



### **Sderot Bar Mitzvah Boys Summer 2010**

In order to qualify for participation in the Sderot group bar mitzvah celebration, the family must be receiving financial assistance from the local department of social services. While every participating family qualifies by the government's definition of living below the poverty line, they each have their own unique life challenges and struggles. Below are some of their stories.

**N.** is one of two children living with his mother in a single parent family unit. He and his brother were visiting with their "Big Brother" a few years ago when a Kassam rocket landed in the "Big Brother's" front yard – just inches away from where the boys were playing. While thank G-d the children emerged without physical injury, the same cannot be said for their spirit and psychological health. Both boys required hospitalization due to the trauma. One of the boys suffered from such severe PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) that he was unable to return to school for an entire year. Needless to say, N. is not a typical bar mitzvah boy and will carry these scars along for life. We hope that his participation in this program will provide a renewed sense of trust in his surroundings, a positive adult male role model in his preparation, and at the very least, a period of time to be a child and experience unlimited joy. In addition, we hope that the memories will give him the strength to continue a positive connection to his Jewish identity and hope that a better tomorrow is indeed possible.

**D.** has also grown up in a single parent family, devoid of a father figure. His own father has been serving a jail sentence for murder ever since D. can remember. Growing up in poverty with the additional stigma of having a murderer for a father has placed a heavy burden on this child. Being accepted and knowing exactly what is considered appropriate behavior are just a few of D.'s challenges. We hope that a positive group experience coupled with a strong Jewish adult male role model will set this young man on a path of personal fulfillment and positive identification with his community, his peers and his Jewish identity.

**A.** is also the product of a single parent family. In his case, it is the loving and nurturing embrace of a mother that is missing as his own mother passed away approximately five years ago when he was but eight years old. While A.'s father has insisted on raising him, a local family has also become an "adoptive family" for A. and his father. While this has helped, in some ways it has also highlighted the very things A. misses the most. He also has two brothers, all of whom compete for their father's time, attention and love. Recently, A.'s father has fathered a daughter with his girlfriend, further complicating A.'s already dysfunctional life. We hope that the group bar mitzvah will provide A. with a supportive group of peers, each struggling with their own challenges; a positive bar mitzvah experience that will provide him with a warm community in which to thrive, and strong positive memories which he can hold onto in moments of doubt and weakness.