Melissa Gerr (Host) ([00:01](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1.77)):

You're listening to *Pull Up A Chair* stories from 100 years of creating community and Jewish Baltimore, a podcast created by The Associated Jewish Federation of Baltimore.

Batsheva ([00:13](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=13.02)):

I remember in kindergarten, the teacher holding up a card and it had the word C A T and everyone shouted cat and I had no idea how they knew that that's a cat.

Melissa Gerr (Host) ([00:38](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=38.73)):

Welcome back to *Pull Up A Chair*. I'm your host, Melissa Gerr. Each month, we explore a different theme that illustrates how for more than 100 years and counting The Associated Jewish Federation of Baltimore has been a place to turn to in times of struggle or celebration and for assistance and connection. You'll probably hear some familiar voices as we laugh, reminisce and learn a thing or two about what it means to build and be a part of a strong Jewish community.

For this episode we meet, Batsheva. Batsheva grew up with a learning disability, but thanks to Shemesh, an agency of The Associated, she earned a graduate degree and today teaches kindergarteners Hebrew and English at a Jewish day school. The extra care and attention, Batsheva received from her Shemesh teachers set her on a path for success. The tools they taught her are tools she still uses to this day.

Batsheva ([01:33](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=93.84)):

So when I was in elementary school, I got pulled out in the morning and the afternoon to really work on reading English. I was also learning how to read Hebrew. And then as I got older, it shifted more towards, okay, this is where it is. And let's give coping skills and figure out, you know, different methods or way to help succeed in life. So whether it's Google translate, audio books, spellchecker, different things like that to help me succeed. And then I went to college and got my master's and use the tools to help me advocate for myself outside [the] real world.

Melissa Gerr (Host) ([02:15](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=135.9)):

Batsheva draws from her experience with Shemesh to create a supportive, nurturing, successful classroom for her own students.

Batsheva ([02:23](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=143.76)):

Working with Shemesh really has impacted my life because once I was already in 11th grade, I decided I wanted to give back and help other children who struggled. So that took me through college, where I got my BA in special education, elementary education and Judaic studies. I really wanted to be an advocate for students who were struggling in Jewish schools and help them get the support that they needed. I went on to get my master's in curriculum development with English as a second language endorsement. And I really feel with all those skills that I'm able to be an advocate for my students. I'm able to work in a Jewish school and I have the knowledge of teaching English as a second language. So when I'm teaching Hebrew, it's their second language and I could use the things I've learned in my master's school. I have the knowledge of special education. I have the knowledge of elementary education, and I could use all those things to really help the child in front of me.

Melissa Gerr (Host) ([03:28](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=208.48)):

Though the work was challenging, Batsheva has fond memories of her Shemesh instructors who offered their patience, understanding and support during her years at Bais Yaakov.

Batsheva ([03:38](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=218.47)):

The teacher who works with the middle school students. I worked with her for three years in a row. It's really to her credit because she sat with me every single day. And I did not like it at all. Then writing and shaving cream and writing in the air and they- doing the same workbook again and again. And when I didn't master that, the a M E S of the sound and we couldn't move on and I'm still in touch with the head of the learning center in the high school. She emails me, you know, around chagim time. And that's really nice to ask how I'm doing it about my family. Um, and then Mrs. Friedman, obviously she was actually my speech therapist when I was five. So for her, you know, she's very proud of how far I've come. Um, so it's just nice to know that I have people rooting for me and cheering me on and supporting me.

Melissa Gerr (Host) ([04:31](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=271.27)):

Advocating for herself is one of the important tools Batsheva learned. She models that behavior for her own classes now and believes it's critical for students of all ages to learn how to speak up.

Batsheva ([04:43](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=283.78)):

I think it's very important for students to learn how to advocate for themselves. When I was student teaching in middle school, learning disabled population, um, who students were getting pulled out just like the Shemesh model. And I really worked with them and told them like, you need to advocate for themselves because their parents are not going to be able to help them once they're in college or master's school or beyond in the workforce, but even in elementary school, even in kindergarten. And I tell my class all the time, they need to advocate when, one student comes over and says, this kid can't open their water bottle. I say, that could be to come tell me they need it. They have a mouth they're able to thank God talk. And they, if something's a matter, they need to come tell me. So I don't think it's anything to do with a learning disability, not a learning disability. You need to advocate for yourself. You need to be able to stand up and tell someone you need help and ask for the help that you need

Melissa Gerr (Host) ([05:38](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=338.62)):

Drawing from her background as a student with learning differences and her experience as a teacher, Batsheva offers this advice.

Batsheva ([05:46](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=346.21)):

My advice to parents is to believe in your child, know that they will be successful in whatever they choose to do, and just constantly believe in them and show them that you care about them and love them and support them, even if it's challenging for them. Um, and then when they're not around to advocate for them and tell the school that they need help give them the support they need. If homework is challenging for you to do with them, get a tutor, pay the extra money. It's not easy, everyone struggles, but really get them the help that they need. But in front of them, tell them that you believe in them, you know, they're going to do great and really build that self-esteem. Um, and then for teachers to believe in your students and to really push them and help them succeed and think outside the box and try not to make things easier for them. Cause they, they don't need it easier. They just need it different.

Melissa Gerr (Host) ([06:43](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=403.46)):

Batsheva says it's hard to imagine what her life would be like, had she not had access to the educational support Shemesh provides.

Batsheva ([06:52](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=412.04)):

I really, really, really am thankful to The Associated and Shemesh because I think without a doubt, like I wouldn't be Frum probably, I don't think I would have been able to succeed in the Bais Yaakov setting. Um, my English classes weren't modified at all, but the way that the Bais Yaakov structure is set up is that your tests were in Hebrew. I couldn't understand the Hebrew. So then you needed to be modified. So I don't think I would have succeeded in the Bais Yaakov setting without Shemesh. And then I would have gone to public school and had a totally different life. Um, so I'm so, so, so appreciative to Shemesh and The Associated because I, I do think I am where I am today because of Shemesh. That I am able to give back and work enough from school. And I have two beautiful children and a family, a husband, and I'm so appreciative. Like I have been where I am today without them.

Melissa Gerr (Host) ([08:01](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/ZO63Q3hQguS6KD7dMbysynSjUHz23UpnyGUgOkPzhdJHwHpJVFF-DtIJQIaKeGqhMbrg_SkX5J_YyrCPYiGi-xvjNfo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=481.01)):

Thanks for listening to *Pull Up A Chair*. I'm your host, Melissa Gerr. This podcast was produced for you by The Associated Jewish Federation of Baltimore from east Baltimore to forest park, from Pikesville to Randallstown and beyond The Associated has been there for the community every step of the way. Don't miss the next episode with more stories from your friends and neighbors in Baltimore's Jewish community. Thanks for listening. You've been listening to *Pull Up A Chair* stories from 100 years of creating community and Jewish, Baltimore. It's part of The Associated Centennial celebration.