

OUR IMPACT

Overseas Stories:

For Israeli DJ with ALS, Disability Doesn't Stop Dreams



3,000 earnest and enthusiastic young people gathered in the Israeli coastal city of Netanya for a street party hosted by

Hagag, the local

chapter of JDC's Center for Young Adults program, which assists young immigrants and other young Israelis facing socioeconomic challenges in cities with high immigrant populations and economic difficulties.

For Yoni, the event's DJ, the crowd represented something more than a fun weekend diversion—it was an opportunity to connect to his peers and break through the barriers and stereotypes associated with disability. Yoni has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), often referred to as “Lou Gehrig’s Disease.” As a DJ with ALS, Yoni creates music with computerized technology that uses the movement of his pupils to control the music. “This

occasion offered Yoni dual exposure, giving him an exceptional chance to reveal his musical abilities and raising awareness for his disease,” Yoni’s mother Rebecca said. “We’re grateful for this opportunity given to us.”

Yoni will be taking his involvement with JDC further: participating in a pilot initiative that focuses on including young adults with disabilities in JDC’s Centers for Young Adults in Netanya, Akko, and Sderot, and four new locations across Israel.

The Centers for Young Adults offer people with disabilities access to services, including educational consultation, employment assistance, networking opportunities, and social connections. The program’s success is twofold: not only are people with disabilities being integrated into existing structures built by JDC for young adults, but services are being uniquely adapted to fulfill this population’s specific needs.

Meanwhile, back in Netanya, Yoni’s performance was a rousing success. As his track played, the young DJ welcomed the crowd’s support and boisterous cheers. He had found a way to make his artistic work public—and was proud to be acknowledged as a valued member of his community.

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—Yoni’s mother Rebecca