

Kids Earn Israel a Bomb-Sniffing Dog

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Children see dogs as cuddly pets, walking companions and loyal friends.

But those enrolled in the religious school at Shir Ami-Bucks County Jewish Congregation in Newtown have come to understand that there are other crucial roles these animals can play.

Over the course of the academic year, such students raised \$10,000 to train a bomb-sniffing dog for use in Israeli counterterrorist purposes.

The animal was purchased through an agency called "Pups for Peace," which is based in California. According to the organization's Web site, \$10,000 covers the cost of buying an animal -- usually a German Shepherd, Belgian Malinois or Labrador Retriever -- from Europe, and putting it through a rigorous four- to six-month training process.



Graduated canines are then stationed in malls, outdoor markets and bus stations around the country, where they work to divert potential terror activity and sniff out danger.

Rabbi Eric Goldberg, director of education at Shir Ami, said that the religious school participates in an annual tzedakah project, with students in kindergarten all the way through grade 12 collecting jointly on behalf of a specific charity.

This year, the congregation choose Pups for Peace because it provides a kid-friendly link to Israel, explained the rabbi.

"Kids generally love animals, so it provides our students with a way to really connect to Israel," he said.

Goldberg added that the project also teaches students the value of pikuach nefesh -- the Jewish imperative to save a life -- as well as a sense of ahavat Yisrael, or love for Israel.

The majority of the \$10,000, he explained, was raised in small increments; since September, students have made contributions during Hebrew-school class, and have also collected change in boxes outside the religious school.

Fifth-grader Kate Prell, for example, said that she "tried to bring in a dollar or two" saved up from babysitting and chores every week.

"I thought it was a very good cause," said this student at Goodnoe Elementary School in Newtown. "Israel needs our help."

The rabbi said that he was impressed by such commitment.

"First and foremost, I think it shows that our kids can do anything they put their minds to," he said. "It shows what you can do if you have a cause."