

SUMMER 2026

DEFINING MOMENTS



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Photo by Nijole Shuberg



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NEWS FROM JCFS CHICAGO

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TELL ME MORE

Defining Moments print edition comes out once a year, but you can get updates, news, and events information in our bi-monthly email version. To subscribe, send your name and email address to Communications@JCFS.org or visit JCFS.org!

JCFS Chicago is a partner with the Jewish United Fund in serving our community. We welcome people of all backgrounds. Our commitment to belonging is woven throughout our services, programs and welcoming workplace. Licensed by the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services. Accredited by the Council on Accreditation.



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**As we look ahead,
one thing is clear:
the need for what
JCFS does has
never been greater.**

Dear Friends,

Each day at JCFS Chicago, we reach people too often overlooked—those living on the margins of society seeking connection, stability, or belonging. In this issue you'll see this commitment in action: through community partnerships that extend our reach, an internship program bringing new talent to our work, and job opportunities that offer not just a paycheck but purpose. These stories, along with more about our expanding chaplaincy services and the lifeline our financial counseling provides to those facing economic instability, reflect our belief in meeting people where they are.

We are grateful to community members, sponsors, and supporters who made our signature fundraiser, Elevate, a success, surpassing our goal for the event. The evening celebrated the inspirational work of JCFS and honored Howard J. Swibel and Marci Friedman, whose leadership continues to uplift our community. We're excited to introduce our newly launched giving communities, a meaningful way for donors to deepen their partnership with JCFS.

This issue also highlights the achievements of our HIAS scholarship recipients, whose determination continues to inspire us. You'll also find information on our psychological services and counseling for individuals and families navigating life's challenges.

As we look ahead, one thing is clear: the need for what JCFS does has never been greater. The struggles people carry today are more layered, more urgent, and sometimes hidden from plain sight. Within that reality lives an opportunity to show up with ingenuity, with compassion, and with the conviction that no one should have to face life's hardest moments alone. Your partnership makes this work possible, and we invite you to join us as we move forward together.

Stacey Shor
President & Chief Executive Officer



Photo by Nijole Shuberg

CATALYZING IMPACT THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

As one of the pillars outlined in the agency's Strategic Plan, catalyze reflects our commitment to accelerating impact by transforming how our services are delivered. By leveraging our partnerships with organizations such as the JCC, The Ark, Keshet, and CJE SeniorLife (CJE), JCFS Chicago has expanded its reach, strengthened community connections, and better met the needs of those we serve.

The following examples highlight just a few of the many ways JCFS works with community partners to expand access to services and enhance support for people of all ages and abilities.

Clinicians from Integrated Pediatric Therapies (IPT) have already been supporting children at the JCCs, and recently three Virginia Frank Child Development Center clinicians and a psychologist from Psychological Services provided social work support to four JCC locations in Chicago and the suburbs.

They visited each location weekly to deliver early childhood mental health support for teachers, parents, and children in the programs.

"A lot of the activities match what we have done traditionally in our infant and early childhood mental health consultation," said Linnet Mendez, Senior Director of Outpatient Behavioral Health and Director of the Virginia Frank Child Development Center. "I'm feeling good about how the collaboration is going."

Linnet said they will continue to support JCC sites in the same capacity next year.

Clinicians will also be providing services at The Ark, another partner agency.

"Individuals who go to The Ark for food and financial assistance, and to talk with their case manager, can also see their therapist while they're there," Linnet said. "And hopefully this will also result in more referrals from people that are able to come to a JCFS office for services."

They plan to start by bringing on two clinicians familiar with the Orthodox Jewish community.

For the past four years, the Ark has also been the location for the annual Hanukkah party for families built by adoption.

“Each year, The Ark staff comes up with creative service opportunities for families of all ages and abilities,” said Andrea Jacobs, Jewish Community Liaison and Coordinator for Adoption & Family-Building Support. “Past projects have included assembling gift bags, sorting food, stocking shelves, packing pantry items, unloading donations, and writing cards.”

Andrea said the event is so popular that attendees contact her early in the year so they can save the date for the next celebration.

“Families tell us they value the sense of connection and community this event provides and appreciate being with others who understand their journey,” Andrea said.

“Each year, parents and children enjoy being with friends they’ve met through JCFS programs while welcoming and getting to know newer families.”

The JCFS Jewish Chaplaincy program has been providing pastoral support at Ezra Multi-Service Center (Ezra) and CJE for many years. As the chaplaincy program expands (read more about this on page 19), so does its reach across these agencies.

“We are so grateful our chaplaincy program is growing and expanding, servicing ever increasing needs in the Jewish community,” said Rabbi Joseph “Joe” Ozarowski, D. Min., BCC Rabbinic Counselor and Chaplain.

Rabbi Joe visits Ezra once a month to run an educational and support group for the individuals who use the Center’s services. Drawing on themes from the Jewish calendar, he leads discussions that explore broader values and issues relevant to participants’ daily lives. Rabbi Dr. Pinchas Zusis, JCFS’s Russian-speaking chaplain, also occasionally gives presentations at the Center, including one in

observance of Pesach.

This year, Rabbi Zusis also led a series of programs at residential communities operated by CJE. He spoke about holidays, including Purim, and incorporated music in his presentations.

Students in the transition program at Knapp School & Yeshiva also visited CJE to do volunteer work that usually involved cleaning. The transition program gives students who are over 18 years old the opportunity to experience working and volunteering outside of the classroom.

“With the growth of the transition program, we are also working on building our partnership with CJE and other establishments,” said Troye Evers, the teacher who runs the transition program.

Troye’s students also volunteered at Chesed Chicago, where they stocked shelves and helped organize supplies and donations.

And finally, servicing the youngest in our community, IPT

has partnered with Keshet to offer First Friends, a welcoming, play-based program for families of infants and toddlers with disabilities or complex medical needs.

“JCFS and Keshet are eager to find ways to support the greater community, and this seemed like a natural and logical connection between the two organizations,” said Jennie Marble, Director of Integrated Pediatric Therapies.

Keshet launched First Friends last year and recently teamed up with JCFS to enhance the program and host it at the Elaine Kersten Children’s Center in Northbrook. In just a short time, families are already finding comfort and engaging in meaningful experiences, including play-based learning, music therapy, speech and language development, and more.

“By joining forces, we will be able to strengthen our impact, expand our expertise, and provide even more comprehensive support and programming for our community,” said Bat-El Lieberman, Keshet’s Jewish Life Coordinator.

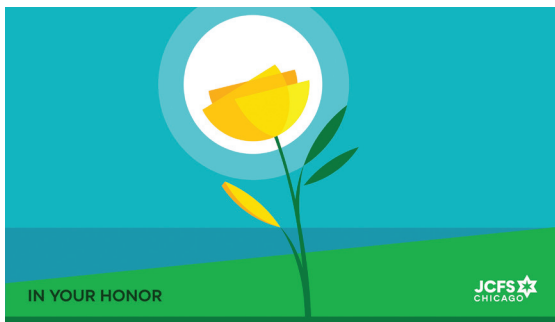


With the growth of the transition program, we are also working on building our partnership with CJE and other establishments.

Celebrate Life's Moments

with

JCFS Chicago Tribute Cards



Whether you are honoring the memory of a loved one, celebrating a new addition to your family or marking the joyful rite of passage of B'nai Mitzvah, you can commemorate any special occasion with a gift to JCFS Chicago.

Every tribute card purchased provides help and healing care for the many children, adults, and families who rely on JCFS for counseling, pediatric therapies, special education, social and recreational opportunities, career support, community needs, services for people with disabilities, and more.



INTERNSHIP PROGRAM YIELDS RESULTS

*Strengthening Services
While Providing Vast Experience*

The JCFS Chicago internship program may not be widely known, but its benefits are far-reaching—strengthening the agency’s programs while providing students with valuable professional experience.

Qualified students work and learn in a social service environment that combines intensive training with one-on-one interactions with experienced thought leaders.

For a compelling example of the impact of the internship program, look no further than Ally Frank, who recently completed an internship with Jewish Community Services. She worked directly under Grief Specialist and Chaplaincy Coordinator Leah Shefsky, but stepped in to support colleagues across the program whenever needed.

“Ally came in with an open mind and was interested in taking on different projects,” Leah said. “She learned a lot and now has an interest in community work she didn’t necessarily know she had when she started.”

Within the chaplaincy and bereavement services program, Ally’s role was to help expand its reach to different senior living facilities and nursing homes and help coordinate grief programming. Ally was also instrumental in assisting with several abuse prevention projects, as well as updating the agency’s online Mental Health Shabbat resources. Additionally, she participated in Let’s Talk About It, an annual program co-sponsored by six city synagogues that aims to inform the community



Intern Ally Frank hosted a Mental Health Shabbat at the Purdue Hillel in West Lafayette, Indiana.

about topics that are considered stigmatizing.

“It was incredible and I’m so grateful for the experience,” Ally said. “I never expected to get as much out of it as I did. Now that I am aware of these services, I’ve been able to tell people about them, even in non-clinical settings. It was the perfect environment for me.”

Interns are supported and appreciated throughout the agency.

“We love having interns,” said Ann Luban, Senior Director of Jewish Community Services. “It’s so important to invest in the future, to help these young people grow and develop at this pivotal point in their professional lives. They also bring so much to us with their questions, their ideas, their enthusiasm and their passion.”

Internships are available in several program areas, including counseling, career services, immigration and citizenship, people and culture, and IT.

“Our internship application is always open, but it’s best to apply as early as possible to be considered for all available opportunities before they start filling up,” said Kathleen Gerhold, Associate Vice President of Programs and Operations. “That would mean at the start of the calendar year for the coming school year and in the fall for the upcoming summer internships.”



Find more information and apply.

OPPORTUNITY LEADS TO LASTING IMPACT

When Boris arrived in the United States from Ukraine through HIAS Immigration & Citizenship more than 20 years ago, he had \$300 in his pocket and a goal of finding a job to support his young family. Since then, he has helped other new refugees secure employment at the same company he has worked at for the last 23 years.

Boris' employment journey began with JVS Career Counselor Rosa Simon, who assessed his English and referred him to ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. He already had a high-level engineering degree but was ready to take on any role Rosa recommended.

"I came to the country with almost no language and not too much experience in anything except sales, which I was not able to do having the language barrier," Boris said. "Rosa helped me at every single step, assuring that I would be taken care of. She helped with my resume and setting up job interviews."

Boris points out the work taking place in the warehouse of Full Circle Electronics, where discarded electronics are disassembled and processed for recycling.





Photo by Nijole Shuberg

Rosa found a company with Russian owners and other Russian-speaking employees that had an assembly/disassembly position available in its warehouse, and that's where Boris started. The company, now called Full Circle Electronics, is an end-to-end electronics recycling solutions provider for scalable asset commissioning.

"He was so grateful," Rosa said. "He said, 'I love that I'm working and that I can support my family.'"

Over the years, Rosa would check in on Boris: he was promoted several times from his general laborer position where he sorted and disassembled computer equipment, eventually learning to do everything in the warehouse, including data entry, forklift driving, computer testing, and managing different teams. Boris became a warehouse manager for a single location, then advanced to be the company's director of operations for three locations, and his pride in his work shows through.

"Green starts here," he said, gesturing to the activity in the Elk Grove warehouse. "Nothing that you see here is going to end up in a landfill."

"He was so grateful. He said, 'I love that I'm working and that I can support my family.'"

When the company had open positions, Rosa would contact Boris because she was representing several immigrant job seekers looking for work. Boris arranged interviews for roles in the warehouse, accounting, and IT departments, and the company ultimately hired Rosa's candidates.

Boris has been instrumental in helping to secure positions for 25 of Rosa's job-seeking refugees, providing the perfect opportunity for him to show his gratitude for her role in helping him secure his first job.

"I was excited to help get more immigrants hired, just as I was helped 23 years ago," he said. "It was important to me to help those whose shoes I was in. To me, it truly is a blessing to be in the position to help, and I hope to continue helping for as long as I can."

Boris' gratitude originates with JCFS and Rosa.

"First and the most important is the quality of the service provided by the organization and Rosa Simon personally," Boris said. "She is the most caring person I have ever met in my life."

FINANCIAL COUNSELING OFFERS

HOPE



Like many people in today's difficult times, Linda found herself in financial distress.

"We got into credit card debt," Linda said. "It kept on multiplying. We couldn't see our way out."

Reaching out for financial guidance can feel intimidating, especially when debt feels overwhelming. So when Linda was referred to JCFS Chicago's financial counseling program, she felt nervous and uncertain, wondering whether the program could provide the support she needed.

"I've never done anything like this before," Linda said.

Any apprehension Linda felt subsided when she met with Financial Counselor Maureen Grey, who quickly put her at ease.

"I think people feel a lot of

"I learned that you don't have all the answers and that you need to reach out and open up and that you haven't done anything wrong."

judgment from themselves, but also from family and from neighbors," Maureen said. "Except that's why our services exist — it's a safety net to help you get back on your feet."

Maureen asked a lot of questions and counseled Linda, starting with financial literacy. She also helped her find resources, creating a larger safety net or network.

"We could see there was hope," Linda said. "It wasn't easy to expose yourself, at least not for me. But I learned that you don't have all the answers and that you need to reach out and open up and that you haven't done anything wrong."

Financial counseling gives people the tools they need to rethink their approach toward money matters and work toward self-sufficiency. Maureen collaborates one-on-one with eligible individuals to dissect their financial decisions, discuss the motivation behind each decision, and steer them towards a more cautious approach to their money.

Although Linda was initially hesitant and unsure about accepting assistance, she is glad she did.

"I'm amazed at the help that we received and the kindness we received," Linda said. "We were left with dignity."

ELEVATE

Our signature fundraising event, Elevate, was a huge success. With more than 400 people in attendance, along with an incredible community behind us, we raised over \$550,000—surpassing our goal.

We proudly honored Howard J. Swibel with the Irving B. Harris Leadership Award and Marci Friedman with the What's Possible Award for the countless ways they elevate our community.

We are endlessly grateful to our supporters, whose generosity and energy carry our work forward, helping ensure no one faces challenges alone.

Photos by Nijole Shuberg



Event Co-chair Stephanie Gray, What's Possible Award honoree Marci Friedman, JCFS CEO Stacey Shor, Irving B. Harris Leadership Award honoree Howard J. Swibel, Event Co-chair Pamela Levy



David Spreckman, Rebecca Friedman, honoree Marci Friedman, Jordan Friedman



Honoree Howard J. Swibel



Steven Wine



Elevate supporters donated \$69,000 during the event to benefit JCFS services.



JCFS Board Chair-Elect Todd Grayson and JCFS CEO Stacey Shor



Jennie Marble, Director of Integrated Pediatric Therapies; Ann Luban, Senior Director of Jewish Community Services; Linda Jamison, Director of Child Welfare



Susan and Adam Rosenbaum



JCFS CEO Stacey Shor
and honoree Marci Friedman



Matthew Swibel



Estella Levin and Rebecca Shuman



JCFS Board Chair Simon Fleischmann



Gail Regenbogen, honoree Howard J. Swibel, Matthew Swibel, Beth Swibel, Sheryl Kozberg

WAYS TO GIVE



\$1000

provides two weeks of in-home respite for caregivers of a loved one with a disability.



\$500

provides a job-seeker with career counseling and placement services.



\$250

supports two weeks of counseling for an adult struggling with depression.



\$100

provides hygiene kits for a refugee family.



\$50

provides a child with a gift through the JCFS Holiday Gift Drive.

Donate now



[JCFS.org/donate](https://jcfs.org/donate)

NOTEWORTHY NEWS



JCFS CHICAGO ANNUAL MEETING

Join us at the JCFS Chicago Annual Meeting to welcome new Board members, honor our dedicated staff, recognize an outstanding community partner, and celebrate the meaningful accomplishments we have achieved throughout the year.

The Annual Meeting will take place on Tuesday, September 8, from 5:00 – 7:00pm at the Abe and Ida Cooper Center, 6639 N. Kedzie Avenue, Chicago.



[Register here](#)



HIAS RECOGNITION NIGHT

In June, we celebrated the achievements of our 2026 HIAS Immigration & Citizenship scholarship recipients with an award ceremony at the Abe and Ida Cooper Center in West Rogers Park. HIAS scholarships are awarded to individuals who identify as Jewish and who were assisted by HIAS in Chicago, or whose family members were assisted by HIAS.

BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

JCFS Chicago offers specialized treatment for disruptive and anxious behaviors in children and adolescents aged 2 to 16. Our psychologists have in-depth expertise in the identification and treatment of challenging behaviors such as aggression, noncompliance and tantrums. They also provide evidence-based support for individuals dealing with anxiety and stress, such as difficulty separating from caregivers, excessive worrying,



and specific fears. Treatment is tailored to the needs of each family and includes a complete diagnostic assessment of a child's emotional and behavioral functioning, along with collaborative feedback with caregivers to review assessment findings and provide recommendations. For more information about psychological testing and assessment for children, or to make an appointment, call 855.275.5237 or email Ask@JCFS.org.

**RESPONSE
FOR TEENS**

JCFS 
CHICAGO

NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR 2026 RESILIENT TEEN AWARD

JCFS Chicago's Response for Teens is seeking nominations for the 2026 Resilient Teen Award, which recognizes young people aged 13-19 who demonstrate courage, personal growth, and kindness through everyday actions and perseverance.

Anyone can nominate—parents, teachers, coaches, camp counselors, youth group leaders, peers, and even the teens themselves. The winner will be recognized at Response's annual fundraising event, Tuned In: The Larry Dobkin Event, on Sunday, November 8.

View more information and submit here by October 2:





APPOINTMENTS AVAILABLE

JCFS Chicago is accepting new clients, including teletherapy appointments. Our individual, group and family therapy services help people build healthy coping strategies and stronger connections. **Counseling appointments are available** at our Chicago West Rogers Park, Skokie, and Northbrook offices, as well as through secure virtual sessions. For more information, call 855.275.5237 or email Ask@JCFS.org. We accept most private insurance, Medicaid, and self-pay.

In our clinic, in your home, or through teletherapy, JCFS Integrated Pediatric Therapies brings services together to help kids build skills and confidence. We have **immediate openings for speech-language and occupational therapies** at our Northbrook and Chicago West Rogers Park offices. To make an appointment, email IPI@JCFS.org or call 847.412.4379. Referrals welcome!

WAYS TO FIND SUPPORT AND GROW

Whether you want to update your resume or are looking for a group of people who are experiencing similar challenges, JCFS Chicago offers educational workshops and support groups across many program areas.



For the list of upcoming events and groups visit [JCFS.org/calendar](https://jcfs.org/calendar)

Adoption and Infertility Support

Ongoing support groups for adoptive parents, prospective adoptive parents, and those navigating fertility challenges.

Adults with Disabilities and their Families

Community education workshops on a variety of topics of interest to people with disabilities, their families, and professionals.

Career and Employment

Workshops focused on resumes, cover letters and LinkedIn, and other resources to help with the job search process and assist in securing employment.

Children with Disabilities and their Families

Sibshops offer brothers and sisters of children with special needs an opportunity to share common joys and concerns, learn to handle common dilemmas, and have fun.

Grief and Loss

General grief groups as well as spaces for more specific experiences, such as those grieving the loss of a spouse or partner, individuals in their 20s and 30s and those coping with a loss to suicide.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Support and process groups on a variety of topics, such as divorce, family estrangement, navigating antisemitism, and more.

Prevention and Education for Teens and their Families

In-depth, honest information on current topics impacting tweens, teens, and those who parent them or work closely with them.

Social Skills and Therapeutic Groups for Children

Therapy and social skills groups that promote social/emotional development and help children navigate peer relationships.

NOTEWORTHY NEWS

CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES!

Twelve students graduated during the Knapp School & Yeshiva's 52nd Graduation Celebration held on June 19. Three students graduated from high school, seven from 8th grade, and two from kindergarten, marking the first time kindergartners were included in the program.

The graduation ceremony featured a slideshow, recognition for retirees, and the presentation of the Spark Joy award, which honors a staff member who "sparks joy" at Knapp. This year, paraprofessional Devin Thompson received the Spark Joy Award.



Photo by LeJean Easley



HINENI
LEADERSHIP CIRCLE



1859
LEGACY SOCIETY

JCFS CHICAGO

A CIRCLE OF CONNECTION: HONORING OUR MOST DEDICATED PARTNERS

JCFS Chicago proudly honors the leadership and generosity of our closest partners through new Giving Communities: The Hineni Leadership Circle and the 1859 Legacy Society.

The Hineni Leadership Circle is for donors who make annual gifts of at least \$10,000, or whose lifetime giving exceeds \$100,000. It also is for Honorary Directors and those who have served on the Board for over 12 years.

The 1859 Legacy Society honors donors who have committed legacy gifts to JCFS through their estate plans, and those who have made special gifts to our Endowment or Capital Campaigns.

Members of these groups are invited to special programs and events that foster community, deepen connections to JCFS, and celebrate our shared accomplishments.

For more information, email MilesRobin@JCFS.org or call 773.467.3896.

BECOME A DISABILITY A.L.L.Y. IN YOUR COMMUNITY

A L L Y

ACKNOWLEDGE

and respect individual experiences and abilities.

LEARN

about different disability types.

LEVERAGE

your influence to promote accessibility and inclusion.

YIELD

the floor to people with disabilities to help identify and eliminate barriers.



Disability affects more than 1 in 4 (28.7%) adults in the United States. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2026)



CHAPLAINCY EXPANDS SERVICES

The JCFS Chicago Jewish Chaplaincy program is expanding its services to include two area hospices, pilot support for residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) at Misericordia, and grow its Russian-speaking Jewish Chaplaincy program.

“I’m delighted that we’re growing the program,” said Rabbi Dr. Joseph S. Ozarowski, D. Min., BCC (Rabbi Joe), Rabbinic Counselor and Chaplain. “We’re hoping to help a lot of people, and we do it all through a Jewish lens.”

JCFS is now partnering with LifeChoice Hospice and Palliative Care, as well as Unity Hospice and Palliative Care.

“If either LifeChoice or Unity requests a Jewish chaplain, then they come to us and we can provide the service,” Rabbi Joe said. “The chaplain offers a wide variety of support to the patient and/or the family depending on what they need and request.”

That can include spiritual conversation, companionship, life review, referrals to other Jewish community and religious resources, and prayer, (especially at the end of life). The chaplain usually visits regularly, and JCFS bereavement services are available to families following the death of their loved one.

Chaplaincy services recently expanded its outreach to pilot support for residents of Misericordia, a Catholic residential community with approximately 40-50 Jewish residents, Rabbi Joe said. Misericordia provides care and support for children and adults of all

faiths and cultures who have I/DD.

The chaplaincy team prepared for visits to Misericordia during the pilot period by undergoing training with JCFS Clinical Supervisor of Services for People with Disabilities Tammy Besser and Director of Services for People with Disabilities Allison Rodenhouse, who taught them more about interacting with individuals with I/DD. They also received training on Jewish topics from Rabbi Shalom Ozarowski, of Israel, who has a master’s degree in special education and is Rabbi Joe’s son.

Rabbi Paul Saiger’s first visit to Misericordia was in March. With additional funding, staff will build on this successful pilot in the coming year with Rabbi Saiger providing ongoing support at Misericordia twice a month and expanding chaplaincy support to more individuals with I/DD.

The Russian language Jewish Chaplaincy program is also growing, with Russian-speaking Chaplain Rabbi Dr. Pinchas Zusis visiting Warren Barr Lieberman in Skokie twice a month and providing services at Forever Young Adult Daycare in Wheeling. He also recently moderated an open meeting with a distinguished Russian-speaking panel to address and answer questions about addiction. Additionally, Rabbi Zusis has offered Russian language programs and support to CJE SeniorLife’s Holocaust Community Services, CJE’s residences, and the Ezra Multi-Service Center.

“We’re very grateful that we have the ability to offer spiritual support in so many ways to the Jewish community,” Rabbi Joe said.

DEFINING MOMENTS

The mission of JCFS Chicago is to strengthen self-sufficiency, belonging, and well-being among individuals and families in the Jewish and broader Chicago communities.



Services for People with Disabilities hosts bingo twice a year.