

# Youth Visions

## ZABS Place Strives to Discover Hidden Potential

When parents of adults with special needs wanted to organize a group home in Charlotte, Rochel Groner had another idea. Rochel is co-director of Friendship Circle, a volunteer based program that advocates on behalf of kids with special needs. With a background in retail, she founded ZABS Place, an upscale thrift boutique and employment training center.

"Our goal is to create a store with a diverse assortment of quality resale merchandise and one-of-a-kind creations, made by local young adults with special needs, all at thrift shop prices," says Rochel.

Zabs Place is named after Zachary Shporer, a 19-year-old Friendship Circle volunteer who passed away from leukemia in spring 2012. The Friendship Circle is an inspiration of Chabad Lubavitch of Charlotte, NC.

According to the organizers, upon graduating high school, adults with special needs have a difficult time transitioning from school to everyday life. "While most people their age would be going to college or getting a job, it is a more difficult transition for people with special needs," says Bentzion Groner, co-director of the Friendship Circle. It is even more difficult for parents whose children had a routine schedule while in school, but now have no way to occupy their time.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2012, 69% of typical young adults ages 16-35 were pursuing a college career or held a job. Contrast that with 74.3% of young adults with special needs were living at home and were unemployed or had stopped looking for work. The Groners learned about this issue from many of the parents who they've been in touch with through Friendship Circle.

"We felt that there is so much these kids have to offer. They have certain talents and abilities, and are capable of doing things that many others may find difficult to do," Bentzion says.

With that idea, they looked for a model and found it in Our Thrift Store in Franklin, TN, a non-profit that employs individuals with special needs. The Groners spent a day there to see how it would work and shortly after they arrived back, they began to implement their vision. Dave and Sandy Krikac, the founders of the Tennessee thrift shop donated a pickup truck to ZABS Place.

Turning to the community, the idea was embraced and donations of quality items that people had no use for, but others would, started to pile up. When a space was acquired, volunteers began sprucing it up and their vision became a reality.

Ultimately the goal is to provide steady employment at local businesses for these young adults. The Friendship Circle partnered with Lifespan Services of North Carolina and the Autism Founda-



Lori Lundy, a representative of the property owner, hands the keys to Rochel Groner.

tion of the Carolinas to develop a job training program. "Participants' skills and talents will be as-

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## Hebrew for Credit Students are Learning and Having Fun

Technology, games, movement, and fun are all part of what's happening in the Hebrew for Credit classes at Hebrew High this year. Morot (teachers) Donna DeGroot and Rachel Groner are busy planning activities that make learning the language a pleasure. They incorporate all required elements of a normal high school class into their classes at CHS.

For example, every year the students have a Hebrew project that they present to the rest of their class. In the first year, the students make a power point slide show introducing themselves. They share facts, and through this, learn vocabulary in Hebrew that connects to their own interests. In the second year, the

students create a game to help their friends practice Hebrew vocabulary. Since this year we have second and third year students, the third year students came to class as guest experts and taught the second year students how to play their games, thus encouraging the younger students to continue to learn.

Hebrew for Credit is just another way that the Hebrew High program continues to evolve, meeting the needs of today's teens. If you would like to learn more about this, or any other part of the Hebrew High experience, please call Roz at 704-944-6782, or email rcooper@shalomcharlotte.org. ✨



Hebrew for Credit students learn in many creative ways.



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