



INSight

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Workshops Integrate Varied Skills

The buzz of an electric saw is the first sound you hear as you approach the Institute's carpentry shop. And then the laughter and general excitement ring loud and boisterously. Perhaps these pupils will not become master craftsmen, but the safety rules and discipline as well as patience and fun that they are experiencing here will serve them for a lifetime.

In addition to carpentry, students are working in a hands-on approach at the Institute in sewing, arts and crafts, metal works, ceramics, and home economics. "We place an importance on academics, but it is these courses and workshops which will make a big difference in the quality of life of our students," explains Rachel Skrobish, Director of the Institute's Department of Education and Rehabilitation. All of these workshops require strict adherence to rules and regulations. They foster creativity while preparing the students for independence and helping to raise their self esteem.

Art instructor Rachel Kastenboim has seen the excitement of her students as they complete a brightly painted Hanukkah menorah or vivid wall hanging, and she agrees that these fine projects can be a source of pride—and perhaps even income—for students.

Although many of her projects are very intricate, Kastenboim shows her pupils that they can be broken down into simple tasks, and although they look very painstaking, one just needs to work methodically, step by step. "The blind share the same aesthetic feelings as everyone else, and they are proud to bring home their projects," she explains. "Perhaps this is a branch that can eventually be developed for financial revenue."



Artistic expression is encouraged at the Jewish Institute for the Blind



Yitzhak Steiner helps Gil in the Institute carpentry workshop

The new kitchenettes of the Home Economics department are already being used to prepare light refreshments for guests or special activities at the Institute. "If there are students that enjoy baking or working in food preparation, why should the services of an expensive caterer be used?" muses Skrobish. And there is now a hand picked group that is called upon to prepare food for JIB functions.

The workshops at the Institute are very integrative, helping to prepare students one step at a time for creative self expression as well as independence. Not only are they appealing and fun, but many pupils might enjoy this self expression so much that this might be a possibility of a life's vocation. At present, all of these workshops and almost all of the educators are financed entirely by the Institute rather than government financing. Moreover, just as academic excellence is important, the Institute sees these various workshops as a giant step towards life as an independent adult.