

FACES OF

# BELONGING



## Philip

Every community has familiar faces, the people you expect to see as you move through your day. For many at the JCC, one of those familiar faces is Philip.

Philip has been part of our community since joining Shalom Baby as an Infant and has never left since! Over time, the J became a steady place in his life: through changing routines, through the uncertainty of the pandemic, and through the many transitions that come with growing up.

Today he participates in camp and social skills programming and can often be found taking one of his favorite walks across campus.

Philip experiences the world in his own special way. He does not use spoken language to communicate and often wears headphones to help manage the sounds of a busy environment. At a glance, people might assume he is separate from what is happening around him.

But spending time with Philip changes that understanding.

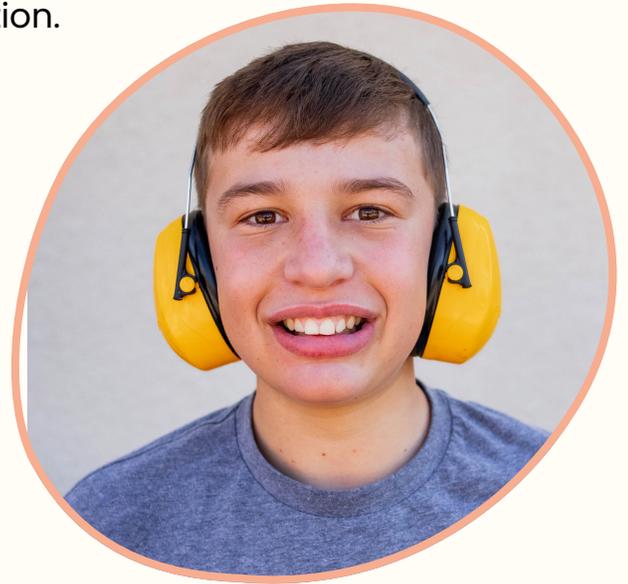
He notices details others miss. He follows patterns. He remembers people.

Years ago, during our All Day at the J program, Philip began stopping by the office of the our head of Security and SFA, Spencer Lynch. At first, it seemed like a passing routine, a brief pause in the doorway leading to a quiet moment in a busy day.

But slowly, a relationship formed. What started with a shared space became a shared recognition. Today, he still visits regularly, and the two greet each other like old friends.

Their connection doesn't rely on verbal conversation. It relies on familiarity, presence, and trust.

Philip communicates using assistive technology tools that include spelled communication on a letter board and tablet. His staff and peers have learned to slow down, to wait, and to pay attention to the ways he expresses himself. When given time and understanding, his preferences, humor, and curiosity become clear. The more the community learned to meet him where he is, the more he chose to engage.



One of the most meaningful things the J has offered Philip is comfort, a place where he does not need to mask, perform, or become someone different in order to participate. He can take his walks, enjoy the swings, explore the playground, and return to familiar people who recognize him. From that foundation of safety, interaction has grown naturally.

Philip has taught our community an important lesson: communication is not limited to verbal interactions.

Connection can be created through a shared routine, a familiar face, or simply recognizing someone and being recognized in return. When we widen our understanding of how people communicate, we also widen who gets to belong. Belonging does not mean changing a person to fit a space.

Sometimes belonging means changing the space so a person can finally be themselves.

***While Philip 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.***

**Watch the video**

