

# ISRAEL PARASPORT CENTER



2025



IMPACT  
REPORT

Dear Friends,

For the past nearly three years, we have stood alongside Israel through one of the most complex periods in modern history. As the nation navigates these troubled waters, the multidimensional needs of Israelis are continuing to grow. In that light, 65 years of the Israel ParaSport Center feels less like a milestone to celebrate and more like a foundation built to serve Israelis with disabilities through whatever lies ahead.

That foundation shows up every day in the Israeli children and adults with disabilities who arrive at The Center to build strength and confidence. There, they find more than rehabilitation: a village where they belong and a home, as so many of our athletes describe it. This steady work, often far from the spotlight, is the foundation of our impact and why The Center has remained a trusted institution for generations.

The impact you will see in these pages reflects a year of extraordinary dedication by our athletes, our staff, and by you. Because of your belief in this mission, a child discovered a sport they love, an athlete carried a flag on the world stage, and a family found their footing through unimaginable circumstances.

As we look ahead, we do so with purpose and confidence. The challenges facing Israel today only deepen our resolve and our commitment to the people who need us.

Thank you for your partnership and support. Together, we empower life without limits.

With gratitude,



Jon Michelin  
National Board  
President



Jennifer Flink  
National Executive  
Director





*The Center is the place I go to clear my head, focus on my training, and spend time with good friends. It's an anchor that helps me stay grounded.*

*Getting out of the house every day, having somewhere to go and having a purpose makes all the difference. I'm so grateful we can go to The Center and do what we love.*

*- Asael Shabo, Professional Wheelchair Basketball Player and Ambassador*

# BY THE NUM



## 3,100

people served,  
including members  
and their families.



## 8,560

specialized therapeutic  
and adaptive sport  
sessions provided.



## 2,100

hours of social services  
provided to members  
and families.



## 1,100

found freedom of  
**movement** in our swimming  
pools each week.



## 293

registered competitive  
athletes participated  
in national competition.



# BERS 2025

**\$387k**

invested in **new sports wheelchairs.**



**1,837**



**visitors toured The Center,** including school groups, professionals, and international guests.

**92**



**volunteers at** The Center weekly.

**70**

**athletes represented Israel** in international competition.



**55**

**children participated** in the soccer program.



Dear Friends,

To everything there is a season, & a time  
to every purpose under heaven. -Ecclesiastes 3:1

2025 felt like it had many seasons &  
many purposes.

Sirens and solar panels. Hostages & heroes.  
Gold medals & miracles.

**It is easy to open with big sport wins, we  
are a sport center after all:**

The National Wheelchair Basketball Team  
beating Germany, the bronze medalists from  
Paris 2024, with our own Coach Lior Dror  
leading from the sidelines.

**Caroline Tabib**, twenty-five years after first  
rolling through our gates, defeating world  
number one in Spokane, WA & moving up to  
#2 in the world in para-table tennis.

**Guy Sasson**, world number 3 in quad  
wheelchair tennis, continues to do what  
he does best — competing at the highest  
level, winning in top-tier tournaments, &  
maintaining his place among the world's elite.

Wheelchair tennis player **Sergei Lysov**, who  
made aliyah as a shy 14-year-old from Moscow,  
debuting at Roland Garros, Wimbledon, & the

U.S. Open, & cracking the world's top 15 at  
21-years-old.

Don't get me wrong, I love these successes. **But  
here is what really motivates me to put my all  
into The Center every single day:**

**Eleven-year-old Shahar**, a little person,  
wanted to play badminton. We didn't have  
badminton. So now we do. We found him a  
coach. A gym. The right equipment. Sometimes,  
you just need to say yes.

Seeing **quad wheelchair tennis player Roy  
Abergil taping a racket to his hand** — his grip  
strength gone — while his coach Asi, himself  
injured during army service, films the process  
so they can replicate it perfectly before every  
match. **This is The Center. Finding creative  
solutions so that a quadriplegic athlete can  
keep doing what grounds him & gives him a  
sense of purpose — play sports.**

And then there is **Diana Shneier**. A veteran  
wheelchair rugby player, the only woman on the  
national team — unstoppable, until she wasn't.  
Back pain so severe that sitting upright became  
unbearable, and wheelchair rugby, the sport  
that had fueled and pushed her to be her best  
self for years, suddenly became impossible.  
Coach Avi had what seemed like a crazy idea:  
wheelchair racing, a sport where you sit in the  
exact position that gives Diana pain relief —  
leaning forward. Months later, she is putting  
her whole being into training. Racing is her  
oxygen. And her best painkiller.

Telling **13-year-old Itamar Tfilin** that he will  
represent The Center at a fundraising event in  
Chicago. I myself was 10 when Moshe Rashkes  
called me into his office and told me for the first  
time of many that I would represent The Center  
in the United States. That moment changed the  
trajectory of my life. Watching that familiar  
spark flicker across the face of a young athlete  
never gets old.

This year we completed the solar panel project,  
which included final installations on the roofs  
of the semi-Olympic pool & the gymnasium. The  
savings will fund wheelchairs, coaches, and  
accessible transportation.

And then there is the part of our work that none  
of us will ever get used to. **We are the home of  
the Nova survivor basketball team, where Roey  
Shalev's jersey, the captain of the team who  
died by suicide, hangs from the rafters for  
eternity in his memory.**



Quad wheelchair tennis  
player Roy Abergil

**Tal Kupershtein, whose son Bar was taken hostage on October 7th**, never stopped coming to The Center. We all watched in complete awe, as Tal, who had promised for two years to stand and hug his son when he returned from captivity, rose to his feet and kept his promise.

The first time I saw Bar walk into our gym, in front of our dear friends from the US during the 65th anniversary mission, there was no way I could remain composed. **In my forty years of being a part of The Center, there are a handful of moments that stop time, and this one is up there.** Some things are simply beyond comprehension.

Like Tal & his family, **for anyone directly affected by October 7th & the war that followed, our doors have stayed open & our services have remained free.** We do whatever we can, for whoever needs it.

And then there is **Matan Baron**, now 16 years old, whose story is one of coincidence upon coincidence.

Matan was discovered by chance when our recruiting team bumped into him while visiting Sheba Hospital. He joined The Center, started playing wheelchair basketball, made the U23 National Team, and this past June was in Brazil competing at the World Championships when the last round with Iran began, with hundreds of ballistic missiles falling on Israel.



Matan Baron, new member of the U23 National Basketball Team

The Baron family home has no shelter in their apartment. They have to go downstairs to the building shelter during sirens. Matan can't make it down the stairs and there is no elevator to the shelter, so when he's home, the whole family stays in the apartment with him, unprotected.

This time, with Matan in Brazil, they went downstairs. During one of the barrages, a missile hit and destroyed their home. The family was in the shelter and wasn't injured.

Call it coincidence if you want. I call it divine intervention.

So many things move me about Matan's story. He is a promising young athlete already on the national team, which fills us with pride. But more than anything, he is a boy who survived cancer, became paralyzed, and found himself cut off from normal teenage life, only to find community at The Center. **Here he has found friends, strength, a place to belong and a reason to push himself.** And here, more than anything, **he has learned how to live again.**

And maybe, being part of The Center saved him and his family's lives too.

There are no bad days. Only difficult ones. And difficult days reveal what this place continues to be for 65 years to so many people with disabilities.

Yes, there are medals. And headlines. And even solar panels. But more than anything, the Israel ParaSport Center continues to be an anchor to our members and their families.

Thank you for making it possible, in every season.

A handwritten signature in white ink on a dark background.

Israel Executive Director  
Boaz Kramer



Roei Shalev, IPSC Nova Team Captain



# 2025 ISRAEL



## Competing Under the Israeli Flag

In 2025, wearing the Israeli flag abroad came with real challenges — logistical, political, & emotional. When war broke out and Israel's skies closed mid-tournament, **our U23 wheelchair basketball team was locked out of the country during the World Championships in Brazil**, with one player's home destroyed by a missile while they were abroad. The team competed anyway, found a way home, and **represented Israel with everything they had.**



## Guy Sasson: Winning for Israel

In 2025, Guy won singles at the French Open at Roland-Garros, and claimed two Grand Slam doubles titles there and at the US Open alongside partner Niels Vink. He also reached the Australian Open and US Open singles semifinals and the French Riviera Open finals. But **it's what he does off the court that defines him.** At nearly every podium last year, **Guy used his platform to stand proudly for Israel and the Jewish people** — including a powerful tribute to released hostage Emily Damari that was seen around the world.



## Caroline Tabib: #6 → #2 in the World

Caroline dominated 2025, taking gold in Spokane by defeating the world #1, followed by silver in the Elite finals and bronze in São Paulo. **Because you invested in elite coaching and international competition, Caroline was able to compete, win, and rise from #6 to #2 in the world.**



## Double Silver @ European Championships

Boccia athletes **Orit Kelner and Nadav Levi** both brought home silver from the European Championships. Orit reached the podium abroad for the first time after competing internationally for 13 years.



# UPDATES



## *Nova Basketball: Finding A Home*

The Nova Basketball Team — made up of survivors of the October 7th attack on the Nova Festival — have made The Center their home. Competing in a recreational work league, the team played their first home game at The Center in December 2025. For survivors still navigating the aftermath of that day, showing up, competing, and belonging to a team is its own kind of victory.



## *A New Community Built for Them*

For Israelis between the ages of 18-45 who acquire a disability through injury or illness, finding a community that feels relevant isn't easy. Our newly launched adult program was built specifically to fill that gap. In partnership with local rehabilitation hospitals, including Loewenstein, it offers sport, movement, and structured social time designed to feel like somewhere people actually want to be. Nine months into the program we are already seeing strong interest, with demand continuing to grow.



## *Orit Kelner: Addicted to the Game*

Orit Kelner will be the first to tell you she's a little crazy. Her hair changes color constantly — green is a recent favorite — her house is famously colorful, and her two cats are named Boccia and Pétanque. The cats' names are a clue. With Orit, boccia isn't a hobby. It's an obsession.

She came to the sport in 2011 through a friend at The Center, and never looked back. Over more than a decade, she has claimed multiple Israeli championship titles and a Breakthrough Athlete of the Year award — but what sets her apart is how she plays. As Israel's only kicking player, Orit spent years working with coaches on her technique until a tournament abroad changed everything. Watching a Portuguese player compete with a stick gave her team an idea, and today Orit is one of only a handful of players in the world to play with a stick. She didn't just borrow the innovation. She made it her own.

When asked what boccia gives her personally, she doesn't hesitate. **More self-confidence. The knowledge that she can achieve what she sets out to achieve.** And, she adds — it's just really fun.

In April 2026, we all hope to be cheering for Orit as she heads to Montreal for the Boccia World Cup.



# A Road Map for Those Who Want to Change the World



**Ayelet Avraham, MSW, Head of Social Services**, has spent the last nine years building the Israel ParaSport Center's Children's Program from the ground up. Always just a call away for staff, volunteers,

parents, and athletes alike, Ayelet has become a cornerstone of The Center's community. **As she transitions into her next chapter, launching a new mental coaching program for young competitive para-athletes, she reflects on what she learned along the way.**

When I started my social work journey 27 years ago, I was convinced I would change the world. Many of us start our careers with stars in our eyes and fire in our hearts, and in my case, those feelings were particularly strong.

But over time I realized the world is actually a pretty big place! I also discovered the real key to making change, and that was the power to create, build, and nurture.

And so, in 2017, when asked to run the Israel ParaSport Center's sport program for children and teens with disabilities, I realized this was my chance to build something that would have real impact.



As I prepare to move on to my next project at The Center, I can't help but reflect on what I learned over the last 8.5 years as we shaped the Children's Program into the vibrant, supportive program that it is today, a community that, as one of our young athletes called it, is a "paradise for people with disabilities."

I'll be taking these lessons with me as I continue on my journey to change the world at The Center.

## **Before Saying "No," Try to Find a "Yes"**

When I was first asked to lead the Children's Program, I almost said no. At first, I didn't understand how I, with my social work background, would be the right fit for running a complex program such as this. It didn't take long for me to realize, though, that this was the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity I sought to create important change, to have an impact. Today this has become a rule that I always share with our team, parents, and athletes. And the Children's Program wouldn't be where it is today if many of us hadn't paused before saying no.

## **Belief and Hope are the Foundation**

Believe in yourself, your team, the kids, and their families. Believe you are the right person for the job, even when it's really hard. And believe in the process, not just the outcome. We all need someone to believe in us. We all need to believe in what we're building, and we all need to believe that something good can happen, even when things are tough.

And when things are tough, that's where we need hope as well. Hope is the quiet voice, saying, "Something good is coming," even when you can't see it yet. Hope keeps me going through the hard days, helps parents dream, motivates our athletes to keep showing up, and pushes our team to keep growing.

## **Lead with Heart**

You need a lot of heart to build a program like this. Compassionate dedication is what makes our team so special. They aren't showing up to simply teach a sport, they are showing up because they care, they want to give, and they believe in the athletes. They are there because they love.

## **Build a Supportive Team**

No one can go it alone. I have relied on incredible program directors, supervisors, advisors, and an amazing office team. They have been my sounding board, safety net, and cheerleaders.



## **Even in the Quiet Moments, Flexibility is Vital**

Sometimes, we want more for a child than they are ready for. Flexibility means recognizing this and having the strength to let go of our own timeline and expectations. To pause, to listen, and to respect each person's pace.

## **Perfection Doesn't Exist**

Over the years, I've had to come to terms with the fact that perfection doesn't exist. Not for me, not for the parents, not for the kids, and not for the team. What we do have is real life - sometimes messy, sometimes crazy, and sometimes magical. Don't seek perfection, seek learning and growth and keep on going.

## **Words Matter**

Words can lift up or tear down. We've worked hard to teach our team how to speak with kindness, encouragement, and care to our athletes and to their families.

## **Not Clients, Partners**

Speaking of families, it can be easy to judge. But when we take the time to see the world through their lens, listen to their challenges, and offer support - trust is built. Over the years, we've created relationships grounded in empathy, communication, and mutual respect. And those relationships are the basis upon which our young athletes can thrive.

## **A Note to Parents**

Our goal isn't to "fix" your child. It's to help them grow - to improve their motor skills, discover their unique strengths, make friends, and, most of all, have fun. Because joy is where our process begins.

## **The Biggest Lesson of All?**

At the end of the day, what you create isn't simply a schedule of activities or a place to go. You want to create a home away from home. A family - for your clients, their families, and your team. When that happens, everyone involved will give their all to nurture it and see it grow.

When I started out, I wanted to change the world. Today, I know the world on a global level may not have changed - but within it, entire lives have shifted. And **if each life is an entire world, then really haven't we all changed countless worlds?**

And it's not just me who benefits from a solid support network, our coaches and instructors are all supported by a network of professionals who help them grow and thrive.

We invest in each other, building a stronger team. We listen, offer training, and create space for honest conversations. Every coach, instructor, and volunteer can feel heard and valued.

When the athletes & families see a team that supports each other, they feel confident knowing there is a team to lean on for support as needed.

## **Find Meaning and Always Keep It in Focus**

What we do with the Children's Program is lifechanging, and the work is deeply meaningful to our team and myself. We are helping children believe in themselves. Showing children that their disability is just a part of who they are, and helping them discover their strengths is worth every challenging day. Helping parents see their children in a new light? A priceless gift.

## **Be Flexible**

During challenging times - from COVID-19 to war and rocket attacks - we learned what real flexibility means. We moved to Zoom, stayed connected by phone, and found creative solutions when The Center was closed or staff were unavailable. Challenges always arise, and it's important that we be able to adapt quickly and find ways to serve even under less than ideal circumstances.

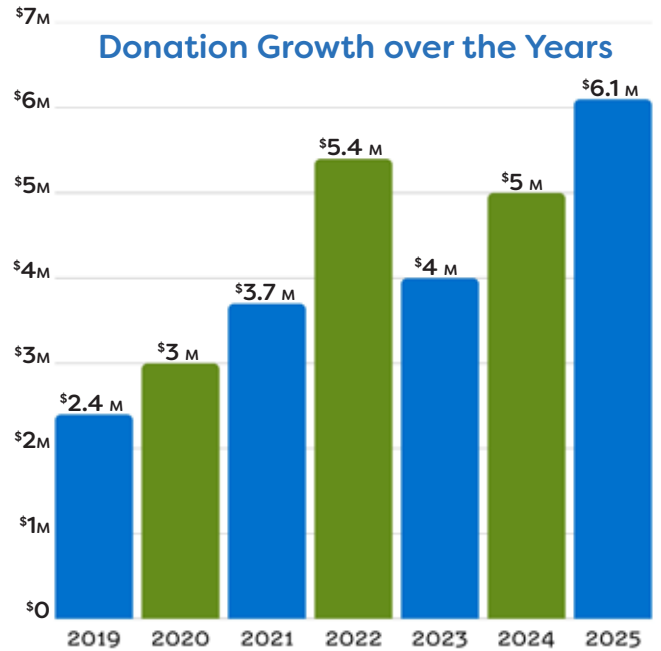


# U.S. UPDATES <sup>2025</sup>

**\$6M raised** in support of the Israel ParaSport Center! **1,617 individual donors supported our mission** to empower Israelis with disabilities!

**\$1.5M was raised** at our **regional events** across the country!

This year, our U.S. communities came together in unprecedented ways. From major events to intimate gatherings, supporters brought The Center's mission to life across the country.



## CHICAGO



The annual **Chicago Golf Classic and Game Day** honoring **Dr. Howard Freedberg** was a great success, bringing together old and new faces from across our community.



Our **65th Anniversary Celebration** featured **Jonah Platt**, host of *Being Jewish*, and brought hundreds together to celebrate The Center's legacy.

## NEW YORK



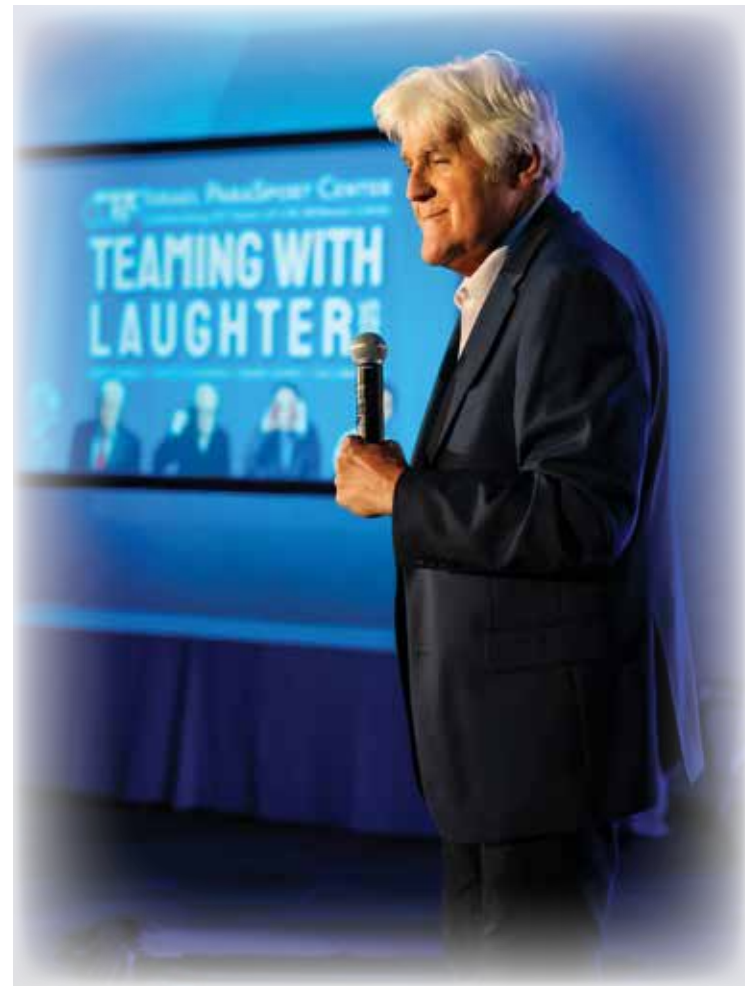
We opened our New York programming with **Ride to Thrive** for our **NextGen cohort**, followed by the **Tri-State Golf Classic**, two events that brought our community together and grew our mission.

We hosted a **family-friendly expo** in the **Hamptons** with **Stephanie Gottlieb**, in support of our **Luski Aquatic Center** campaign.

## LOS ANGELES



**Teaming with Laughter** brought together a comedy all-star team with **Jay Leno, Fritz Coleman, Mark Schiff, & Avi Liberman**. Jay was so taken with our mission that he auctioned off **private tours of his Big Dog Garage** in support of The Center.



## ATLANTA



Over **40 members of our NextGen cohort** came together for our **NextGen Pickleball Tournament**.



**Teaming with Israel** returned to Atlanta, this year featuring award-winning performer **Montana Tucker**. After the event, Montana visited Israel and had a blast visiting The Center.

# LUSKI AQUATIC CENTER

## Where Every Journey Begins



For children and adults with disabilities, the pool is often the first step on their rehabilitative journey. **Swimming engages every muscle, builds strength, and provides a freedom of movement not possible on land.** For many, it is the only place to experience play, camaraderie, and success.

Despite ongoing upkeep, the semi-Olympic and children's pools have aged and require critical upgrades — challenges intensified by rising construction and maintenance costs following October 7th. Renovations are essential to ensure rehabilitation and training continue safely for the hundreds who rely on the pools each week.

Thanks to the **generosity of Cathi & David Luski & Family**, renovations are now underway. The Luskis donated **\$1 million** directly and pledged to match every dollar donated up to an **additional \$1 million**, **doubling the impact of every gift to the Aquatic Center.**

During our 65th Anniversary Mission to Israel, we officially broke ground — marking the start of a transformation that will serve generations to come.



**The match is still open!**  
**Scan to Give**



## What Is Being Built

- 🌱 Complete REBUILD to the semi-Olympic & children's pools
- 🌱 New mechanical rooms with state-of-the-art filtration, heating, & plumbing
- 🌱 Enhanced accessibility: ramps, lifts, automatic doors
- 🌱 Solar panel systems to improve energy efficiency



**Join the Match!**  
**Every dollar**  
**you give,**  
**has DOUBLE**  
**the impact!**



# 65<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY MISSION

In November, participants from across the U.S. joined us for our **65th Anniversary Mission to Israel, experiencing The Center firsthand**. Over four days, they met athletes, families, and survivors of October 7, including Tal and Bar Kupershtein, whose powerful reunion after Bar's return from captivity was felt across the world.

The group toured the country, met with athletes, trained in goalball with Paralympic medalist Lihi Ben David, and celebrated 65 years with over 200 community members at the Luski Aquatic Center's groundbreaking ceremony. The mission highlighted the transformative power of adaptive sports, the dedication of our community, and the enduring impact of The Center's programs.



# A Promise Kept

Three years ago, a stroke left Tal Kupershtein paralyzed and non-verbal. He found community and belonging at The Center, becoming a beloved member of The Parliament — a social group of older disabled Israelis who gather there regularly.

On **October 7th**, Tal's son Bar, a security guard at the Nova Festival, was taken hostage. Through two years of uncertainty and grief, Tal made his own quiet promise: he would stand to hug his son when he came home. Through it all, The Center stood by him — providing services, support, and a community that never let him feel alone.

Tal fought hard for his own recovery. And in **October**, Bar came home. Tal kept his promise — lifting himself from his wheelchair to embrace his son.

During our **65th Anniversary Mission**, we had the privilege of meeting Tal, Bar, and Julie in person and hearing their story firsthand. In honor of this family's extraordinary resilience, we are proud to have awarded Tal a **Lifetime Membership** — for a family that has carried so much, we wanted Tal to know: **The Center will always be here for him.**



# Experience The Center



This year, **over 1,800 visitors from across the world** came to see **The Center** firsthand — walking the facilities, meeting athletes, and trying adaptive sports for themselves. From family groups to donor delegations, each visit tells the same story: there is nothing quite like being here.

**The Israel ParaSport Center** is one of those places that's hard to fully understand until you've walked through it. The athletes, the energy, the community — it has **to be experienced firsthand**. As one recent visitor put it: **"This place rivals Disney World for the happiest place on earth."**

**If you're planning a trip to Israel, we'd love to welcome you.**

# LOOKING FORWARD & BEYOND 2025



The Israel ParaSport Center continues to break barriers and empower athletes. As we look ahead, we are building on a year of extraordinary achievements and preparing for the challenges and opportunities to come.

- 🚲 **Training for Los Angeles 2028 & Beyond:** Our athletes are hard at work, building strength, skill, and resilience in preparation for the 2028 Paralympic Games in Los Angeles.
- 🚲 **Modernized Facilities:** Renovations at the Luski Aquatic Center are underway, creating safe, accessible, and energy-efficient spaces where athletes of all ages can thrive.
- 🚲 **Ongoing Innovation:** From expanding youth and adult programs to introducing new adaptive sports, The Center is constantly evolving to meet the needs of our community.
- 🚲 **A Year-Round Mission:** Every day, our athletes, staff, and supporters push limits and celebrate achievement.

Every step of this journey—from rehabilitation to international competition—depends on continued support from donors who believe in life without limits. Whether through donations, volunteering, or sharing our story, you help create possibilities where others see limitations—and empower the next generation of Israeli athletes to reach their full potential.

Join us in making  
**2026**  
another year of  
**HOPE IN MOTION**



*What matters is that these kids come and play the sport and have a great time.*  
- Baruch Hagai, Former Head of Competitive Sport





# Our MISSION

The Israel ParaSport Center is committed to providing ongoing financial support to The Center in Israel, empowering children and youth with physical disabilities from all backgrounds to participate in physical and psychological rehabilitation through sports in order to attain the goal of leading productive and successful lives in Israeli society.

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