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CELEBRATING



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September 12, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to write a letter of support for Rabbi James Gordon and the programs being offered through Team Spirit Institute. I have worked with Rabbi Gordon for the past nine years, previously at JCC of Chicago - where I served as Assistant General Director, in my current capacity as Executive Director of Jewish Council for Youth Services (JCYS), and as a TSI Advisory Committee member. Rabbi Gordon has indeed created innovative programs that engage Jewish youth in an exciting way, using sports as a medium to teach and instill the values/ethics that guide Jewish life.

As a trained therapist with a Ph.D. in counseling psychology, I am a firm advocate of recreational therapy and the power of activities and helping others feel better emotionally and cognitively. I have accompanied Rabbi Gordon on numerous **Lifting the Human Spirit by Visiting the Sick (LHSVS)** program visits to both The Claremont Rehab and Living Center and Advocate Lutheran General Hospital. It is through these first-hand observations, as well as the psychological surveys administered to patients/participants, that I truly believe in the positive impact of TSI's LHSVS program. To see individuals smile, move, speak and in general express positive emotions as a result of the visit by the teens and a guest participant from the sports world is amazing. The LHSVS program at both The Claremont and Advocate Lutheran General Hospital are superb models for similar programs to exist in communities around the country.

In my communications with teen participants, it is quite evident that the value of caring for the sick and those less fortunate has been absorbed, and volunteering in general is now a regular part of their schedules, both within LHSVS and through other programs or on their own. Furthermore, family members of the healthcare patients praise the program and express their appreciation that LHSVS gives their loved ones something to look forward to on a regular basis.

TSI's second program, the **Team Spirit Value Series (TSVS)** curriculum, is an equally dynamic way of helping Jewish youth of all backgrounds understand and identify with critical life values. Rabbi Gordon excels at customizing both the curriculum and the presentation materials for the level and interest of his audience. I have observed hundreds of Jewish youth -- in day school, day and overnight camp and sports league settings -- sit and listen intently as both Rabbi Gordon and trained staff told modern sports stories, relating them to Jewish figures and role models from the past. For their parents, utilizing sports play as a forum to further "Jewish" learning, makes the athletic experience a priority for their children.

TSI has come a long way! With additional funding, the opportunity clearly exists to expand its programming both locally and nationally. I am very proud that Rabbi Gordon uses JCYS as a pilot site for new curriculum initiatives. TSI has helped JCYS better define what makes the agency Jewish, and involvement/collaboration with TSI has grown to be viewed by youth and parents alike, as a critical part of JCYS camp and sports experiences.

Sincerely,



Martin Oliff, Ph.D.

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