

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

*On March 9, I will be participating in a three-day, 80+ kilometer trek "Down South" from just before Sde Boker to inside the Ramon Crater to raise funds for a very worthwhile organization called AKIM-Jerusalem. This is the eighth year that AKIM-Jerusalem has run a charity trek – last year's event raised over 250,000 NIS – and a large proportion of this was used to add on services for the elderly with mental disabilities including more opening hours in their specialized fitness center. This year we are hoping for even more participants who will bring in even more donations!*

*AKIM-Jerusalem provides "in-the-community" housing for people with mental disabilities and other developmental disorders of all ages and functioning. At the moment, it operates 3 hostels and 16 apartments in the city of Jerusalem, housing 157 residents. Its clients are referred to them by local and regional welfare agencies and the large majority of them originate from below average, low-income families. The average age of its residents is approaching 50 and the parents of many of them are no longer alive.*

*Although part of their care is funded by the Ministry of Welfare, leisure time activities, further education and specialized para-medical services such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, etc., are not covered by the government. The costs for new construction and renovation of buildings and for equipment acquisition are also, at best, partially covered for by the government. As a consequence AKIM-Jerusalem must raise extra-budgetary money for these services from outside sources.*

*AKIM-Jerusalem has, since its inception, preferred to provide support to families who continue to care for their children with disabilities at home, rather than encouraging their institutionalization, an approach often propagated and practiced by the government.*

*The association's Family Support Center includes a Respite Care program to which children come for anything from a few hours to several days at a time, thus giving their families a chance to "re-charge their batteries". For those families who cannot send their children out to the Respite Center, Home Care support is provided for at least two hours a week. This service allows quality, one-on-one time with the member of the family who has mental disabilities by care-providers trained, supervised and monitored by AKIM-Jerusalem.*

*An extended school day program is operated at the Ben Yehuda School of Special Education. The 26 children that attend this program are aged 10-14 with medium to serious mental disabilities. Several of the children in the group also have autism and all have severe behavioral problems. For the parents of these children private care is*

*usually well beyond their means and there are very few options run by the State if they want to work a full-day. The aim of this project is to give these children a rich and diversified leisure curriculum, which encourages mental, emotional and physical development and is open five days a week from 2-6 p.m.*

*Other projects run by the Family Support Center include a Job Opportunity Advice service and Family Counseling Services.*

*The trek itself involves a substantial commitment of time by its participants and it is very challenging physically. It is also very rewarding, to say the least – seeing and experiencing the Israeli countryside and wildlife first-hand (and not just from a bus or car!) – as well as getting a chance to make new friends from many different countries and from all “walks” of life.*

*You can help by sponsoring me on the trek. As an extra incentive for me to finish the trek, how about committing to a fixed amount per kilometer for the 80+-kilometer trek? Your sponsorship donation is tax deductible in Israel, in the U.S., Canada, UK and France.*

*I thank you in advance for your consideration and support.*

*Sincerely,*