



# just in the nick of time

UJF and JCF — and some very generous donors — grant funds to all areas of the Jewish community

BY JESSICA HANEWINCKEL

We can control and shape many aspects of our lives: where we live, our professions, our spouses and families, our hobbies and habits. But other areas are out of our control and do not discriminate based on race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, social status or anything else. The economic recession has left no resident of San Diego untouched in some way, but the magnitude of its effect has managed to infiltrate the lives of the local Jewish community more powerfully than many might think, and long before anyone had even labeled the state of the economy as a recession.

“We identified as early as over a year ago in summer 2008 that something was up, even before anyone identified that there was a crisis,” says Linda Hudkin Slade, senior director of community services at Jewish Family Service of San Diego. “Our client numbers increased drastically. We’re seeing everyone from people who have a limited job skill set to really experienced, highly educated people. You just look at all the

institutions being hit, and there’s a ripple effect as to who [the recession] hits.”

Together, the United Jewish Federation of San Diego County and the Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego have created the Jewish Community Economic Recovery Fund in an attempt to remedy the problem locally. Both the UJF and the JCF have worked with anonymous donors to facilitate the distribution of nearly \$1 million to the Jewish community to assist those affected most severely by the economic downturn. Though many local organizations have just received their portion of the funds in the last few months, the planning has been in effect for more than a year.

The UJF’s Community Economic Summit in October 2008 and the JCF’s Governance Leadership Institute in November 2008 both revealed the breadth and depth of the impact of the economic downturn on San Diego Jews. Leaders and representatives of local Jewish institutions stressed the emerging need among

their respective memberships.

In the first months of this year following their initial meetings with local leaders, the JCF and the UJF partnered to help those in the local Jewish community who were affected. Representatives of both organizations, including JCF CEO Marjory Kaplan, JCF Vice President of Philanthropy Charlene Seidle, UJF COO Michael Sonduck and UJF Director of Planning and Allocations Lisa Haney, formed a task force and led focus groups. Board chair of JCF Murray Galinson and board chair of UJF Andrea Oster co-chaired the task force. Their goal was to learn which facets of the community needed the money most desperately. What they found was that no facet was without need.

“We held two focus groups in February 2009, one with Jewish organizations that was attended by every major local Jewish organization executive director and Jewish day school principal or headmaster,” says JCF’s Charlene Seidle. “The second, with congregational rabbis, was attended



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by nine rabbis representing all denominations and geographic areas.”

Seidle says they followed up with an online survey to all organization chief professionals, day school headmasters, synagogue executive directors, preschool directors and congregational school principals. The Foundation and Federation then identified need in three priority areas. In April of this year, the Jewish Community Economic Recovery Fund was established. JCF and UJF worked with donors in May to raise about \$900,000; as of now, about \$800,000 in grants has been distributed to each of the area’s 32 synagogues, Jewish Family Service of San Diego, Seacrest Village, local Jewish schools and local Jewish summer camp programs.

“Approximately \$100,000 is still to be granted,” Seidle says, “and we are working with several donors on some follow-up distributions both for rabbis’ discretionary funds and to strengthen and continue the commitment to other programs.”

So where has the first \$800,000 of the Fund already gone, specifically? Let’s take a look according to the three priority areas of need.

#### **Priority One**

First is emergency services, which was awarded 45 percent of the grant money. A large portion of this money went to several programs of JFS. First was crisis case management, so that JFS

could hire more case managers and other staff to manage the increasing client base. Next was emergency financial assistance, so that JFS case managers could disburse more funds to clients to assist with short and medium term needs like rent, food and gas.

JFS’s Project SARAH also received grant money to assist domestic violence victims, which have increased significantly in this time of increased stress. Says JFS’s Hudkin Slade of domestic violence assistance, they’ve used funds to add programming for children and to add more intensive outreach because they’ve seen an 82 percent increase of the problem in the Jewish community, directly related to the economic crisis. JFS’s Hand Up Food Pantry, which provides food to those in need, also received funds.

In this priority area, Seacrest Village Retirement Communities also received a portion of the funds. Seacrest’s grant went to supplement the costs it pays toward the care residents receive when they cannot afford it despite government assistance.

According to Pam Ferris, president and CEO of Seacrest Village, Seacrest subsidizes \$1 million-\$1.5 million annually to residents who cannot pay for their care out of pocket and with government assistance. They’re not simply paying for room and board, but also very expensive 24-hour care, she says. In a nursing home situation, where care is more costly, residents are each

subsidized \$25,000-\$30,000 annually. With the grant money they received from the Fund, Ferris says, they’ll be able to care for two more nursing home residents in the coming year who couldn’t otherwise live there.

“With the demographics changing and people living longer, we’re going to have to continue to raise more and more money,” Ferris says. “It’s natural that they’re going to exhaust their resources and need our help, not just because the economy is the way it is but because there are more seniors, and more seniors living longer.”

For Seacrest, the need for funding is unusually great. Unlike other organizations, they cannot select which healthcare and housing programs and services they offer, nor can they cut staff (due to staffing laws) or close at night.

“We’re very grateful to the Foundation and Federation and all those who participated in the recovery fund, because clearly it makes a difference,” Ferris says. “By taking care of the residents, we’re helping their families.”

Finally, each of the 32 local synagogues received a grant for the rabbis’ discretionary fund. Grant size depended on congregation membership and ranged from \$500 to \$8,000.

Temple Solel was, like every other area temple, in great need of help for its congregants. Robin Rubin, executive director of Temple Solel, says the spirit of giving has spread to their entire



Soille San Diego Hebrew Day kindergarten students Noah Leeman, Anna Maya, Jeremy Zimmerman and David and Jordan Rezmovitch bake cupcakes in honor of learning the letter 'C.' Soille received a portion of the Economic Recovery Fund money, which allowed students to continue to attend the school who otherwise would not have been able to.

congregation. After Rabbi David Frank of Temple Solel gave a Yom Kippur sermon about the economic downturn and how he's personally made a few mortgage payments for congregants, many congregants who were able began giving generously to the temple and to Rabbi Frank's discretionary fund, adding to the JCF/UJF grant money already given.

"I have four pages of temple members who are receiving assistance in some form from Temple Solel," Rubin says.

And everyone is affected, even at a congregation like Temple Solel, which is located in the more affluent area of Cardiff by the Sea.

"[The JCF/UJF gave] a very generous amount, and we were thrilled to receive it," Robin says. "We take that donation and turn around and help our families. I just started my 23<sup>rd</sup> year here, and it's the most humbling thing I've had the opportunity to do. Not a day has gone by since Nov. 1, 2008, that I have not received a phone call, e-mail or someone walking in who has not needed help."

### Priority Two

Priority two, which garnered 15 percent of the grant money, was moving individuals and families out of crisis. JFS, with its diversity of programming, received all funding in this area. First, its newly established program called the Jewish Employment Network, or JEN, received funds to help get people back to work.

According to Hudkin Slade of JFS, this new job placement branch of JFS is part of its economic crisis workshops. Through JEN, participants, from first-time job seekers to seasoned lawyers who have been laid off and find themselves unemployed for the first time in decades, proceed through a job-



Soille sixth grade students Ami Alpert, Yonah Sefchovich, Sheila Slomianski and Sofie Maisel showcase the "Middah of the Month" bulletin board highlighting the middah (Jewish value) Dan L'Chaf Zechut, meaning to "judge others favorably."

search and career workshop series and meet with an employment specialist. They can even join job clubs, share leads and take support from mentors and coaches.

JFS also received grant money to continue its series of economic recovery workshops that teach people financial options, budgeting, managing stress, etc.

"They say the economy is improving, but we're not seeing it yet," Hudkin Slade says. "It continues to be very different for the people we see. They're in a lot of pain and are very scared. Unfortunately, people wait to get help, and they come when it's almost too late."

Adds Hudkin Slade: JFS protects clients' privacy to their utmost ability. Anyone can come there for assistance, and no one needs to know they're doing so.

"Some people feel ashamed," she says, "and I don't want that to be a barrier."

### Priority Three

Third of the priority areas was scholarships for Jewish children, which took 40 percent of the Fund. All five local day schools received funds for scholarships to supplement existing scholarships and financial aid programs.

Rabbi Simcha Weiser, headmaster of Soille San Diego Hebrew Day School, says Soille was overwhelmed with requests from families needing extra assistance.

"The [UJF/JCF] funds came at the right time and in the right way to help us keep kids in a Hebrew day school and help them keep their Jewish

Children enjoy playtime at the Lawrence Family JCC's Nierman Preschool, one of six local preschools to receive support from the fund.



education,” Rabbi Weiser says. “A year in a child’s schooling is irreplaceable; each grade level is unique from every other. This is an excellent example of the Jewish community pulling together to support what we value most, which is a Jewish education.”

According to Audrey Jacobs, director of school advancement at Soille, 144 of the school’s 355 students receive financial aid of some kind.

“We want to make sure every Jewish child who wants a Jewish education can get one,” she says. “The support from the Federation and Foundation was essential. We literally have families who would not be here today without their help. We had a few families who sold their homes and moved in with their parents so they could continue to send their kids to Jewish day school. It’s heart wrenching, but the level of commitment is inspiring.”

On a smaller scale, 10 congregational schools and six preschools also received grant money for scholarships.

Finally, to address children’s summer Jewish

educations, grant money went to Camp Mountain Chai, UJF and the Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center to fund campers’ scholarships.

According to Alan Friedman, executive director of Camp Mountain Chai, 40 percent of CMC’s campers are on some sort of financial scholarship, so the added funds from this most recent grant will allow campers to attend who otherwise wouldn’t be able.

“We’ve seen the need go up every year, but this year it increased by a higher percentage than in past years,” he says. “With the economy being what it is, more parents need help. Since summer 2006, when we first started, we haven’t turned anyone away due to financial aid or hardship. As the need continues to increase, it gets harder and harder for us, and this fund will definitely help the situation. We’ve seen the Jewish community rise to the occasion.”

According to Seidle of the JCF, San Diego’s experience was one of the most comprehensive and robust she has known when receiving

feedback from other Jewish communities across the nation about how they have addressed the recession. San Diego is also the only community she is aware of, she says, where the Federation and the Foundation worked in full partnership to assess and report needs and develop a plan, including funding, to address them. Though the job isn’t yet complete (Many beneficiaries of the Fund report they have now run through savings and credit and are in dire situations), what has been done is certainly a solid start.

“Working singularly to address needs, we can accomplish very little,” Seidle says, “yet working together we can accomplish a great deal and create change in the lives of many of our community’s most vulnerable.” ☆

• To find out more about the Jewish Community Economic Recovery Fund, visit or call JCF or UJF at: [www.jcsandiego.org](http://www.jcsandiego.org) or (858) 279-2740 [www.jewishinsandiego.org](http://www.jewishinsandiego.org) or (858) 571-3444