious school. The Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project helped us to create this important job. Everyone has different learning needs, and it's the inclusion coordinator's job to help make sure people of all abilities' learning needs are met. If your learning needs aren't met, you might fall behind from your peers or feel less accomplished. You also might feel like you've been excluded from the group. It's important to us that everyone has an opportunity to get a Jewish education in their own community. In our religious school, we give everyone the special help they need so they can feel accomplished for what they've learned and feel valued for who they are. Thank you, RSIP, for all the help you've given to the kids in our community.

9. **Stacey Schneiderman, Temple Beth Shalom**

I'm Stacey Schneiderman of Temple Beth Shalom, and I am a mother of three, and I also work with youth who are differently abled.

My youngest daughter, who is now 6 years old, was diagnosed with childhood apraxia of speech, which affects her articulation and both gross and fine motor skills. Among the more frustrating aspects of CAS is that its symptoms make integrating into a community uncertain and scary. **Before**, this was a real fear for our daughter as well as for my husband and me.

Now, the Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project certainly lightens my load. The services supported by RSIP's generosity are fantastic. They are a testament to the wonderful professionals who put so much effort, expertise, and care into what they do. Our daughter is now thriving. With their support, she is reading and adores reciting her prayers to us at home on Friday nights.

Thank you — your work is exceptionally important to my family and to so many others.