



FACES OF

BELONGING



AVA

If you spend even a few minutes at the JCC, chances are you have already met Ava.

You might not know her name yet, but you would recognize her immediately.

She is often found walking confidently down the hallway, waving to anyone she passes, occasionally popping into an office just to say hello. Staff members who have never worked directly with her know her well, because Ava has made it her personal mission to make sure no one at the J goes unnoticed.

A quick greeting, a small treasure she has found, or simply a bright smile is usually enough to turn someone's entire day around.

Since joining JCC programming in the summer of 2024, Ava has become something of an honorary greeter. What began as cautious visits to a new place has grown into a sense of comfort and belonging that now extends across the entire building, from camp spaces to classrooms and especially out to the Hanna & Mark Gleiberman Family Playground in the Jerri-Ann & Gary Jacobs Family Harmony Village.

Ava is currently part of our Camp Jaycee community and participates in our Social Play programs. But her story is not only about the programs she attends. It is about what happens when a child is welcomed not for fitting into a space, but for being fully herself within it.

Before finding the J, Ava and her family were searching for a place where she could simply participate due to the complications that arose from her behavioral needs. They were looking for a place where her energy, curiosity, and enthusiasm would be understood rather than redirected. Like many families, they were not looking for something special or separate.

They were looking for community.

Here, Ava found it.

Over time, something remarkable happened. Ava didn't just join the community, she began shaping it! Children now look for her on the playground. Campers greet her by name. Staff pause during busy days to exchange a moment with her. Her presence invites connection in a way adults often struggle to create on their own.



In our Social Play classes, we have seen her confidence grow alongside her friendships. Familiar routines have become opportunities for independence. Shared activities have become shared laughter. And small daily moments such as waiting in line, taking turns, sitting beside a friend have become meaningful milestones.

But perhaps the most important change has been what Ava shows all of us.

Belonging is not built through perfect behavior, matching abilities, or sameness. Belonging is built through interpersonal relationships. Ava reminds our community that connection often begins with something simple: a wave in the hallway, an invitation to play, or a smile offered without hesitation.

At the JCC, inclusion is not just a service we provide but is a value we live. Ava is one of the many reasons that value comes to life every day.

Because sometimes the person who teaches a community what belonging looks like... is the smallest member of it.

While Ava is truly one-of-a-kind, the Lawrence Family JCC is here for the entire community thanks to the dedication of our Inclusion team.

Please give today and help us open our doors wider to every child, every family, every ability.

