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Bowling alley installs ramp for disabled players after teens put on the pressure

By Dana Weiler-Polak

The 207-point bowling record that appeared above the lane may have been far higher than Rotem Elnatan and Yotam Toter's score, but the two wheelchair-ridden youths, both suffering from cerebral palsy, couldn't have been happier.

"I came here on one of my birthdays but couldn't reach the parquet because it was inaccessible," says Elnatan, 15, of Jerusalem. "I never went bowling again after that."

After a group of eight 15-year-olds spoke with the manager of Bowling Arbel, located in the Lev Talpit Mall in Jerusalem, this week the bowling alley unveiled its new ramp - finally enabling people with disabilities to participate in the game.

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The group, consisting of students from various Jerusalem schools, had been working on a project initiated by Bema'aglei Tzedek (a social justice organization which, among other things, defends disabled persons' rights), and financed by the Jerusalem Foundation.

"We wanted to work on accessibility for people with disabilities in a place that is relevant for us, where we'd want to go," says group member Smadar Nuri.

The organization approached The Shai Society for the rehabilitation and support of disabled children and worked on the project together.

"One day we wanted to meet with a group that included some disabled students in our usual meeting place, but then realized that it wasn't accessible," says Tamar Cohen-Hatav, one of the spearheads of the group. "We tried to think where we could go together and immediately thought about bowling, something we all like to do."

When the group realized the bowling alley was also inaccessible to wheelchairs, "we went to the manager and asked him to make the place accessible," says group member Tamar Shechter.

Bowling Arbel manager Yoav Zevuluni was surprised by the students' request. "They said they had been here before and would like to return with more friends, but the absence of a ramp made it difficult for them," he says. "I sympathized with them because my 14-year-old son, who is disabled, used to be an excellent bowler. So I decided to go for it."

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Today dozens of teenagers with disabilities enjoy bowling as a game and the bowling alley as a meeting place. Tamar Rozokin, who knocked over all the pins on her second try, never thought she'd have access to such a place.

"That's what it's like when when you're in a wheelchair, some places are simply not an option," she says.

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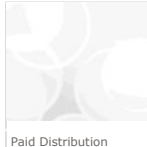


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