



friendship walk 2012

A Parents Story...

Dear Friend,

Our daughter, Rachel, is 19. She wants to drive a car, wear makeup and go out on dates like most other teenagers. The problem is that Rachel has Down Syndrome. She will never drive a car, although makeup and a special young man can be possibilities for her future. As parents of a teenager with special needs, we constantly think, "How can we facilitate friendship for our child? How can we get others to take the time to understand our daughter with her speech challenges? How will other teens learn to connect with her?"



The Friendship Circle's mission is to bring friends and smiles to children and adults with special needs and peace of mind to their parents; to foster the values of volunteerism and compassion among our youth; and to ultimately realize the community's responsibility for its members with special needs.

Friendship Circle (FC) provides a full spectrum of services to the **special needs population** throughout the span of their lifetime. FC impacts families of those with special needs through communal programs and individual socialization and is recognized for being among the first in the Houston community to systematically address the needs of this population.

Our goal is to create an environment and programs that serve special needs individuals and their families, letting them see themselves as proud members of our community and feel the support of the community.

The Friendship Circle of Houston offers 15 recreational, **educational and social programs**. More than 165 individuals with special needs and their families, 100+ volunteers and 300+ community members participate in our programs annually.

The Friendship Circle program is now entering its ninth year.

The goals and outcomes of the program have been achieved and each year the organization and success of the program has increased:

- **Engaging children and adults with special needs** through a full range of experiences
- **Supporting parents** and members by providing respite and support
- **Enriching, inspiring and motivating teens** to share their time and talents with others
- **Connecting teen volunteers, children with special needs, and their families to the community** through education and social opportunities

The first time Rachel went to the park or to a movie with a friend was a Friendship Circle activity. The Friendship Circle trains its volunteers to accept our daughter as the loving, caring, young woman she is, and to focus on her abilities rather than her disabilities. Rachel loves music, singing and dancing, as does her Friendship Circle friend, Stephanie. Rachel is willing to try anything as long as Stephanie is there to do it with her. The Friendship Circle offers an environment where Rachel can grow as an individual, develop close friendships, and become a contributing member of our community. As a result of her relationship with Stephanie, Rachel has also experienced the joy of sharing experiences with a trusted friend.

The young women who have been Rachel's Friendship Circle friends are kind, caring and devoted individuals. I am constantly surprised and thrilled when I meet these dedicated volunteers; they are unfailingly devoted to the people they are working with, and they constantly encourage and support them. The Friendship Circle is not just a job for these young men & women; it is a reflection of the way they live their lives.



Please help support the Friendship Circle's many programs. There are special needs children who live at home, as well as those who live in Texas State Supported Living Centers. Friendship Circle is the only Jewish experience available to them and includes many varied activities: Sunday Circle, bowling, ice skating, baking matzoh, celebrating the Jewish holidays or participating in a Shabbat Dinner. To provide these experiences for the special needs community requires funding, and the Friendship Circle's major fundraising event is the Friendship Walk, which will be held on March 11, 2012.

Rachel, along with many others, will participate in the Friendship Walk through the streets of Houston to raise money for a cause that has changed her life. On behalf of Rachel and children like her, I ask you to please use the enclosed form to support this effort, not only to raise funds to sustain the activities of Friendship Circle, but also to raise community awareness in regard to this program.

There are various ways to help Friendship Circle raise the necessary funds to continue and expand its mission. \$100,000 is needed to provide funding for upcoming year's budget. The website has information about how you can help. Be part of this excellent program. You can make the commitment by logging on to www.houstonfriendshipwalk.com

Arriene and Frank Kaplan

WWW.HOUSTONFRIENDSHIPWALK.COM

Friendship Circle is a branch of Chabad Outreach of Houston a 501(c)3 charitable organization, an affiliate of Chabad of Texas and affiliated partner of the Jewish Family Service Disability Services.
Friendship Circle of Houston—11000 Fondren B104 Houston, TX 77096—713.774.0300—elisa@friendshiphouston.com