



CHIMES ISRAEL

Improving the lives of people with disabilities
in everything they do, at every stage of life

Stories of Impact

Health & Wellness Education for Aging People with Cognitive Disabilities



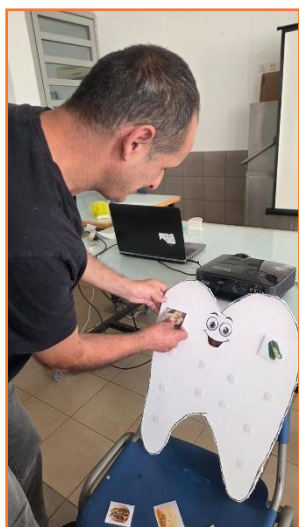
Amir Builds a Healthier Routine Through Hands-On Learning

During one of the Health & Wellness Education sessions at the Taibe center, the program nurse led a highly interactive and visual lesson on dental hygiene as part of the broader focus on self-care and healthy aging. Rather than delivering a traditional lecture, she created a hands-on learning environment that allowed participants to actively engage with the material.



At the front of the room, the nurse set up large, hand-made tooth cutouts, each with a clear emotional expression. One tooth had a smiling face, representing healthy teeth, while the other had an angry face, representing teeth affected by sugar and poor hygiene. An interactive lesson, the participants were invited to place food stickers onto the teeth. Sugary foods such as sweets and soft drinks were placed on the angry tooth, while fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and water were placed on the smiling tooth. This simple, visual activity helped participants clearly understand the connection between food choices and dental health.

The nurse reinforced these concepts using a short PowerPoint presentation with clear images and minimal text. She also demonstrated proper brushing techniques using a toothbrush and a model set of teeth and gums. These large visual aids made it easy for everyone to see how plaque builds up during the day and how to reach different areas of the mouth while brushing. Participants were encouraged to ask questions, talk about their own routines, and share challenges they face in maintaining daily hygiene.



The atmosphere during the session was open and supportive. Participants leaned forward, laughed, pointed to the tooth cutouts, and discussed when and how they brush their teeth at home. Several practiced brushing motions while watching the demonstration. They later used the tooth cutout as a frame for selfie photos, with the caption above reading, "Healthy teeth means a healthy body." This helped turn the learning experience into a positive and memorable event. At the end of the session, each participant received a new toothbrush, reinforcing the lesson in a practical way.



After the session, one participant, Amir, approached a staff member privately. He explained that he usually brushed his teeth in the morning but had never considered brushing in the evening. Seeing the demonstrations, placing the food stickers himself, and learning how bacteria builds up overnight helped the information resonate for Amir. He decided to start brushing his teeth before going to bed.



In the days that followed, the staff observed a real change. Amir began mentioning his new evening routine on his own during casual conversations. He proudly shared that he had brushed his teeth before sleeping and said that it made him feel clean and more comfortable at night. He spoke about his self-care with increased confidence and ownership.

For the staff, this small but meaningful change reflected the core goal of the Health & Wellness

Education Program: helping participants understand information in concrete ways, make their own choices, and build routines that support health and independence over time.



Amir's change did not require reminders or supervision. It grew from understanding, personal choice, and repetition. This is the ideal learning method. It supports prolonged independence, dignity, and quality of life for aging adults with cognitive disabilities.

Ronit Reclaims a Lifelong Dream

During the Health & Wellness Education Program at the Rosh HaAyin center, one participant was inspired by the idea that learning and growth remain possible at any age. A medical clown led a therapeutic activity that focused on fulfilling dreams and personal aspirations at any age. Through gentle conversation, humor, and storytelling, the facilitator encouraged participants to talk about things they had always wanted to do but never had the opportunity to pursue.

During this session, Ronit shared something deeply personal. She explained that throughout her life she had always wished she knew how to write. She spoke about feeling limited and dependent because she could not write her name or recognize written words. She expressed deep sadness that this was something she had never managed to learn. Recognizing the importance of this moment, staff responded immediately. Immediately following the session, a staff member sat with Ronit and began working with her on basic letter recognition. Using worksheets, clear visual cues, and repetition, the instructor guided her through the letters slowly and carefully. In later sessions, Ronit practiced holding the pen, stabilizing the paper with her other hand, and tracing letters before attempting to write independently.



What began with copying her name quickly expanded. As Ronit gained confidence, she began writing additional words. When she completed her first words on the page, she smiled broadly and showed her writing to staff and peers. She was excited and emotional, repeatedly looking back at the paper as if to reassure herself that she had truly written the words herself. Staff observed a clear shift in her confidence. Writing was no longer something she believed was impossible.



Following this breakthrough, the multidisciplinary team updated Ronit's Individual Habilitation Plan (IHP) to include daily one-on-one learning sessions with an instructor. The plan now focuses on continued letter recognition, writing, and word memorization at the first and second-grade level. This addition reflected Ronit's motivation and capability.

The Health & Wellness Education Program was created with the understanding that cognitive engagement and learning play a critical role in maintaining independence and self-worth as people age. For staff, Ronit's story illustrates the program at its best. A single therapeutic session created the conditions for personal growth, renewed self-belief, and an ongoing learning pathway. The experience reinforced that aging adults with cognitive disabilities can continue to learn, set goals, and achieve meaningful milestones when given the right support, patience, and encouragement.

Bracha's New Focus on Personal Hygiene

Bracha is 54 years old with a developmental disability and lives in a group home. The severity of her intellectual disabilities makes it impossible for her to work in the free market. For the past 14 years, she has spent her days at Chimes Israel's Kfar Saba sheltered employment center. She now participates in our Aging Unit, where the structured agenda includes employment time to preserve skills and abilities, leisure activities, and therapeutic health support.

Personal hygiene was not a priority for Bracha. She would come to the center wearing clothes from the day before. When asked, she would confirm that she had not showered nor brushed her teeth. The staff would constantly remind her that she needed to maintain better hygiene. They would tell her that she must brush her teeth, wash her clothes, and keep her body clean.



After participating in the Health and Wellness workshop in 2022, Bracha overhauled her hygiene habits and now consistently maintains personal cleanliness. She became an advocate for hygiene within the center, regularly sharing her routine during morning meetings and encouraging others to follow her example. Now, at every morning meeting, she talks about the importance of this, explains what she does, and reminds everyone to maintain their hygiene. Her newfound leadership around the subject has also fostered a sense of community responsibility. For Bracha, the program was transformative and significantly contributed to her improved quality of life.

Yaffa's Journey to Healthier Eating Habits

Yaffa, 62, who has an intellectual developmental disability, has been spending every day at our center for the past 20 years. She lives in a group home with other people in her situation. A sociable woman in our Aging Unit, she likes to help other clients at lower functionality levels. Yaffa had unhealthy and socially unacceptable behaviors around food. She kept snacks and

desserts around her, eating messily whenever she felt like it. At lunch, if unmonitored, she would pile enormous amounts of mostly desserts on her plate. Because of this, our aid needed to accompany her in the lunch line to guide her toward nutritious food choices and limit her portions.



When Yaffa participated in the Health and Wellness workshop, she tuned-in on the topic of nutrition and healthy eating. It really interested her and we saw that due to what she learned, she began to change her eating habits. She stopped the daytime snacks and began choosing more nutritious lunchtime meals with only one dessert. One week, the cooking workshop moved to the same day our clients sell homemade baked goods at a kiosk. Yaffa remarked that since we eat dessert at the cooking workshop, we did not need to operate the kiosk that day. To this day, Yaffa is a

healthier eater and limits herself to one dessert per day.

Hannah's Hygiene Breakthrough

Hannah is 60 year-old with an intellectual developmental disability. She lives at home with her mother and has been spending her days at our center for the past 24 years. Although she never worked in the free market, Hannah used to spend her days creating embroidery at an art center. The center sold her intricate needlework pictures and mezuzahs to the public and she would receive money for the sales. She now participates in our Aging Unit, where the structured agenda includes employment time to preserve skills and abilities, leisure activities, and support from therapeutic health professionals.

Although her mother is intellectually sound, she is quite elderly. Hannah's two brothers visit often, act as their guardians, and attend to their larger needs. They are planning to move Hannah into a group home when their mother becomes unable to care for herself.

Hannah neglected her appearance and had poor hygiene. Her personal habilitation plan included working on hygiene and there had been frequent conversations about this. Every morning the professionals who worked with her



checked that she changed her clothes from the day before and that she was washing them at home. There is a comb in her personal space, and each day she was led to a mirror to look at herself and comb her hair.

Though the team at Chimes Israel worked diligently with Hannah to improve her self-care habits, it wasn't until she participated in the Health and Wellness workshop that a lasting change occurred. Now, Hannah independently maintains her hygiene, including regularly bathing, brushing her teeth, and wearing clean clothes. What was once a challenge is now a part of her daily routine, demonstrating the workshop's ability to help foster sustainable habits.

A Vital Step toward Aging with Dignity and Health

Our Health & Wellness Program has proven an invaluable resource for aging adults with intellectual disabilities. Through tailored support and education, participants have significantly improved their overall self-care. As evidenced by the stories above, the program can also enhance participant confidence, independence, and sense of community. The participant transformations to healthier lifestyles and greater independence demonstrate the program's value.