

SPOTLIGHT ON INCLUSION

February is Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance & Inclusion Month (JDAIM).



WINTER PROGRAM GUIDE:

FEBRUARY 2-APRIL 5

REGISTRATION OPENS:

MEMBERS | JANUARY 12

PUBLIC | JANUARY 19

Look Inside the Winter Program Guide

Special Edition: Spotlight on Inclusion

Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance & Inclusion Month (JDAIM)



Josh Bender,
Chief Executive Officer, Bender JCC

As we continue to advance our vision of inclusion at the JCC, it's important to pause and reflect on the roots of this journey—where it all began and the foundation that has guided us ever since.

This fall, I found myself thinking about the history and the experiences within our community that gave rise to inclusion at the JCC. Decades ago, when children with disabilities were often hidden from public life or sent away, one family chose a different path. For Sara Portman Milner, who pioneered inclusion within the JCC community, that path meant her entire family fully embracing her brother Sam, who was born with Down Syndrome, in every moment of family life. That early experience didn't just shape Sara's perspective it became the foundation of her work. In 1979, inspired by Sam, Sara's determination drove her to envision a JCC where individuals of all abilities could participate fully and with dignity, opening doors for countless families and establishing the JCC as a model of inclusion.

The legacy Sara helped create has been strengthened over the years by individuals who have embraced and expanded her vision. This year, we were proud to honor Eva Cowen with the Polin Humanitarian Award at the Dinner of Champions for her 40 years of extraordinary leadership and her unwavering dedication to inclusion at camp. The Dinner of Champions not only celebrates leaders like Eva—it directly supports inclusion at Lessans Camp JCC, ensuring that campers of all abilities can experience the fun of camp.

Like Sara, Eva's journey was deeply personal. Eva grew up with a sibling who has a disability, and that experience shaped her understanding of what true inclusion means. Guided in part by Sara as her mentor, Eva transformed that

personal insight into a lifelong commitment to creating spaces where every individual feels valued. Today, Eva's work continues to strengthen our promise to build a community rooted in respect and compassion where every individual is seen, welcomed, and fully embraced.

As we mark Jewish Disabilities Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month, we are reminded that this work is both a celebration of how far we have come and a call to continue strengthening a community where everyone is welcomed.

Thank you for taking the time to read more about our ongoing vision of inclusion at the JCC. We are deeply grateful to all who make this possible, our dedicated staff, committed lay leaders, and every individual who continues to drive our inclusive mission forward.

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Caroline Cardullo,
Director

301.348.3890 | ccardullo@benderjccgw.org

AQUATICS

Youth Group Swim Lessons

Skip dates: Monday, February 17

Level 1: Water Exploration (3 – 5 years old)

Choose from three convenient class options:

Sundays | February 1 – March 29 | 10:00 – 10:30 AM
\$207/members | \$225/public

Mondays | February 2 – March 30 | 4:00 – 4:30 PM
\$184/members | \$200/public

Thursdays | February 5 – March 26 | 4:00 – 4:30 PM
\$184/members | \$200/public

Level 2: Primary Skills (4 – 6 years old)

Choose from three convenient class options:

Sundays | February 1 – March 29 | 10:30 – 11:00 AM
\$207/members | \$225/public

Mondays | February 2 – March 30 | 4:00 – 4:30 PM
\$184/members | \$200/public

Thursdays | February 5 – March 26 | 4:00 – 4:30 PM
\$184/members | \$200/public

Level 3: Stroke Readiness (4 – 6 years old)

Choose from three convenient class options:

Sundays | February 1 – March 29 | 11:00 – 11:30 AM
\$207/members | \$225/public

Mondays | February 2 – March 30 | 4:30 – 5:00 PM
\$184/members | \$200/public

Thursdays | February 5 – March 26 | 4:30 – 5:00 PM
\$184/members | \$200/public

Level 4: Stroke Development (6 – 12 years old)

Sundays | February 1 – March 29 | 11:30 AM – 12:00 PM
\$207/members | \$225/public

Group Swim Classes

Waterbabies (6 – 18 months)

Sundays | February 1 – March 29 | 9:00 – 9:30 AM
\$207/members | \$225/public

Watertots (18 months – 3 years old)

Sundays | February 1 – March 29 | 9:30 – 10:00 AM
\$207/members | \$225/public

Adult Beginner Swim Classes

Mondays | February 2 – March 30 | 5:00 – 5:30 PM
\$184/members | \$200/public

Private and Semi-Private Swim Lessons

One-on-one (private) or two-on-one (semi-private) swim instruction exclusively for Bender JCC members.

To schedule your lesson, contact Caroline Cardullo at 301.348.3890 or ccardullo@benderjccgw.org.

Isadore and Bertha Gudelsky Exceptional Swim Program

Helping children, teens, and adults with orthopedic-related disabilities to enjoy aquatics, this program matches participants with a coordinator, physical therapist, and adaptive water instructors to teach basic swimming skills.

For details, contact Caroline Cardullo at 301.348.3890 or ccardullo@benderjccgw.org.

GROUP EXERCISE CLASSES

Paul Macias, Fitness Manager

301.348.3891
pmacias@benderjccgw.org

Aqua Suspension

Mondays | March 2 - April 13 | 11:00 - 11:45 AM
\$50/members | \$150/public
Skip Date: April 6

On Saturday mornings for decades, the **Gudelsky Exceptional Swim Program** has been helping children, teens, and adults with orthopedic-related disabilities to enjoy aquatics. The program partners volunteers and professional staff members with participants to teach swimming basics and help students feel comfortable and safe in the water.

"The Gudelsky Exceptional Swim Program has been life changing for my daughter. It fosters a community of caring and dedication where people of differing abilities get together weekly in a judgment-free environment to have fun and share in accomplishments. There's no other program like it!"



All Bender JCC programs are open to everyone. Contact Kaitlyn Mora at kmora@benderjccgw.org or 301.348.3767, to discuss support and accommodations.

YOUTH SPORTS

Jeremy Schlafstein,
Sports Program Director

301.348.3852 | jschlafstein@benderjccgw.org



YOUTH KARATE

All karate classes run through June.

Participants are welcome to join mid-session for a prorated class fee.

Skip dates for all karate classes:

Mondays | February 16, April 6, and May 25

Wednesdays | April 1 and April 8

Lil' Dragons (ages 3 - 5)

Mondays | February 2 - June 1 | 3:15 - 4:00 PM

\$510/members | \$530/public

Kid Tiger (ages 5 - 8)

Mondays | February 2 - June 1 | 4:15 - 5:00 PM

\$510/members | \$530/public

Beginner (ages 9+)

Mondays & Wednesdays | February 2 - June 3

5:00 - 5:45 PM | \$1,054/members | \$1,094/public

Intermediate Advanced (ages 9+)

Mondays & Wednesdays | February 2 - June 3

5:45 - 6:30 PM | \$1,054/members | \$1,094/public

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work at

Lessans CAMP JCC

@ the Bender JCC

Be a part of our team *Apply today!*



SCAN TO APPLY

ADAPTIVE FITNESS SETS UP HEALTHY HABITS, STRENGTH AND NEW RELATIONSHIPS



Mike Holmes,
Director of Health & Fitness | Bender JCC

One of the values we hold strongly is the power of adaptive fitness. Every person who walks into our fitness center deserves the opportunity to move, grow, and succeed—no matter their ability level. Adaptive fitness allows us to meet members exactly where they are and support their goals with individualized, inclusive, and empowering approaches.

Through our Fitness Center, I've been fortunate to build very special relationships with two members (and roommates), Justin and Jared. I met Justin eight years ago and we began training together four years ago at the suggestion of his mother, who saw that we had established a strong friendship. From the start, Justin was very disciplined and consistently wanted to come to the JCC to exercise. He was even inspired to stop drinking Diet Coke!

Two years later, when Jared and Justin began sharing a MAKOM apartment – and their moms began talking about the benefits of their sons spending time together at the JCC – all three of us began training regularly. Working together, I've earned their trust – always explaining why a variety of exercise will help them be healthy and encouraging them to try unfamiliar fitness equipment. Now, they're almost self-sufficient on most of our circuit machines.

Each day, Justin and Jared remind me – and all of us – what resilience, dedication, and joy in movement truly look like. Their progress and presence inspires our entire community, and they personify why the JCC has prioritized the expansion of our adaptive fitness offerings.

In fact, I am excited to share that we will soon be enhancing our training space with new adaptive and inclusive equipment, including a ski machine and a rowing machine, to better support members of all abilities. This equipment – with adjustable and removable seats, as well as upper body ergometers (hand cycles) – will allow members in wheelchairs and walkers, and their support staff, to move freely and maximize their workout in our space. In addition, we are continually investing in recumbent equipment with accessible transfer heights; weighted balls, tubing, and dumbbells in various sizes and textures; and adaptive fitness classes to meet every athlete's needs.

When we invest in our adaptive exercise programs, we're also sending a strong message to our community: Our health and fitness center is a welcoming and accessible space where everyone can be seen and known – and thrive.

HEALTH & FITNESS

Mike Holmes,
Director

301.348.3894 | mholmes@benderjccgw.org



PERSONAL TRAINING

Visit benderjccgw.org/training to meet our trainers and to book your session.

Jump Smart Packages

Three, 30-minute Personal Training sessions | \$99
Three, 30-minute Nutrition sessions | \$99

Three, 60-minute Personal Training sessions | \$149
Three, 60-minute Nutrition sessions | \$149

NUTRITION AND WELLNESS COACHING

Emma Hertzberg, Wellness Coordinator
301.348.3710
ehertzberg@benderjccgw.org

For details or to book your free 30-minute consultation, contact Emma Hertzberg at 301.348.3710 or ehertzberg@benderjccgw.org.

New Year, Best You: Drop the last 10 pounds Masterclass (Virtual)

Monday, January 5 | 6:00 PM
\$15/members | \$20/public

Unlock Your Best Health: Intuitive Wellness and Weight Loss (Virtual)

Wednesdays | January 7-February 11 | 6:15 PM
\$180/members | \$210/public

GROUP EXERCISE CLASSES

Paul Macias, Fitness Manager
301.348.3891
pmacias@benderjccgw.org

Choose from 20+ weekly GroupEx classes. Please note that class options, times, and locations are subject to change. Check the GroupEx calendars on our website for the most up-to-date information.

A Taste of Group Ex

Monday, January 12 | 6:00 - 7:45 PM
Free

Abs, Back, & Stretch

Thursdays | 10:00 AM

Align Yoga

Sundays 11:00 AM

Aqua Aerobics

Fridays | 11:00 AM

Aqua Fit

Tuesdays + Thursdays | 11:00 AM

Balance & Strength

Mondays | 12:00 PM + 1:00 PM
Wednesdays | 12:00 PM + 1:00 PM

Butts and Guts

Tuesdays | 10:30 AM | *Virtual Only*

Cardio Sculpt

Wednesdays | 8:15 AM | *Virtual Only*

Cardio Strength

Mondays | 10:30 AM

Cycle

Tuesdays | 8:30 AM
Thursdays | 8:00 AM
Saturdays | 7:00 AM

Fit Fusion

Thursdays | 9:00 AM

Hatha Yoga

Wednesdays | 6:00 PM

Flow Yoga

Mondays | 9:30 AM
Tuesdays | 12:00 PM
Fridays | 10:30 AM

Gentle Yoga

Thursdays | 3:00 PM

Ignite Dance Fit

Mondays | 6:00 PM

Les Mills CORE

Thursdays | 6:10 AM

Les Mills BODYPUMP

Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays | 6:10 AM
Tuesdays, Thursdays | 6:30 PM
Saturdays | 8:00 AM

Les Mills Body Combat & Core

Sundays | 8:30 AM

Lift

Fridays | 9:30 AM

Pilates

Tuesdays | 6:00 PM
Wednesdays | 9:30 AM

Power Flow Yoga

Thursdays 600 PM

Spin

Tuesdays | 6:00 PM

Tone-Up and Shape-Up

Fridays 12:00 PM

Zumba

Sundays, Wednesdays | 9:30 AM
Wednesdays | 7:00 PM
Fridays | 11:00 AM
Saturdays | 10:15 AM

Zumba Toning

Tuesdays 7:00 PM

Total Body Fitness

Tuesdays 930AM
Thursdays 1000AM

Stretch / Balance

Wednesdays 1030AM

SPECIALTY CLASSES FOR A FEE

Adult Beginner Pickleball

Tuesdays | February 3 - March 31
10:30 AM - 12:00 PM
\$225/members | \$275/public

Aqua Suspension

Mondays | March 2 - April 13
11:00 - 11:45 AM
\$50/member | \$150/public

Tai Chi

Mondays, | February 9-April 6
12:00 - 1:00 PM
\$110/members | \$180/public

Teen Fitness 101

Tuesdays | February 3-March 10
6:00-7:00 PM
\$180/member | \$210/public

Women with Weights

Wednesdays | February 4-March 11
6:30 - 7:30 PM
\$230/members | \$260/public

SPORTS

**Jeremy Schlafstein,
Sports Program Director**
301.348.3852 | jschlafstein@benderjccgw.org

Adult Karate

Mondays, Wednesdays | February 2-June 3
6:30-7:30 PM
\$1,054/member | \$1,094/public
Skip dates:
Mondays | February 16, April 6, May 25
Wednesdays | April 1, 8

JCC Adult Men's Basketball League

Wednesday | February 4 - March 25
6:30 - 7:30 PM



Lauren Dworkin,
Director

301.348.3837 | ldworkin@benderjccgw.org

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BENDER-DOSIK PARENTING CENTER

Jennifer Radosh, Director of JFamily Programs
301.348.3848 | jradosh@benderjccgw.org

Fern Weiland Parenting Lecture Series **Estate Planning**

Friday, February 6 | 8:30-9:30 AM | Free

Abrakadoodle's: Cute and Cudly Art

Sundays | February 8 - March 29 | 10:45 - 11:30 AM
\$215/members | \$225/public

Baby and Me Yoga

Mondays | February 2 - March 30 | 8:45 - 9:30 AM
\$215/members | \$225/public
Skip Date: February 16

Books & Bubbles

Wednesdays | February 4 - April 1 | 10:30 - 11:00 AM
\$75/members | \$85/public

Shabbat Shalom Playgroup

Fridays | February 6 - March 27 | 10:30 - 11:00 AM
Free RSVP

Silly Soccer with Potomac Soccer

Saturdays | February 7 - March 28 | 9:30 - 10:00 AM
\$215/members | \$225/public

Rhythm'N'Ruach

Thursdays | February 5 - March 26 | 10:30 - 11:15 AM
Skip dates: February 12
Registration coming soon. Visit benderjccgw.org for up-to-date listings.

Little Dribblers Basketball

Sundays | February 8 - March 29 | 9:15 - 9:45 AM
\$240/members | \$260/public

Music Together

Choose from two convenient class times:
Saturdays: March 28 - June 13
9:00 - 9:45 AM & 10:00 - 10:45 AM
\$280/members & public (Sliding scale for siblings)

JEWISH FAMILY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

benderjccgw.org/jfa

The Bender JCC welcomes parents raising Jewish children into our community. Our Jewish Family Ambassadors (JFAs) are here to listen and share with you, and to connect you to other families and opportunities in our Jewish community. If you live in Montgomery County and are raising a Jewish child up to five years old, please register at benderjccgw.org/jfa.

BENDER-DOSIK GRANDPARENTING CENTER

benderjccgw.org/grandparenting

The Grandparenting Center is dedicated to strengthening and celebrating the grandparenting experience.

GRAND Sleep Under

Saturday, February 14 | 5:45 PM - 7:30 PM
Family ticket | \$35/members | \$40/public

Grand Challah Baking

Sunday, March 8 | 10:00 AM - 11:15 PM
Family ticket | \$18/members | \$25/public

Stroller Barre

Monday - Friday | December 1-March 27
\$25/members & public

DELIVERING GOOD NETWORK

Volunteer Opportunities

The Delivering Good Network is the Bender JCC's centralized and sustained social action effort focusing on five key areas of impact: environment, housing, hunger, immigrants, and inclusion. Visit benderjccgw.org/dgn for more information.

Care Packages

Monday, February 16 | 10:30 AM
\$5/members | \$5/public

Care Packages For Comfort Cases

Friday, March 20 | 10:30 AM | \$5/members & public

HOLIDAYS

Purim Shabbat Shabbang!

Friday | February 27 | 5:45 PM - 7:30 PM
\$15 per children | \$20 per adult

Purim Parade with your Favorite Furry Friend

Sunday, March 1 | 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM
\$5 per family

Passover Little Noshers

Sunday, March 22 | 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM
\$10 per children | \$5 per adult

NURTURING JOYFUL AND SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN: WHY INCLUSION MATTERS IN OUR PRESCHOOL



Rachel Assal-Albert,
*Developmental Support Coordinator,
Bender Early Childhood Center*

What makes a preschool truly inclusive? For me, it begins with a strong early childhood program that views children as capable, curious learners built on predictable routines, clear expectations, and thoughtfully designed spaces. When the day feels safe and structured, children can focus on taking risks, exploring, and connecting rather than managing uncertainty. This kind of environment lays the foundation for supporting every child, including those with diverse learning needs, helping them feel confident, curious, and ready to engage.

My background in special education and early intervention allows our school to go beyond offering just a wonderful early childhood experience. As the inclusion specialist, I support children in the moments they need extra care to feel confident, connected, and included. Through observation and reflection, I work alongside teachers to understand each child's strengths, interests, and challenges, and to make thoughtful adjustments, such as adapting activities, offering targeted strategies, or providing one-on-one guidance. Together, we are working to preserve the child's agency and encourage their full participation within the classroom community.

Our work begins the moment a child walks through the student-sized door at the entrance to the ECC. I work closely with our team to notice challenges early. Through regular observation, check-ins with teachers, and the thoughtful use of a variety of developmental screening tools,

we are able to identify potential concerns as small struggles first appear. This early support often prevents frustration from building, helps children develop new skills, and protects their sense of joy and confidence, which is especially important in the preschool years.

When additional support is needed, we approach decisions collaboratively with families and teachers. Together, we consider whether a private therapist, such as a speech or occupational therapist, or a county-based evaluation is the best next step. I support families through this process by helping them navigate referrals, advocate for their child, and coordinate services. I also work closely with therapists and teachers to ensure strategies are clearly understood and embedded naturally into the classroom, so learning remains cohesive, respectful, and rooted in daily experience.

We believe parents are our partners in this work. To support families, we have hosted a parenting series over the past few years, inviting experts to share guidance on topics such as social-emotional regulation, potty training, sleep challenges, and establishing routines. This series has helped build a strong community of learning and collaboration.

Having a dedicated inclusion role within our school allows this work to happen thoughtfully, deliberately, and organically. It supports a culture of reflection, collaboration, and responsiveness, where inclusion is part of everyday practice, rather than a separate service. I am grateful to be part of a community that values this work and supports children and families every step of the way.

A COMMUNITY OF BELONGING: LESSANS CAMP JCC



Talin Tahmasian,
Lessans Camp JCC, Director



Heather Strauss,
*Lessans Camp JCC,
Director of Inclusion Services*

At Lessans Camp JCC, inclusion isn't a promise—it's the foundation of everything we do. Our camp is built on the belief that every child should be welcomed, supported, and celebrated. Every camper, staff member and family regardless of their background, religion, gender, ability, or identity, everyone has a place here. Activities are designed to be accessible, flexible, and fun for everyone, and our staff are trained to support a wide range of abilities and needs. This intentional approach shapes a camp experience where every camper can thrive—because creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving bring out the best in everyone.

Belonging is at the heartbeat of camp, where campers, staff, and families come together to build a truly connected community. Campers learn from one another and discover that differences and diversity are strengths that make our community stronger. Children with disabilities participate fully alongside their peers, while other campers gain confidence in supporting friends and seeing the world from different perspectives. Staff model kindness and inclusivity, and families reinforce these values, creating a culture that extends beyond camp.

This kind of inclusive environment has a lasting impact. Campers leave with new skills, new friendships, and a stronger

sense of connection to the people around them. Staff grow in leadership and understanding, and families gain insights that influence their communities. Together, this experience helps shape a generation of young people who value diversity, inclusion, and kindness—and who carry those lessons into the wider world.

Our activities focus on cooperation, creativity, and celebration of both individual and group achievements. Whether exploring nature, creating art, or laughing with friends, campers feel the joy that comes from being part of a community where everyone can be themselves.

At Lessans Camp JCC, inclusion shapes every moment, every choice, every connection. By intentionally building a welcoming and supportive environment for all campers, staff, and families, we create a community where everyone thrives and continues to bring compassion, respect, and genuine care into every space they enter. At Lessans Camp JCC, inclusion isn't just our value—it's the force that strengthens our community and connects us all.



DANCE + MUSIC + AFTER SCHOOL

Talin Tahmasian,
Director

301.348.3880 | ttahmasian@benderjccgw.org



Youth Dance by ACD Dance

All dance classes run through May 2026.
Skip dates: March 31, April 7

All classes include age-appropriate instruction in a combination of disciplines, including ballet, jazz, musical theater and tap. Students will learn a piece to showcase at our May spring performance.

Payment can be made in full or in three installments at registration.

Preschool Dance (Ages 3-5)

Tuesdays | February 3 - May 19 | 3:45 PM - 4:30 PM
\$575/members | \$595/public

Ballet (K-2)

Tuesdays | February 3 - May 19 | 4:45 PM - 5:30 PM
\$560/members | \$580/public

Ballet (Grades 3-5)

Tuesdays | February 3 - May 19 | 5:30 - 6:30 PM
\$595/members | \$615/public

Jazz and Hip Hop (K-2)

Tuesdays | February 3 - May 19 | 5:30 PM - 6:15 PM
\$560/members | \$580/public

Jazz and Hip Hop (Grades 3-5)

Tuesdays | February 3 - May 19 | 4:30 PM - 5:30 PM
\$595/members | \$615/public

Private Music Lessons

Virtual and in-person private instruction available in a variety of instruments including piano, percussion, strings, and woodwinds. Choose from 30 or 45 minute lessons.

For questions, contact Talin Tahmasian at 301.348.3880 or ttahmasian@benderjccgw.org.

After School Enrichment

Basketball

Mondays | February 2 - March 30 | 4:45 PM - 5:30 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public
Skip Date: February 16

Sports Festival

Tuesdays | February 3 - March 24 | 4:45 PM - 5:30 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public

STEM

Tuesdays | February 3 - March 31 | 4:45 PM - 5:30 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public

Gymnastics 1 (Ages 3-5)

Wednesdays | February 4 - March 25 | 4:45 PM - 5:15 PM
\$185/members | \$200/public

Gymnastics 2 (Ages 5-12)

Wednesdays | February 4 - March 25 | 5:30 PM - 6:15 PM
\$260/members | \$275/public

Beads & Bracelets

Wednesdays | February 4 - March 25 | 4:45 PM - 5:30 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public

Pickleball

Wednesdays | February 4 - March 25 | 4:45 PM - 5:30 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public

Youth Cooking

Thursdays | February 5 - March 26 | 4:45 PM - 5:30 PM
\$260/members | \$275/public

Friday Fun and Games

Fridays | February 6 - March 27 | 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public

Class Complement

Supervised care between the end of the school day and the start of after-school enrichment classes at the Bender JCC. Children will be offered a snack and can participate in quiet, structured activities such as reading, drawing, or games. Children will be escorted to their designated enrichment class within the JCC. *Please note: children under age 12 are not permitted to be at the Bender JCC without adult supervision, and this program ensures they are safely cared for during the transition period.*

\$60/members | \$80/public (February 2-March 31 | 1 Session)
\$120/members | \$160/public (Semester)

School Out Days

When school is out, fun is in session! The **No School Day Program** offers a full day of engaging, supervised activities for children on scheduled school closure days. Held at the Bender JCC, this program includes games, arts and crafts, sports, themed activities, and more—providing a safe and exciting environment for kids to spend the day. Families can count on a structured schedule, experienced staff, and plenty of opportunities for socializing and creativity.

Dates: January 20, 26; February 13, 17; March 16, 20; April 15; May 27

Through May 27 | 8:00 AM-6:00 PM
\$105/members | \$120/public (per day pricing)

Parents' Night Out

Saturday, March 14 | 6:00-9:30 PM
\$55/members | \$70/public (\$10 sibling discount)

Spring Break Camp

March 30, 31; April 6, 7, 10
\$105/members | \$120/public
Registration coming soon.

WE'VE COME FAR, AND WE STILL HAVE FAR TO GO



Eva Cowen,
Kochavim Unit Head, Lessans Camp JCC

In the early sixties, my brother Roger was diagnosed with autism. When my parents, Shirley and Al, were advised to send him away so he wouldn't be a "burden," they rejected that suggestion instantly. Their advocacy was kind and fierce: This is Roger. He belongs with us. He belongs in the world. We love him—and you will too.

In the early 80s, my mom joined the JCC "Special Needs Committee," run by Sara Portman Milner—also a sibling to someone with a disability. Sara's brother, Sam, of blessed memory was born with Down Syndrome. After meeting Sara, my mom begged me to work at Camp JCC "just for one summer." Saying no to Shirley was impossible, and - after meeting Sara, I knew it wouldn't be just one summer - it has now been 40 summers.

People often ask what keeps me coming back.

Recently, one of my Lessans Camp JCC colleagues told me that a camp parent tearfully told her that Lessans Camp JCC is the ONLY place that her daughter with disabilities is accepted. While I felt proud, I also felt sad and disgusted. How did we come to live in a world where we choose whether or not to ACCEPT the existence and inclusion of another human being? Who decided on the standard by which we are each measured?

My siblings and I are all very different

from each other -- and Roger is not MORE different from me or my siblings, Andy and Toni. We live in a world that values and accepts some people more than others based on how they fit into some arbitrary concept of normal. We are - each of us - different from the next and we have been misled by well-meaning phrases like "I don't see differences" or "we all are all alike inside". Not only should we see differences, but we should also embrace and celebrate them. If we all had the same strengths and challenges, how could we ever help and support each other? We are NOT all alike on the inside or the outside. Thank goodness.

Camp has a profound impact on campers and counselors alike. Our job as camp leadership is to help our counselors thrive and become the best most authentic versions of themselves. One counselor told me, "You taught me I didn't have to apologize for who I am." Another wrote, "I didn't realize compassion, a hard work ethic and positivity weren't required at every job in the real world—I just thought that's how work was supposed to feel."

The small things are the big things. It's the butterfly effect. When Sam Portman and Roger Pollin were born, Sam's sister and Roger's mom didn't want them to change to suit the world. They wanted the world to adapt and embrace them. One small favor for my mom became my career and my life's passion.

We all have the power to lift up people

around us – and show them their strength, their value and their worth. In turn, they may show you yours. Do this intentionally every day – starting right now.

We've come far, and we still have far to go. One day, inclusion will not be a program or an option—like decaf or gluten-free bread or a side of fries. The question should never be if it can be done, only how. We will get there. I believe it in my soul.



Dinner of Champions | November 22, 2025

MY LESSANS CAMP JCC EXPERIENCE



Anderson Jones,
*Avodah Team Member,
Lessans Camp JCC*

I am so grateful to have been a part of the Avodah program the past few summers as part of my Kochavim experience at Lessans Camp JCC. Avodah began three years ago as a pilot program with just a few campers selected to participate and with the help of Kaitlyn Mora and Eva Cowen it has really grown and expanded. Avodah participants are given opportunities for work experience during the day with support from camp staff.

My first job involved one of my biggest passions music and being a DJ. It began with small weekly dance parties in the music room that I planned for our Kochavim group. I would bring in my own DJ equipment and party lights and everyone had a total blast. I think word must have spread about how much fun we were having because by the end of the summer I was asked to DJ a huge dance party for all of the campers to celebrate the last day of camp. I was so excited for this huge opportunity! I had never DJ'd for such a large group before but because of the support I had from being in Avodah I felt ready. It was a big success and it gave me confidence to start DJing other events and really helped to get my DJ business started.

I have been working as a DJ for a few years now and you may have seen me at other events around the JCC like the Health and Harvest Festival, Shavim Soccer Tournaments and even the staff summer picnic. I really love spreading happiness to

others through music and seeing everyone having fun on the dance floor filled with high energy.

Last summer, I was given an amazing new opportunity through Avodah to work as an assistant to the Sports Specialist. Ben was an incredible mentor to me and I was lucky to gain experience working with the younger campers and I learned so much about leadership, time management and teamwork. When summer ended I was looking for an internship for my final year of high school. I really loved working with the younger campers and that experience helped me to get hired as an intern at Bethesda Elementary as an assistant to the PE teacher and to help in one of the Kindergarten classes. It has also crossed over into my job as a paid assistant coach for Open Door Sports where I have been helping with the soccer program for players with disabilities.

Camp JCC's inclusion program has been a very important part of my life. I am so lucky to have spent my summers here since I was four years old. I learned how to swim here (shoutout to Caroline!), performed in many shows while I was in Habimah, went on amazing field trips with Zahav and even had my first sleepover ever here. The Avodah program is allowing people with disabilities to gain work experience in a supportive, inclusive environment while they continue to participate in Kochavim. This is a meaningful experience as we transition out of school and camp and are looking to our futures.



Beats and Bloom (Ages 6-9)

Tuesdays | February 3 - March 31 | 4:45 PM - 5:30 PM
\$260/members | \$275/public

Brain Builders Pre-School

Wednesdays | February 4 - March 25 | 3:45 PM - 4:30 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public

Real World Ready (Ages 13-21)

Mondays | February 2 - March 30 | 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public

Brain Builders (K - 2)

Wednesdays | February 4 - March 25 | 4:45 PM - 5:30 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public

Teen Connect (Ages 13-21)

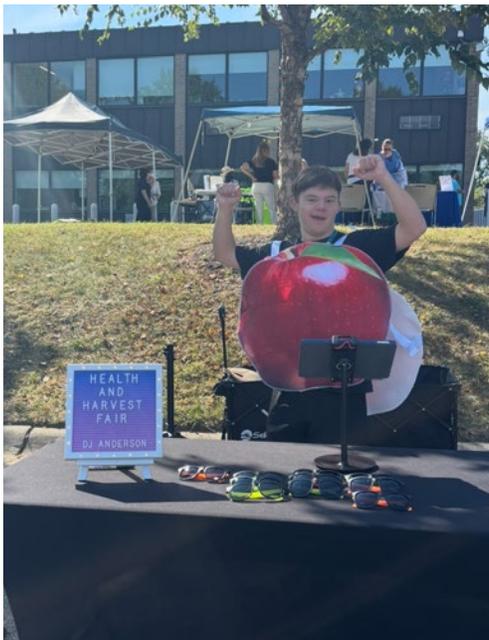
Sundays | February 8 - March 29 | 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM
\$245/members | \$260/public

Book Talk: Kuri Levine Autism with a Side of Sushi

Thursday, February 19 | 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM
\$20/members | \$30/public

Shavim Soccer Season (Ages 12-21)

Sundays | Through June 7 | 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM
Free program
Skip Days: April 5, 26



Health & Harvest Fair | September 14, 2025

FOSTERING INDEPENDENCE AND COMMUNITY



Kaitlyn Mora,
*Inclusion Program Coordinator,
Bender JCC*

My journey at the Bender JCC began in 2018, when I started as a Kochavim counselor. I did not know it then, but that summer set the foundation for the work I do today. Spending each day with the campers and seeing their growth, energy, and individuality showed me how meaningful the right support and structure can be.

As I moved into new roles, I was fortunate to be guided by my mentor, Eva Cowen. Her constant reminder, “Not if we can do it, but how we can do it,” shaped the way I approach every challenge. Her perspective grounded me in problem solving, patience, and the importance of designing programs that truly meet the needs of our participants.

One of the programs I am most proud to highlight is Real World Ready. It provides life skills, vocational training, leisure skills, and social skills instruction to teenagers and young adults with disabilities, ages 13 to 21. Lessons take place in a small group setting, which allows participants to receive individualized support as they build practical tools, confidence, and independence. Real World Ready prepares them for the everyday responsibilities and challenges they will encounter as they move into adulthood.

This commitment to fostering independence and community continues in Avodah, which is designed for our older

Kochavim campers, ages 17 and up. Avodah helps participants navigate the transition from school to whatever comes next, whether that is entering the workforce, learning to live independently, or stepping into leadership roles. The program provides hands-on experiences that strengthen real world skills, teamwork, and personal responsibility. Watching participants apply what they have learned and support each other is one of the most rewarding parts of my work.

This year, we were proud to honor Izzy Triandafilou, one of the recipients of the JCC Hyman M. and Phillip D. Perlo High School Athlete Award, at our annual Dinner of Champions.

Recognitions like Izzy’s highlight the talent and dedication of our young people and reflect the values we strive to nurture across all our programs.

Our Shavim program reinforces these same values of teamwork, sportsmanship, perseverance, and leadership by encouraging participants to explore their abilities and step outside their comfort zones. Through Shavim, participants build athletic skills along with personal qualities that will serve them far beyond the playing field.

It is these values—and the powerful sense of community within Shavim—that inspired Izzy, a coach and the founder of a new inclusive soccer league, to create meaningful opportunities for others. As Izzy shared:

"I created a soccer league for kids with disabilities because of the impact my experience with Shavim had on me during my time in Israel. Every Friday morning, the camaraderie, joy, and inclusivity of Shavim practices filled me with happiness. The genuine greetings, whether verbal or through gestures, and the shared love for the game beat any differences.

However, when I returned home, I felt like something was missing; I wished for that sense of belonging and community. It became clear to me that everyone—regardless of ability—deserves the opportunity to play and enjoy soccer. That is why I founded this league with the belief in equality, inclusion, and the universal love for the beautiful game."

Izzy's journey demonstrates the ripple effect of Shavim's mission—how the program's spirit of inclusion and empowerment inspires leaders to create change well beyond our walls.

Across each of these programs, the philosophy remains the same: with the right support, every individual can grow, lead, and succeed. I am grateful for the opportunity to witness that growth each day and to help shape programs that empower our participants to thrive



Izzy Triandafilou





Frieda Enoch,
Director

301.348.3809 | fenoch@benderjccgw.org

COMING OF AGE

SPECIAL EVENTS FOR ACTIVE ADULTS (60+)

Cinema J: Four Winters Afternoon & Evening

Thursday, March 5
Matinee: 1:30 PM
Evening Screening: 7:00 PM
\$12/In Advance | \$15/day of

Sip & Share: Women Connect

Women's group is back at the J for bi-monthly gatherings. Join us for a hot beverage and conversation every other Monday at 1:00 PM. Sip & Share Sisterhood is a warm and welcoming get-together designed exclusively for women seeking connection, camaraderie, and stimulating conversations.

Meets on the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month, at 1:30-2:30 PM
Skip Date: June 15

Fun, Fit & Free

Meets on the 2nd and 4th Friday of each month, at 1:00-2:00 PM
Skip Date: May 22

CoA Coffeehouse: From the Bimah to Broadway

Thursday, March 12 | 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM
\$48/members & public

Overnight Excursion: New York City

Wednesday, March 25 - Thursday, March 26
\$1,250/person, double room; \$1,450/single room (all inclusive)

Private Music Lessons

Virtual and in-person private instruction available in a variety of instruments including piano, percussion, strings, and woodwinds. Choose from 30 or 45 minute lessons.

For questions, contact Talin Tahmasian at 301.348.3880 or ttahmasian@benderjccgw.org.

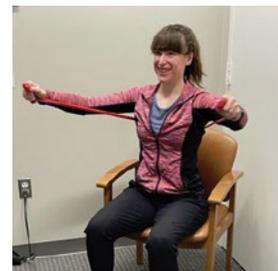
All Bender JCC programs are open to everyone. Contact Kaitlyn Mora at kmora@benderjccgw.org or 301.348.3767, to discuss support and accommodations.



PROACTION
PHYSICAL THERAPY
www.ProActionPT.com

Your recovery begins with your first visit.

Conveniently located at the Bender JCC of Greater Washington
Downstairs in the Weinberg Health & Fitness Center



For appointments and Information call 301-881-CARE (301-881-2273)

ARTS & ADULTS

Marcie Blackman,
Director

301.348.3808 | mblackman@benderjccgw.org



LESSANS FAMILY LITERARY SERIES

Lessans Family Literary Series Book Club: One Good Thing by Georgia Hunter
Friday | February 20 | 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM | Free

CONCERTS

2025-2026 POLINGER ARTISTS OF EXCELLENCE

CONCERT SERIES

Tommy Mesa and Ilya Yakushev

Sunday, March 15 | 3:00 PM
\$56/members & public

Terrence Wilson

Sunday, April 19 | 7:00 PM
\$56/ticket & public

Ariel String Quartet

Sunday, May 17 | 7:00 PM
\$56/ticket & public

MAH JONGG

Beginner

Mondays | February 2 - February 23
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM & 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM
\$115/members | \$125/public

Intermediate

Tuesdays | February 3 - February 24 | 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
\$115/members | \$125/public

Advanced Intermediate

Tuesdays | February 3 - February 24 | 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM
\$115/members | \$125/public

CANASTA

Monday | February 23 - Monday, March 30 | 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
\$160/members | \$170/public

GALLERY

Montgomery Art Association: Where The Light Falls
March 1-March 29

Selma Sweetbaum Senior Nutrition Program: Mondays and Wednesdays

10:00 AM-1:00 PM

ADULT MEMOIR WRITING

Mondays | February 2 - April 6 | 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
\$200/members | \$220/public

MEN'S CLUB

JCC Men's Club: Mixtapes to Meaning: Crafting Your Encore Chapter

Tuesday, March 17 | 1:15 PM - 2:30 PM
Free; Open To Public

PRIVATE MUSIC LESSONS

Virtual and in-person private instruction available in a variety of instruments including piano, percussion, strings, and woodwinds. Choose from 30 or 45 minute lessons.

For questions, contact Talin Tahmasian at 301.348.3880 or ttahmasian@benderjccgw.org.



HEBREW CLASSES

Rivka Degani,
Director

301.348.3810 | rdegani@benderjccgw.org



Hebrew Vav

Choose from three convenient class times:

Wednesdays | February 4 - June 24 | 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM
Mondays | February 9 - June 29 | 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM
Thursdays | February 12 - July 2 | 7:00 PM
\$610/members & public
Skip dates: April 1, 2; May 25

Hebrew Bet

Choose from two convenient class times:

Tuesdays | January 27 - June 9 | 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Mondays | February 9 - June 29 | 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM
\$610/members & public

Hebrew Gimel Intermediate

Wednesdays | February 4 - June 24 | 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
4:00 - 6:00 PM | *virtual class!*
\$610/members & public
Skip date: April 1

Wednesdays | February 12 - June 25
6:00 - 8:00 PM | *hybrid class!*

All Bender JCC programs are open to everyone. Contact Kaitlyn Mora at kmora@benderjccgw.org or 301.348.3767, to discuss support and accommodations.

Lessans CAMP JCC

 @ the Bender JCC

2026

THE
COUNTDOWN
BEGINS!



For up-to-date information,
scan the QR code or visit
benderjccgw.org/camp

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Onsite instructional/recreational swimming
- Low camper-to-counselor ratio
- Sports, arts and specialty options
- Extended day & transportation options



2026 Camper Application Now Open!



 **Bender JCC**
of Greater Washington

Bender Early Childhood Center

Visit our preschool!

- Programs rooted in a play-based approach
- Environments intentionally designed inspiring growth
- Child-centered classrooms spark curiosity and deepen engagement
- Guided by our Reggio Emilia-inspired philosophy, we view children as capable, creative partners in their own learning journey
- Together, we cultivate a community that celebrates exploration, connection, and the wonder of learning

Program Options

Bender ECC Preschool Core Hours: 8AM – 4PM
Preschool After Care: 4PM – 5:30PM

2026-2027 Application Dates

January 16: Returning Students & Siblings
January 26: Applications Open to Everyone



Apply at
benderjccgw.org/ECC
or scan the QR code



“ The preschool is more than just a school, the kids and families learn to build a community. After 9 wonderful years in the preschool, we will “graduate” this year. We take with us fond memories, and deep friendships with the families we have met during our time there. ”

Margaret D.
Parent of 3 Bender ECC Alumni

Play-based education inspired
by the world around us.

