



## President's prize to former Londoner

By Charlotte Hall?

British-born immigrant Michael Segal is one of 12 volunteers who will receive an award for their work from President Moshe Katsav next week.

Segal, 58, who has worked with blind and visually-impaired infants for 20 years, will receive the President's Award for Volunteerism in Jerusalem on Wednesday.

Born in London, Segal immigrated to Israel with his wife Marsha and their two children in 1976. While working as a manager of orange groves and living on Moshav Bet Yehoshua near Netanya in 1985, Segal answered a newspaper ad seeking volunteers for Eliya, an organization helping blind and visually-impaired babies and toddlers prepare to enter the mainstream education system.

In 1987, after having two more children, Segal became chairman of Eliya, and in 1991 he took very early retirement from his agricultural work to become a full-time volunteer with the organization, taking on the role of executive director.

Eliya ([www.eliyausa.org](http://www.eliyausa.org)), originally set up in 1982 to help one group of six children, now provides full-week specialist programs to 90 children in Petah Tikva, Be'er Sheva and Jerusalem. In addition to preparing blind and visually-impaired under-threes for mainstream kindergartens and future schooling, Eliya has created a second stream, providing programs for children who are visually-impaired in addition to having severe developmental difficulties.

As the children learn primarily through speech and touch - necessitating a large professional staff - the organization has more than 100 part- and full-time employees, plus 60 volunteers, and operates on a budget of NIS 7.5 million, 40 percent of which must be raised in the private sector.

Segal says his volunteerism "stems from a feeling that everybody should try and do something for the community."

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