

Valley Beth Shalom Men's Club: Best Mitzvah/Social Action Program

Our ten-year old Mobile Mitzvah program, which has undergone several revisions in recent years, involves services at rehab and retirement centers for Shabbat and holidays.

We have six volunteers, working in three teams.

We aim for participation and interaction by the residents through various means.

- (1) We start with "*Hine Mah Tov*", with the residents holding hands;
- (2) For the "Shma" they do the same, in a circle;
- (3) Residents light the candles and join in the grape-juice Kiddush;
- (4) Sharing of personal histories.

Recently, in coordination with our Day School Principal, we used full classes of 9- year old students for the services, which has been meaningful for the youngsters and inspiring for the residents.

We have also begun using role-playing, which has produced delightful results, e.g.: for the parsha when Moses is told he will not enter Canaan, one male resident was Moses, complaining to a female resident (God), about how unfair it was, viz. "I told you up front I couldn't be your spokesman and didn't want the job. I took a lot of guff from the people and from you. And now, this!" At this point, the female resident cut him short with a stern "Do you realize you're talking to God!" In addition, the residents enjoyed a rare, good belly laugh.

Along with the liturgy, we use audiotapes of familiar Jewish tunes such as "My Mother's Sabbath Candles" and "My Yiddishe Mama", as well as Debbie Friedman's "Mi Shebeirach"

. For Pesach, under Men's Club sponsorship, our Rabbis prepared a short copy of the Haggadah, used by our Mobile Mitzvah,

we solicited funds for printing 5000 copies, which were sold in our gift shop or distributed gratis. A recent revised version that our Mobile Mitzvah uses is attached.

For our mini-seder, each resident gets a "seder plate", with the symbolic items prepared by the institutions' chefs under our tutelage (including charoses!) At one of the seders, the four questions were asked by an 88-year old woman, who cried as she remembered the last time she had asked them-at age 10!

Some of the many memorable instances include the following.

We volunteers wear talesim for the services, at one of which an elderly resident asked whether he could put it on. As we helped him with the brachah, he said the last time he had done it was for his Bar Mitzvah, and he broke into tears.

A woman who grew up in a secular Jewish home, devoid of any observance, now takes a lead in lighting the candles for our service and in readings.

An Israeli woman points to her steel wedding band and explains, with pride, she got it in 1948 in exchange for her gold band, which she contributed to Israeli defense.

As we close our service with "HaTikvah", one of the wheel-chair patients, a 92-year old Israeli, musters his full strength to raise himself and stands erect as a marine, and later tells us of his exploits with Haganah in the pre-State days.

Invariably, at the end of each session we are peppered with the question, "When are you coming again?" and "Why not sooner?"

Bringing the touch of Yiddishkeit to those who hunger for it is a gift not only to the residents-but also to us.

Each of us has come away more sensitized to the needs of others.

In addition, on Yom Kippur, when we perform the services at the break time of our own services, between Mustafa and Neilah, we have all come away saying it made the fast a lot easier!

We would be pleased to share any of the materials we use with other Clubs.