



The Support Report



A COMMUNITY OF KINDNESS POWERED BY YOU

You Got JARC to Israel!

“Life-changing” is an understatement when it comes to describing Brooke Dunn and Jonathan Arens’ experiences participating in Jewish Federation’s Motor City Mission trip to Israel. As Detroit Jewish Community members, they were just two of 140+ people looking for a memorable trip to Israel, and that’s exactly what they got. The Mission was a trip for any member of the community and Brooke and Jonathan’s experience was not at all modified due to their disabilities and no accommodations were needed. Experiences like this are what JARC strives to make possible: providing adults with developmental disabilities the opportunity enjoy life to its fullest, just like any other person.

While on the trip, Brooke and Jonathan each tried countless new things and pushed their own personal limits in a way that no one, including themselves, expected. With just a little bit of assistance from JARC staff Jacob Gottlieb and Shira Woodside who accompanied them on the trip, there was nothing that Brooke and Jonathan couldn’t do.



Everyone enjoyed the beautiful view at the Lebanon border. This was a significant moment for Brooke when she surprised everyone by conquering her fear of heights and went on to enjoy exploring every peak for the rest of the trip.

In their daily lives, Jonathan and Brooke are very active. They both enjoy being out of the house, walking, and visiting different places. This trip was the perfect opportunity for them to walk to their heart’s content, as every time participants were given the choice to take the bus or walk to the next location, they always walked.

The very first day of the trip before the mission officially started, the JARC group had some time to take a nice walk on the beach. Jacob and Shira showed Jonathan and Brooke a photo of Ben Gurion doing his famous handstand on the beach while they visited this iconic statue. They had a good laugh while they posed with it.

Each of the 140 participants on the trip had different reasons for going to Israel. Some were celebrating milestone anniversaries and birthdays, some - like Jonathan and Brooke - had never been to Israel before. Regardless of their purpose for the trip, everyone was looking forward to seeing Jerusalem and the Western Wall.



According to Jacob and Shira, the Western Wall was the most meaningful part of the trip for Brooke and Jonathan. They each took the time to write prayers and find a place in the wall to insert them. Jonathan shared his prayer which was: "I hope things will be better."

The group spent a lot of time touring Jerusalem and visiting markets. Brooke and Jonathan were among many in the group that enjoyed experiencing the art and seeing knick-knacks in shops. Jonathan was very thoughtful in finding gifts for his JARC staff back home and for his beloved, long-term housemate, Richard. It was in the Old City that he found a beautiful kippa for Richard and bought a matching one for himself.



Jonathan wore his Detroit Tiger's T-shirt one day in Jerusalem and was ecstatic to find another Detroit Tiger's shirt, but in Hebrew. The same day, Brooke found a Hebrew Spongebob sweatshirt. She had been looking for the perfect souvenir and finally found it!

Brooke and Jonathan learned that Israel is a diverse country that has a little bit of everything to offer. In one day, you can be stuck in traffic in the international city of Tel Aviv, drive through lush greenery and farmland to the north of Israel, look onto Lebanon and Syria, and be immersed in holy sites of three different religions. From rain in Jerusalem to hot sun at Masada and the Dead Sea just an hour away, Israel felt like 10 countries in one to Jonathan and Brooke. Between the weather changes, various sounds, and foods, a trip to Israel was an experience for all five senses for them.



Brooke's first time seeing an orange tree in person was on a Kibbutz in Israel. One of the group tour guides offered her some fresh oranges and let her choose one. He plucked it from the tree and peeled it for her. She was amazed by the freshness and flavor of the fruit.



The trip was a great chance for Jonathan and Brooke to try new foods. Many meals were served buffet-style and Jonathan took full advantage of the opportunity to try every single new food he could find. His plates were filled with little dabs of everything, to satisfy his adventurous palate. There was nothing that he didn't enjoy. Brooke, while a bit more skeptical of new food, enjoyed the variety offered, and tried new food in small bites. She was grateful for the experience of trying so many new things, even when she didn't like something. And of course, they both enjoyed ice cream that was available almost every evening.

The Mission took participants all over the country and they stayed in three hotels throughout the week. With a whole country to visit in only seven days, their schedules were filled to the brim with touring, activities, and travel. And still, there were many opportunities for participants to explore at their own pace rather than as a large group. While most of the group's transportation was on buses and by foot, they also enjoyed some of the more unique experiences, like exploring the Golan Heights on ATVs.



Jonathan and Brooke enjoyed the various modes of transportation. Most of all, they loved riding the cable car to the top of Masada. While it was a busy day and they didn't have much time there, Brooke ate a date for the first time and loved it. Others on the trip were helpful in warning her that dates back at home wouldn't be nearly as good!

After coming down from Masada, the group visited the Dead Sea. It was a part of the trip that many first-time Israel visitors were most excited to experience. The Dead Sea has changed significantly over the years, and has shrunk to the point that there isn't enough mud for tourists to enjoy. Instead of "mudding up" in the natural mud by the water, tourists who want that experience must buy it and bring it with them for their photo opportunities. Nevertheless, Brooke and Jonathan had a great time floating in the water.



Many laughs were shared by Brooke, Jonathan, Jacob and Shira at the Dead Sea. Brooke had been very excited for this experience. Once she got into a comfortable floating position and her legs floated up from under her, she couldn't help but giggle. Getting her feet back down when it was time to leave was a challenge, but one that she had fun solving.

Meanwhile, Jonathan was skeptical of floating at first. After watching Brooke and some others enjoying it, he went all in and sat down. He enjoyed it so much, that he didn't want to leave!

The entire trip was monumental for Brooke and Jonathan. Their independence excelled as they navigated a foreign country with new food and culture experiences. While Jacob and Shira were always there to assist and make sure they were comfortable, the trip allowed them to impress everyone with how much they could do on their own.

Brooke, who is normally shy in large groups, was truly being herself by the end of the trip. The last night featured a drum circle and dancing, and she had no hesitation about joining in to drum along and dance. Jonathan is sometimes uncomfortable speaking. However, he was able to make his likes and dislikes known, and showed many huge smiles to communicate that he was having the time of his life.

Photos in this issue are courtesy of Jeff Aisen, John Hardwick and JARC Staff.

Not only was the trip incredible for Brooke and Jonathan, but their presence was also transformational for many fellow travelers who got to know them.

“There are a lot of pre-conceived notions about people with developmental disabilities and having the opportunity for community members getting to see Brooke and Jonathan being just regular people was eye-opening for so many of them,” said Shira.

Brooke and Jonathan continued to show they were just a part of the group like everyone else, like when many people decided to take a break, and Jonathan and Brooke insisted on continuing. There wasn't a single time that they were unable to do something that others were doing.

“Everyone on the Mission was so happy and impressed that they could come on the trip,” said Jacob.

“Having Brooke and Jonathan on our bus was so special and they made our bus that much better,” said David Glass, who was the captain of their bus. “Their disabilities didn't make any difference.”

“Brooke has been begging to go to Israel for years and watching her get to live that dream was incredible.”

- Shira

Ilene Silverman-Abrin and Marty Abrin joined the Mission to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. Like Brooke and Jonathan, it was their first time in Israel. Sitting nearby on the bus, the group got to know each other.

“Brooke and Jonathan were welcomed by everyone. We happened to have a cohesive bus, and everybody welcomed them into their life. Which was very special,” shared Ilene. “It really warmed my heart to see how much they were getting out of the trip and enjoying themselves.”

Marty concurred and added that Jonathan's smile and Brooke's laugh were so authentic and that will stay with him long after returning home.



Thank you to Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit for subsidizing the cost and making this trip possible for Brooke and Jonathan to experience. We are so grateful to everyone who contributed to our Israel Campaign, to fund Jacob's and Shira's expenses. You have made the dreams of two people come true!

To support JARC programs, please visit jarc.org/give or call us at 248.940.2617.