

# ATHLETICS IN OUR SCHOOLS

*“Sports is the only entertainment where, no matter how many times you go back, you never know the ending.”*

Neil Simon

One of the things that unites many Jews is a love of sports—watching games, rooting for the home team, attending a “Jewish Heritage Day,” buying from the kosher hot dog stand, and more. Participating in sports appeals to us in so many ways, for their health benefits, the thrill of competition, spending time with friends or making new ones. The pieces here tell stories of different sports and athletic endeavors at Jewish day schools. They also reveal the power and potential that sports can exert for the good.



## BUILDING PEACE THROUGH PYRAMIDS: PARTNERING WITH FERGUSON TO CREATE CIRCUS SHOW

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I had never been to Ferguson. Neither had the students from our suburban St. Louis Jewish day school, even though it’s a mere 20 minutes away. The events of 2014 made it clear that we needed to change that.

When your city is torn apart after the killing of an unarmed black teen by a white police officer, riots and protests, how do you involve Jewish day school students in tikkun?

In our case, we put on a circus. Seriously. We built “Peace Through Pyramids” in a wildly creative project facilitated by Circus Harmony, a social circus school. Their mission is to use the teaching and performing of circus arts to motivate social change. With the support of our Jewish Federation, students from Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School joined with children from Ferguson last spring to learn circus arts and create a show together.

Our plan was to build bridges between communities and to give our students the opportunity to be part of the solution. Little did we know that this Peace through Pyramids Project would deeply impact not only the children, but their audiences and parents as well. The three circus shows, performed at a Jewish community event, at the Ferguson library, and at the Circus Harmony center in downtown St. Louis, lifted spirits up at a time when there were feelings of little hope. It provided a visual rainbow of children coming together. It made people smile and cheer loud and long, and see different possibilities for our future.

The parents and their relationships were our greatest unanticipated surprise. During rehearsals, they built relationships of their own—chatting about the weather, their children and, well, racism. They became Facebook friends and continue to like, share and connect with each other. As I write this, the children and parents are together again for a Peace through Pyramids reunion retreat at a local camp.

We’ve all faced the same challenge at some point. The world presents us with a tragedy or crisis that is not appropriate to share with our younger students. And yet, our Jewish values drive us to take action. Our students did not need to know the details about the crisis in Ferguson to help St. Louis heal.

At Mirowitz, we are always sending the message that tikkun is not just for adults. Even our youngest children have the power to create a better world. When they see something that doesn’t sit right with them, we encourage them to make it better—whether it’s a mess in the classroom or hunger in the world. Circus arts, a wild combination of the physical team work that comes with sports, and the exhilaration that results from producing a show, provided us with an avenue for tikkun that even a kid can do. During this dark time in St. Louis our students donned sparkly costumes and makeup, dragged out mats and juggling balls, and defied the gravity that was weighing down our community by supplying St. Louis with contagious joy. Indeed, they made peace through pyramids.