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Your Monthly MetroWest E-Newsletter

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Voice of UJC Leadership

Moving in a New Direction

by Ruth Steckelman, Chair, Local Allocations Committee

On July 1st, 2008 I became the chair of the Local Allocations Committee, familiarly known as the LAC. Our mandate was to oversee the annual allocations given by UJC to its beneficiary agencies and service providers. The process had been in place for several years: the LAC reviewed yearly budgets and met with allocation recipients to discuss their needs on a yearly basis. Once the amount of available dollars was determined, based on the current UJC campaign, the LAC met to recommend the allotment of these funds, primarily unrestricted and in a (hopefully) even-handed manner "across the board." This was my LAC. But it didn't last very long.

Soon after the summer of 2008, in September to be precise, the financial world imploded along with the UJC Campaign and the funding dollars it generated. As a result, UJC leadership began to rethink the allocations process in order to determine how best to distribute the available dollars in light of the shrinking campaign. Our focus shifted, our criteria changed and a new mandate evolved. In light of the shrinking dollars available to our beneficiaries our approach was redirected to limit unrestricted funding and earmark our dollars for those programs and services that most benefited our Jewish community.

And that is what we are doing. We are in the process of developing new strategies to deal with this approach. We have asked our beneficiaries to evaluate their agencies in terms of the programming they provide to the Jewish community. We want to know which programs are primarily directed to the Jewish population based on the demographics of age, location and economic need. We want to know what programmatic needs for this population are unmet due to budgetary constraints. In short, our focus has changed from allocating unrestricted dollars to be spent at the discretion of the recipients to one where programmatic needs will be the primary determiner of where funds will be allocated. Beneficiaries will be encouraged to work together, to develop and share in programs in which more than one entity can participate for the benefit of a greater part of our community. Program appeal is an essential part of our donor approach and it is anticipated that donors will be excited by our new focus and its programmatic results. The allocation of unrestricted funds will still occur but to a far lesser extent than in the past.

We are working hard at developing the roadmap to send our dollars to new and exciting places. We are thinking creatively as well as pragmatically and are encouraging our beneficiaries to do the same. Streamlining expenses by

CAMPAIGN UPDATE

UJC MetroWest raised more than \$50,000 for the Haiti Earthquake relief effort from the MetroWest community within the first ten days of this horrific natural disaster.

sharing costs and programs are but some of the ways that we are thinking “outside” the box and toward new places for our community. We are excited by the challenge and optimistic that our community will indeed be the successful beneficiary of our efforts.

Issues of the Day

How Inclusive Are We?

by Rebecca Wanatick, Community Coordinator, MetroWest ABLE

How Inclusive Are We? This thought provoking question is one that has been posed within MetroWest synagogues for the past few months. In commemoration of National Jewish Disability Awareness Month in February, congregations across MetroWest are providing opportunities to raise awareness and welcome all members in their celebration of MetroWest’s *Shabbat Shalem*, a Shabbat made “whole and complete” by the inclusion of all of its members. Our 2nd Annual Shabbat Shalem celebration will be taking place during the first weekend in February with the goal of supporting meaningful inclusion of individuals with special needs and their families in every aspect of Jewish life. Shabbat Shalem is a program of MetroWest ABLE (Access, Belonging and Life Enrichment for People and Families with Special Needs) and is funded through the UJA MetroWest campaign, the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey and the Bunis-Haller Foundation.

Across MetroWest, congregations are assessing the level of services they provide for individuals with special needs and their families. Through the collaboration of MetroWest ABLE and local synagogues, a self-assessment tool is being developed and circulated among congregational leadership. This tool is designed to elicit conversations about the inclusion of individuals with special needs and their families. A number of synagogues have been proactive through the development of Inclusion Committees that are assessing the needs of their own congregations.

In honor of Shabbat Shalem, MetroWest ABLE is excited to announce *The Synagogue ABLE Challenge Grants*. Funded by UJC MetroWest and The Gary Aidekman Family Foundation and cosponsored by MetroWest ABLE and the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, the challenge grants will provide support for congregations seeking to raise their level of inclusion. The grants will match dollar for dollar support of building enhancements for people with disabilities or services for families supporting those individuals that allow them greater accessibility to synagogue programs. The use of the synagogue self-assessment tool will provide congregations with the critical information necessary to help them best assess their needs in applying for this grant.

Momentum is building in MetroWest to become a community that opens its hearts and all of its doors to those with special needs. Rabbis are joining in the discussion of what it means to be an inclusive congregation, and assisting in the development of “ABLE Awards” that recognize congregations that adopt best practices of inclusion in their physical plant, practice, and attitude. Educators and teen shadows in our religious schools are participating in trainings to allow them to better work with our children in inclusive classrooms.



Students at Summit Jewish Community Center pray together.

So we ask ourselves, "How Inclusive Are We?" As partnerships between synagogues, agencies and families are being formed, stories are being shared and excitement is being generated. With our eye on creating a truly inclusive community, we are creating opportunities for those with special needs to fully engage in a meaningful and productive Jewish life. Providing these opportunities benefits everyone, because it is only by including all of its members are we a community that is "whole and complete."

For more information, contact Rebecca Wanatick at rwanatick@ujcnj.org or (973) 929-3129.

Making a Difference

Volunteerism is Tikkun Olam

by Amy Ganz Sadeghi

In our family, there are always many different points of view on any given subject. As in most families, my kids note with relish how different their views are from mine. There is one point on which we do not disagree, however, and that is on volunteering time, skills, and money for tikkun olam (repairing the world).

I consider this a pretty decent accomplishment, especially given life's resource constraints. In recent years I've developed a "diversified portfolio" of community volunteerism.

How did this happen? I planned to return to my marketing career or launch a new one (which I'm

still planning to do) as soon as my kids were in school. But along the way the Federation drafted me, and I haven't looked back. The potential for tikkun olam is everywhere.

It was an honor to represent MetroWest on the National Young Leadership Cabinet. There have been appointments in Women's Department, Young Leadership, on the Board of Trustees, in various allocations committees, on the MetroWest CARES Committee, and for the last year or two, following the venerable Golda Och, of blessed memory, as the Chair of the Maxine Fischer Scholarship Committee. My family constantly hears about how motivating it is to be with people who share the commitment to volunteering in the community.

I am regularly impressed by the attitude of "hineini" (here I am) that permeates the meetings in which I have the privilege of participating. Also, each of the "hats" I wear enhances my ability to understand the community's needs and priorities. Whether it's finding the "how" to pay for the desperately needed transportation services for seniors or exploring "how" to Jewishly educate our children and inculcate in them a love of Israel, I find the journey of being a part of a very committed community to be incredibly satisfying and a major contributor to my personal happiness. It is life-affirming and community-affirming.

Several of the "hats" I sport are worn outside of UJC. One is as Social Action Chair of Congregation Oheb Shalom. At Oheb it seems everyone is engaged in his or her own social action efforts. Our team has been willing to try new things, including a Freedom Seder with the members of a Newark Church who've become social action partners.

This partnership enables us to expand our social action efforts into neighboring communities experiencing tremendous need, and forge a shared tikkun olam experience. It enhances our ability to make a difference (and have our voices heard) in a community that, with notable exceptions, in the last two generations has lost much of its Jewish voice.

These days I'm exploring opportunities in microfinance. Amir Shacham (Director of the UJC Israel office) helped me connect with a loan program in Rishon Le'tzion, one of our sister cities in Israel, which helps Ethiopian immigrants

start businesses. I am particularly interested in helping women become economically independent, whether in Israel, in Newark, or elsewhere. Newark desperately needs attention, and my goal is to help bring microfinance opportunities to this community.

My volunteer work, in and out of the community, is a way of life that opens so many doors and enriches my life. Here's an example. The Holocaust Council's director, Barbara Wind, asked me to drive a neighbor, a survivor, to an event. I said "yes" and picked her up. I met (and my family has had the pleasure of knowing) one of the most remarkable people you could ever know. Our relationship with Nessa Ben Asher has enriched our lives so much, and it's all because when asked, I said "hineini." Nessa has twinned with my son, Jono, for his bar mitzvah, and we've all learned so much from this amazing woman.

There are so many things in this world over which we have no control. But every bit of tikkun olam we do demonstrates our ability to overpower chaos, practice healing, share goodness, and create opportunities for goodwill. That's the real power of purpose, and that's why I keep saying "hineini."

Amy Ganz Sadeghi chairs the Maxine Fischer Scholarship Committee and sits on the UJC local allocations and P2K Steering committees. She lives in Short Hills.

Working Together with Our Partner Agencies

The Jewish Women's Foundation of New Jersey – Supporting Programs for Women and Girls

by Jocelyn Gilman, Director, Jewish Women's Foundation

Even in today's world of so called equality, it seems that women still have to struggle to be heard and find positions of power in the work place, in the political arena, and on the world stage. Yet there are more women controlling more wealth in the U.S. than ever before. Of those in the wealthiest tier of the country, as defined by the I.R.S., 43% are women.

In previous generations women tended to

give to museums, the symphony and colleges; today's female philanthropists often elect to help girls and women in need. Also, as women make the majority of the decisions in the home and nurture the upcoming generation, their impact cannot be underestimated or ignored. Throughout the world, it is the women who are the glue in keeping societies together, more or less in one piece.

Despite these facts, there are still great imbalances in our society. Most top executives around the world and most of those with real political power are often men. For example, the U.S. population is more than 50 percent female, and yet in the 2009 congress, approximately 17 percent of the seats are held by women. New Jersey currently has no women in a nationally elected office.

Today, more than ever, with the economic and social pressures and challenges, it is women who take on greater burdens in the house, sometimes supporting struggling spouses, keeping their children connected to what is important while often holding down a full time job at the same time.

So organizations such as the Jewish Women's Foundation of New Jersey exist to rally women together so that they can become a voice to be heard and a force to be reckoned with. The work of this foundation is to identify needed programs, get the necessary organizations involved and then help seed these programs and try to ensure that they succeed.

"We have made a huge impact in the community" says Jocelyn Gilman, Director the Foundation. "So far in three years of grant making our money has helped create a network for women encouraging and aiding them in the political process. We have supported empowerment programs addressing self esteem, body image issues, education and leadership for girls and women, as well as family and financial independence. A program for job readiness that we funded helped women re-enter the workplace. We have been instrumental in the development of a program that gives legal support to abused women trying to escape the grips of domestic violence, as well as supporting a program which mentors foster girls."

One of our co-chairs, Carol Marcus, commented "Participating in this foundation has been a

fulfilling experience in collaborative giving. Working with some incredibly inspiring women, I have participated in analyzing grant proposals, participating in site visits and being involved in the exciting process of deciding which grants to award. This experience has been exciting and very empowering.”

JWF is an Advisory Council Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation of MetroWest NJ.

Thoughts from MetroWest Rabbis

Why Do People Do What They Do to Help Others?

by Rabbi Donald Rossoff

God said to Elijah, “Go out, and stand upon the mount before the Eternal.” And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and mighty wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Eternal; but God was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but God was not in the earthquake; And after the earthquake a fire; but God was not in the fire; and after the fire, there was a still small voice. — I Kings 19: 11-12

We were all horrified — so remain — by the terrible earthquake in Haiti, seeing the tremendous destruction it created and the immeasurable human loss and suffering it left in its wake. Only those with hearts of stone could be unmoved by this yet unfolding tragedy. As time goes on, the lot of those fortunate enough to receive food and medical care will improve somewhat, while those not so fortunate will continue to die or live in increased misery.

The outpouring of aid from around the world has been inspiring, though not surprising. It is also no surprise to see that aid from Israel, both from the IDF as well as other Israeli NGOs, was swift and remarkably effective, given the difficult logistical and human challenges that faced them. The Israelis bring an unmatched wealth of expertise and devotion, in medicine as well as search and rescue. I have to say I was proud and gratified to watch scenes of Israeli soldiers on CNN, climbing through the rubble and carrying out the trapped. That is the face of

Israel that unfortunately is not seen enough by the world at large.

At times like this, I ask what appears to be a simplistic, naive question: “Why do people do what they do to help others?” People around the world, of all religions and none, have responded with such compassion and generosity — why? One could say that this is simply the right thing to do, which it is. But why is that so simple? Why is it so obvious that people should help people? Why is this mitzvah of being our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers — regardless of who and where they are — seemingly so universal? Why is it that we possess that “altruistic instinct” which social scientists are more and more beginning to identify?

I don’t know for sure, but for me, that instinct is what the Biblical author metaphorized as “the still small voice.” For me, that instinct is, among other things, one of the unique manifestations of the Divine in the human species. It begins to manifest itself with those closest to us. But now, in an age of instant worldwide communication, the distance between here and there, between us and them, between me and him, has been reduced to the distance between my face and the face looking up at me from my cell phone screen. And as Emanuel Levinas taught us, ethics begins when my face looks into the face of the other.

Now, as then, God was not in the earthquake. The earthquake came as a result of certain geological forces which are part of a delicate system we name “nature” that made our planet what it is and allowed us to evolve on it in response to God’s eternal nudge towards life. The earth is neither kind nor cruel. It is both life giving and very dangerous to live upon. When we are good, we use our God-given ingenuity to protect ourselves from it the best we can. And when we are at our best, we share those means of protection with others who have less than we.

No, God was not in the earthquake, but God is very much present in the overall altruistic human response to it. Now, as then, after the earthquake and the fire, there was a still small voice — call it God, call it conscience, call it the innate preservation of the species — that called us to act.

We ignore that voice at the peril of our own humanity. On the other hand, when we respond to that still small voice by doing and giving, there is an inner glow, happiness, if you will,

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that goes along with it. Giving feels good. Call it selfish if you would like, but that is the way we are. The more we do for others, the more we give, the happier we are. It feels good to have our hands act as the hands of God. It is a loving feeling to have another feel God's kindness through the work of our hands, and God's love through our embrace.

For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my loving kindness shall not depart from you. — Isaiah 54:10

So now the mountains have fallen and the hills have been flattened. Now it is our turn to act and make good on God's promise of love and kindness.

Rabbi Donald Rossoff is the Rabbi at Temple B'nai Or in Morristown.

Community Relations Committee Update

CRC in Action

Become an informed and active advocate

CRC Launches New Action Alert Technology

To make it easier – and faster – for the MetroWest community to take action on priority legislative matters, the CRC has launched a new action alert capability which allows you to send an advocacy letter directly to your Congressmen from your own computer with a click of the mouse. The action alerts will be sent to every donor on issues of only the highest importance to UJC. Look out for CRC Action Alerts in your inbox. We encourage you to open them and take action!

Stop Iran Nuclear Weapons Program

- No Nukes for Iran: Take Action and Purchase Magnets, Banners and Posters.
(<http://www.ujcnj.org/stopiran>)

Due to your efforts, the Senate passed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act of 2009 (S. 2799) by unanimous consent on Thursday night, January 28. The legislation, which contains the major components of both the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act (IRPSA) and the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act (ISEA), seeks to reinforce American diplomacy by dramatically increasing economic pressure on Iran. Now that the Senate has acted, House and Senate members will meet to reconcile the Senate bill with the House-passed Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act (IRPSA). After their work is completed, the reconciled legislation will go back to the House and Senate for a vote on final passage before it is sent to the President for his signature.

Please remember to send a thank you letter to your senator.