

SHINSHINIM

2025-2026

HOST FAMILY GUIDEBOOK



Jewish Federation®
OF GREATER ROCHESTER



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הסוכנות היהודית
לארץ ישראל
THE JEWISH AGENCY
FOR ISRAEL

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Thank you! Toda Raba! תודה רבה

We are thrilled you have chosen to host a ShinShin in your home. Opening your home to a ShinShin will no doubt bring great rewards to your entire family. Past host families regard this as one of the most enriching experiences they have ever had and express that they feel they have not only gained a new family member but have also gained a whole new understanding of what it's like to be an Israeli. Host families play a vital role in the success of the ShinShinim program. Host parents and siblings provide a great deal of support to the ShinShinim and help them transition to living and working in our community.

The following material is intended to answer basic questions and provide some guidance to help you make the most of this opportunity. If you have questions, and you will, please do not hesitate to reach out to Michal Spivak, ShinShinim Program Director or any of the other contacts listed on the previous page.

Who are the ShinShinim?

The ShinShinim program is a partnership between the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester and the Jewish Agency for Israel and is a part of our Partnership2Gether (P2G) program between Rochester and Modi'in, Israel. The program seeks to bring contemporary Israeli life to the Rochester Jewish community by bringing post-high school young adults to Rochester for a year of service to the community.

ShinShinim are young Israeli leaders who defer their army service for one year to volunteer in communities around the globe. Our new ShinShinim, Yael, Itai, Nadav and Maya, will arrive in Rochester in early September 2025 for eleven and a half months of service, including two months at our JCC summer camps. They were carefully chosen from hundreds of candidates after a lengthy and thorough selection process which evaluated candidates' personality traits, creativity, interpersonal skills, knowledge of Israeli culture, fluency in English, and much more.

What will they be doing?

The ShinShinim will be a living bridge between our Rochester community and Israel. They will serve as informal educators and facilitators at synagogues and day schools, for youth movements, supplementary schools, other Jewish agencies and organizations, and several public schools in our community. Depending on where they are working, they will share about Israel and Israeli culture, about Jewish identity, Jewish celebrations, and life in Israel in general. In addition, they will help create community wide programs about Israel. A typical weekly schedule for the ShinShinim is included in this manual, however please note that the ShinShinim's schedule may be adjusted as conditions and needs change. We recommend reviewing your ShinShin's particular schedule together with him/her to help them get settled and help you and your family understand their time commitments.

The ShinShinim will meet at the Jewish Federation twice per week for program planning as well as professional development (PD) sessions run by the ShinShinim Program Director.

Sample Weekly Schedule

Time	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Morning	Synagogue/ Supplementary School	JCC	Planning in Pairs	Federation Planning/ PD Day	Public School	Preschool	D A Y O F F
Afternoon	Community Programs/ Free Time	JCC	Jewish Day School	Federation Planning/ PD Day	Public Schools	Jewish Day School	
Early Evening	Chabad CTeen	Youth Program	Synagogue/ Supplementary School	Synagogue/ Supplementary School	Community Programming		

Becoming a Host Family

To be considered for hosting a ShinShin, you must complete a Host Family application available on the Federation website. Please complete and submit this short online questionnaire. Throughout the application there will be questions related to Jewish home observances, schedules, pets, dietary practices, etc. Please know there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. We are looking for ALL types of homes and families. We need this information to provide the best match for our ShinShinim.

Once we review your application, a Jewish Federation staff person will contact you to make arrangements to interview you. Before making a decision, a committee member will meet with you in person to further discuss the program and the role of host families. A requirement of the program is that we visit your home and see the room where the ShinShin will be housed to make sure that it is a good fit. As a final step in the process, Host Family decisions will be contingent upon the adult family members passing a background check.

Host Family Criteria:

- ShinShinim will be placed in warm, loving, Jewish homes of ALL backgrounds.
- Family members should have time to dedicate to spending with the ShinShin. Regular family meals and activities are very important.
- Consider your family’s schedule and when you are available to include the ShinShin as part of your family. The ShinShin will be VERY busy and involved in the community but the host family experience is a major component of the mission of the program.

- The ShinShin must have a dedicated bedroom that is not used for other family needs (the family computer, the family TV, tutoring, etc.). It is preferred that the bedroom be a guest room or other unoccupied space so that the ShinShin is not displacing a member of the family. Additional private space, such as a bathroom or living area is a plus, but not required. No basement rooms are allowed unless there is an accessible exit from the basement.
- The home must be a non-smoking, non-vaping environment.
- The ShinShin must have access to the internet and Wi-Fi.
- Host families ideally will have school age children at home. It is also very helpful, although not required, that host parents have some experience with teenagers.

Background Check

As the final step in the Host Family selection process, all adults over the age of 18 in your household will be subject to a background check. The Jewish Federation conducts background checks using a third-party organization called National Crime Search. You will receive a request to authorize the search and to provide needed personal information. The safety and well-being of our ShinShinim are of the utmost importance to the Federation and we appreciate your willingness to comply with this request.

If you are selected as a Host Family

Federation staff will introduce you to your ShinShin prior to his/her arrival. You will be provided with his/her email address, phone number, and other means for you to connect. It would be ideal to contact the ShinShin and his/her family before the ShinShin moves in. It is very reassuring for their parents to get to know the people their son/daughter will be living with. Pictures of you and your family are greatly appreciated.

Once they move in, the ShinShin will become a part of your family and household. Be sure to show them where things are located and how things work. We encourage you to treat them as members of your family. They must live by the rules of your home and we encourage you to speak candidly about how your family life runs.

Please remember these are young adults who have been chosen for their maturity, skills and considerable experience. We expect and communicate to the ShinShinim that they be respectful of all household rules and responsibilities. Please note that the ShinShinim do not have curfews but they may need reminders to be considerate of family's schedules. As with American teenagers, the ShinShinim may start their social evening much later than we do. Though they have busy schedules, we encourage you to include them in your family's outings/activities and find the time each week when you can enjoy quality time together.

Living Space

As a host parent you are a caregiver seeing to it that your ShinShin is properly housed, fed and protected from harm. You will need to provide them with their own bedroom with a door that can close for privacy and easy access to a bathroom. Private space is important. Please ensure that your ShinShin has personal space, and that their bedroom is not used for other purposes that have the potential to infringe on their privacy. It is also best that this is a spare or guest bedroom so that the ShinShin will not be displacing any other family members. The ShinShinim need to have a bedroom with easy access to an exit, which excludes most basements and attics. Before you can be approved to host a ShinShin, a member of the ShinShinim Host Family committee will come by to visit your home and see the room where the ShinShin would be housed to make sure that it is a good fit and will answer any questions you may have about the program.

Finances

The ShinShinim receive a monthly stipend from the Jewish Federation. They also receive a laptop, cell phone and data plan and will be supplied with winter coats/outerwear. The Host Family is expected to feed and house the ShinShin, it is also recommended that the host family provide basic toiletries (soap, toothpaste, shampoo, toilet paper), and we encourage you to discuss this with your ShinShin when they arrive.

The ShinShinim are here to volunteer, and their visas do not allow them to work for pay (though this applies to ShinShinim who are American citizens as well). They are not allowed to babysit or tutor. Beyond that, the ShinShinim will have very busy schedules volunteering in our community, and any available free time that they have should be time for them to relax and recharge.

Transportation

The ShinShinim will be provided with two leased cars and car insurance paid for by the Jewish Federation. The Jewish Federation will also arrange for the ShinShinim to receive driving lessons when they first arrive and at the beginning of the winter season, to familiarize them with NYS laws and driving conditions. Rides are always appreciated, particularly during the winter months but not expected.

It is important to note that the ShinShinim are not permitted to transport anyone under the age of 18 in their cars. Furthermore, the ShinShinim are not permitted to drive the Federation leased cars outside of city limits without prior consent from the ShinShinim Program Director.

Health Insurance

The ShinShinim will have health insurance coverage through David Shield, arranged by the Jewish Agency for Israel. If your ShinShin needs a doctor or a dentist, you can take them to your own, if that option is available. Please check that your physician accepts the ShinShin's health Ins. first. If

not, the Jewish Federation has a list of doctors and dentists who are willing to provide the ShinShinim medical and dental services when needed. You and your ShinShin will be provided with this list. If you have concerns about your ShinShin's health, please contact the ShinShinim Program Director or a member of the ShinShinim committee. Please follow the following guidelines:

- Encourage the ShinShin to talk to you, when he/she feels unwell.
- In the case of any serious or contagious illness, the Federation contact person must be informed as soon as possible due to the ShinShin's close involvement with the community.
- In the case of a medical emergency, please take the ShinShin to the emergency room, and contact the Federation contact person as soon as possible.
- If your dentist or family doctor is willing to see the ShinShin, or if you take the ShinShin to one of the physicians on the Fed on call list, please notify the Federation staff person of this decision.
- Additionally, in case your ShinShin needs to see a specialist, please let the Federation know as soon as possible and whether you may be able to help get them an appointment with the type of specialist that may be required.
- In the case of COVID-19, please consult with the ShinShinim Program Director re Federation's protocols at the time.

Food

Food and shared meals are an integral part of the cultural and family experience. As host parents, this is especially important to the bond you will develop with your ShinShin. Please include them when possible in family meals and outings. Please explain the rules and dynamics of your kitchen: whether you keep kosher, if anyone in the family has any allergies and/or other dietary restrictions, who cooks the meals, if they are expected to do their own dishes, etc.

While the ShinShinim do their best to be home as often as possible, they do have very busy schedules and as such, will not be able to join you for dinner every evening. We recommend you sit down with your ShinShin on a weekly basis to discuss his/her schedule. Friday nights are typically spent with the host family, but there will be times when they may have to accept other invitations from members of the community. These invitations will be coordinated by a volunteer from the ShinShinim committee. In the event that they are working late or if you choose to go out to dinner without them, please ensure that there is food for him/her to eat and that he/she is comfortable preparing the food him/herself.

It is up to the host family to discuss with the ShinShinim who will be making lunches. If your kids make their own lunches, feel free to let the ShinShin make their own lunch. Make sure they feel comfortable making it. Again, treat the ShinShinim the same as your own children. If a parent or a housekeeper makes lunches for your children, have them do the same for the ShinShin.

Please remember the ShinShinim are 18 years old and generally eat quite a bit. To avoid embarrassing or uncomfortable situations regarding food, please ensure you maintain open communication right from the beginning.

House Rules

The ShinShinim do not have a curfew. However, they are told that they must be respectful of the house rules and to be considerate of their families' schedules. The general guideline is that they should be home no later than 12 midnight on weeknights, and 1 am on weekends. Please note that there are evenings when the ShinShinim will be working late at their institutions or with their partners. As the ShinShin is part of your family, they will need a key (or code) to your house and the code to the alarm (if applicable).

It is up to the host family who does the laundry. Please discuss with your ShinShin and ensure that they know how to do laundry and work the machines in your home. If a housekeeper is doing laundry for other members of the family, it would be recommended that the ShinShin's laundry is done for him/her as well. We encourage families to treat the ShinShinim as another member of their family.

Please refer to the Discussion Checklist on page 10 of this manual for a useful guide to reviewing and discussing other rules in your household.

Cell Phones

Every ShinShin receives a cell phone from the Jewish Federation and a monthly data plan that includes texting and voicemail. Their cell phones are critical tools for communication and safety. It is important that you provide your ShinShin contact information for the whole family and that you have their contact information as well.

Time Management

Some host families have found that the ShinShin is so busy with community work and preparations that it becomes a challenge to find times when the host family and the ShinShin are both free. Plan a time to sit down with your ShinShin and review their weekly schedule and then identify and designate specific times during the week that you both know you will be able to connect with each other. Ask your ShinShin for his/her schedule and post it where you can check it as needed. We view spending time with the host family as an important component of the mission of the program. Please communicate any concerns around this issue to the ShinShinim Program Director or any member of the ShinShinim committee. Please be open and honest. We value your feedback and wish to address any issues as soon as they arise.

Holidays

Holidays can be a difficult time for the ShinShinim. Jewish holidays are ingrained in the national culture of Israel and it is just not the same here in the US. Even the most secular Israeli usually has a Friday night Shabbat dinner and or Saturday Shabbat lunch with family. Holidays inevitably bring a longing for family and friends. Many holidays which may be considered "less important" in America are significant in Israel: Lag B'Omer, Purim, Yom Hazikaron, etc. Before a

holiday, share information about how your family observes the holiday with your ShinShin. Use this as an opportunity to learn more about his/her family and their customs. Encourage them to teach you and share with you about their traditions or family recipes. Perhaps incorporate some of your ShinShin's customs into your family's observances this year. Please use sensitivity and be sure to include them and show them that you understand and care!

Cultural Differences

There are tremendous similarities in culture and values between Israelis and North Americans. However, there are also significant cultural differences. Be aware and encourage your ShinShin to talk about how they are feeling. They may experience culture shock and will need your help and guidance to work through their feelings. Some of them have traveled previously, but for some this is the first time they will be away from home. Please be sensitive to any issues that arise from this. At times, you will act as a cultural advisor who may need to explain behaviors that seem odd and help your ShinShin avoid any conflicts that may arise from misinterpretations or misunderstandings. The recognition of differences and bonding based upon what we share is what **living bridges** are all about!

Your ShinShin may experience periods of worry or anxiety about not being in Israel while their family and friends are serving in the army. This can be especially difficult during periods of tension in the region. It may be helpful to stay current on Israeli affairs, so that you can help offer reassurance. Websites like Ynetnews, the Jerusalem Post, Israel Hayom or JFNA's and/or Makom's website are some good sources of accurate information on what is happening in Israel. Just as you would with your own teen, please reach out and engage in conversation.

As difficult as it can be for a North American teen to talk about their feelings, imagine that challenge magnified by the limitations of trying to express yourself in a foreign language. Remember that speaking in English is stressful and exhausting at first. Don't be surprised if your ShinShin chooses to go to sleep early in the beginning. Please help your own children understand the ShinShin's occasional need for privacy and rest. Host parents have commented that it often takes some time for things to come together. Hosting takes some effort, but the experience is richly rewarding.

Vacations

If your family is going on vacation you may include your ShinShin in the trip (domestic only), if you deem it appropriate and feasible. However, you must consult with both the ShinShinim Program Director and their Worksite Supervisors about your plans well in advance to determine your ShinShin's availability. If it is not feasible for your ShinShin to join you, short term alternate hosting arrangements will be made for the ShinShin. **The ShinShin may not stay alone in your house while you are on vacation.** The ShinShinim will have a scheduled vacation to return to Israel for a 2-week break normally during the February break. Depending on COVID-19 guidelines at the time, they may be required to quarantine upon arrival in Israel, and their return to the US.

Due to Visa & immigration laws, the ShinShinim are not permitted to travel outside of the contiguous United States. This includes Canada, Mexico, and non-US Territory Islands in the Caribbean. If your vacation is to any of these locations, your ShinShinim may not join you and will need to be placed in short term housing.

Mental Health/emotional support

The mental and emotional well-being of our ShinShinim is top priority. This is even more important in our post October 7th reality. Host parents are encouraged to be attentive and sensitive to the needs of their ShinShin, to check in with them and discuss their feelings and emotions openly. If you sense that something isn't right, or feel that intervention is necessary, please reach out to the ShinShinim program director to discuss. There are several resources available at our disposal, including JAFI's social worker, professionals from Jewish Family Service, and other qualified local mental health professionals.

Drugs, Alcohol and Smoking

The Jewish Federation does not tolerate illegal drug or alcohol use. All ShinShinim have provided written and verbal assurance that they should expect to be sent home should they violate this rule. As role models within the community, they must also refrain from smoking, vaping, and/or tobacco use. Call the ShinShinim Program Director or any other ShinShinim program contact person immediately should this be an issue.

Dating Policy

As the ShinShinim are young adults, a few of their relationships may have the potential to develop romantic intentions. The ShinShinim have been made aware that the legal age of consent in the United States is 18 and that they are not under any circumstances permitted to become romantically involved with a minor. They understand that doing so is a crime and will result in their immediate dismissal from the program.

They are not permitted to become romantically involved with any member of your household. During their stay here they are a member of your family, with respect to all the same boundaries. They are to respect your home and the trust you place in them. They are not permitted to engage in any sexual activities in your home, nor are they permitted to have overnight guests in your home.

They have been reminded to remain mindful of the distracting nature of relationships and to remember that they are here first and foremost to volunteer as Israeli Shlichim (emissaries). They have also been instructed to confide in you should a relationship ever make them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Please be there for them during this time. Should you have any concerns or questions regarding this issue, please reach out to the ShinShinim Program Director.

Keys to Hosting:

- Make regular time to share the details of your life and be interested in learning about the ShinShin's life and interests outside of the program. It is important to also ask them how things are going each day at school and at synagogue.
- Be available to lend a helping hand, offer counsel, and give an occasional hug.
- Maintain your normal schedule and lifestyle. Encourage your ShinShin to participate as much as they can but recognize that they have incredibly busy schedules.
- Be open, sensitive, respectful, and keep all lines of communication open.
- Your ShinShin is family now, treat them as you would your own son or daughter.

Please review and complete the following discussion and safety checklist with your ShinShin upon his/her arrival in your home.

Discussion Checklist

Kitchen, Food, and other general information

- Discuss the level of Kashrut (dietary laws) observance in the home, and the Kashrut observance of the ShinShin.
- If there is an allergy, explain to the ShinShin what is ok and what is not.
- Are there any particular meals during the week at which you would like the ShinShin to be home?
- What time is dinner? Does the family eat dinner together? How do you want the ShinShin to communicate with you about their presence at dinner? By what time do they need to notify you if they will or will not be home for dinner?
- Is there anything the ShinShin would like you to buy in terms of food? Would he/she like to come with you to the supermarket to choose some of the food?
- Find out what foods the ShinShin likes/dislikes.
- What are the expectations regarding helping clear, loading the dishwasher, food consumption outside of the kitchen/dining area?
- Is the ShinShin welcome to go in the refrigerator/cupboards? Is there a system for 'reporting' food consumed for a shopping list?

Your ShinShin will need to take a lunch most days. Please make sure to clarify a system around this with the ShinShin. Will you make it when you are making lunch for your other children? Do you want the ShinShin to make his/her own lunch? Either system is fine but please make sure it is communicated clearly to the ShinShin.

It is important to show your guest around and explain particularities such as where spare towels and paper goods are kept, how appliances work etc. Remember that many of these young people have never lived in North America and there may be significant differences.

General Household Responsibilities

- How are household responsibilities divided in your house and what are your expectations of the ShinShin (laundry, garbage, general cleaning)?
- Is there someone employed in your home that does certain household tasks? If so, please describe that person's role.

Scheduling and Communication

Please spend some time sharing and explaining household scheduling. If the ShinShin or the family's schedule changes weekly, please discuss how everyone will continue to update one another about schedule changes. Some issues to consider:

- What is the family schedule in the morning? How will the ShinShin fit into it?
- Please discuss the weekly time in your schedules that you will spend together. The ShinShinim are busy, and so setting this time in advance will be helpful.
- Do you have a family bulletin board for messages? Can you perhaps put a calendar up on the fridge?
- What would be the best way to give updates and or communicate that they are invited to a meal at another family from the community?
- What is the easiest and most comfortable way to communicate a late-night arrival home? (if they are running later than 11pm)
- What is the best way for the ShinShin to reach members of the family during the day – cell phone? Text? Etc.

Other considerations

- What are the rules of your stereo, television, computer and internet usage, use of cell phone during meals?
- If the house has an alarm and they trigger it by accident, who do they call?

General safety

- List of emergency phone numbers should be available to ShinShin including contact info for family. It must be posted in the host family home and provided to the Community Coordinator.
- Review the use of 911 as the first call in any emergency.

Home safety

- Home must have functioning smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Make sure ShinShin understands home escape plan in the event of fire.
- Make sure ShinShin understands exits and functioning of locks, alarm system.
- Make sure ShinShin understands what to do if electricity goes out- flashlights, generator, etc.

Kitchen safety

- Make sure ShinShin understands how to properly and safely operate kitchen appliances including microwave, oven, and cooktop.
- Make sure ShinShin understands how to unplug or turn off appliances appropriately.
- Make sure ShinShin knows where fire extinguisher is located and how to operate it.
- Discuss with ShinShin any restrictions on kitchen use if they are alone in the house.

Fireplace / Wood burning safety

- No ShinShin should operate a fireplace or wood burning stove in your home without host family supervision.

Bedroom safety

- If the ShinShin is in a basement bedroom, there must be an exit to the outside in the basement.
- If the ShinShin is in a basement bedroom, there must be a carbon Monoxide detector.
- Make sure the ShinShin understands how to safely operate electric blankets, space heaters.
- NO candles, matches, lighters should be used in ShinShin bedroom. No smoking anywhere, anytime.
- Make sure ShinShinim knows what to do with personal trash.

Bathroom Safety

- Make sure the ShinShin understands how to safely operate any appliances in the bathroom.
- Make sure the ShinShin understands how to turn off water in the event of a plugged toilet.

In Conclusion

Once again, thank you for generously offering to host one of our ShinShinim. We are grateful to you for opening your home and hearts.

Host families play a vital role in the success of the ShinShinim Program. Host parents and siblings are supportive guides in helping the ShinShin navigate the transition to living and working in our community. The challenges your ShinShin may face include finding their place in a new group dynamic, refining their command of English, understanding and adapting to American culture and the local Jewish community. All of these challenges can be tempered by open and frank dialogue. When there are problems that seem institutional, please reach out immediately to the ShinShinim Program Director at the Federation.

Similarly, if issues arise within your family, or with the ShinShin, being open and honest about thoughts and feelings is very important. Every community has a “backup family” who is available should unanticipated circumstances arise that make it necessary to consider moving the ShinShin to a different family. Contact the ShinShinim Program Director or any of the other individuals listed under Contacts for assistance if needed.

We hope you find the information in this guide helpful. The Federation’s ShinShinim Program provides a rare gift to our Rochester community by giving community members of all ages the opportunity to develop a close personal relationship with Israelis and Israel.

Our past ShinShinim have shared that bonding with their host families was the highlight of their experience here in Rochester. Likewise, past host families have shared that hosting a ShinShin in their home has been a joy for their family and has greatly enriched their lives and strengthened their connection with Israel. They feel that they have gained not only a new family member in their ShinShin but a whole new Israeli family as well. If you are selected to host, you will be asked for your thoughts and reflections on the experience. Host families provide important insights and your input will be greatly appreciated.

Host Family Policy Guide Acknowledgment

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the policies and guidelines presented in this Host Family Guidebook and the ShinShinim Guidelines which I have also received and I agree to abide by requirements set forth in both documents.

I also acknowledge and agree that our family will provide a warm, welcoming and secure home to our assigned ShinShin, and will host the ShinShin in accordance with the policies and guidance provided in this Host Family Guidebook and the ShinShinim Guidelines.

On behalf of myself and my immediate family, including any minor children, I further release The Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester from any and all liability associated with our family's participation in the ShinShinim program, including but not limited to, theft, loss of property, property damage, and potential or actual exposure to COVID-19 as a result of the ShinShin's residence in the home.

Full Name of Host Parent 1 (Please print)

Signature

Date

Full Name of Host Parent 2 (Please print)

Signature

Date