

Our Family Matters

BY KEN WEINBERG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE

My family matters to me. I love them. I don't always get along with them, but I care when they hurt, when they are suffering. I know there are the relatives who won't sit next to each other at a bar mitzvah; and yes, I remember my father saying he'd rather be dead than sit next to Uncle Moe; but when Uncle Moe lost his job, my father offered him one in the factory he was working in.

There is a great difference between American society and many others in the world. We think in terms of the word "I," not "We." What is family? Only brothers and sisters, parents, aunts and uncles? Is the Holocaust survivor that I am not related to also my family? Are the thousands of people waiting for food from our *Food Bank* family, or just a bunch of strangers to whom I owe nothing?

I don't abuse my wife; do I owe anything to the women who have been abused? My parents and grandparents are long deceased; does that terminate my responsibility to the older adults in our community who are sick, alone and lonely? My children were not born with physical or mental disabilities; am I off the hook to care for those who have disabilities? It is not about me...it is about we! Who are we if we don't care about each other? It is written in the Torah, "A family resembles a heap of stones. One stone taken out of it and the whole totters."

All human beings are people in need. All are challenged by what life dishes out. No exemption, no free passes. What we Jews learned thousands of years ago is that **we are each responsible for the other**. This extends not only to our Jewish community, but to the world. That's why Jewish Family Service helps refugees, those persecuted in their native land. Last year we resettled and helped 1,567 refugees.

This past year, JFS was challenged as never before. The economic crisis hurt us, and hurt us deeply. But even with numerous cuts in our budget and with staff taking some major hits, our doors stayed open and no client was sent away unserved. We helped 11,256 people and provided 175,477 service hours.

Just as individuals and communities can be vulnerable, so too can JFS. Those in need cannot afford to have a vulnerable

agency where one day we shut the door to one or more of our services.

Whether responding to a large-scale crisis or a personal tragedy, JFS wants to be able to deal from strength. The global economic collapse that nobody saw coming, social ills that surface after decades of collective denial, even the predictable disruptions associated with the life cycle — all are seismic shocks for the people involved.

Our challenge is to have sufficient financial resources to help those in need, and to have sufficient physical space as well. JFS finds itself in a building purchased 15 years ago, when JFS was one-fifth the size it is today. The facility has served us well, but it can no longer do the job. We simply can't sustain even our current level of programming, let alone any new initiatives.

JFS needs a facility and the resources to secure our future, so that each and every person who turns to JFS will, in turn, find the help that is needed — the kind of help you wish to provide to your extended family. You, our committed community, have been our largest source of assistance; you have kept us going, you have made all the difference.

Three years ago, our Board decided that we must always provide help and hope; and thus began the quiet phase of our *Family Matters Campaign*. And now, as we enter the public phase, it is reasonable for you to ask, What are the goals? What do we need to do? The answer is three-fold.

- **Reduce and prevent suffering of our highest risk community members.** The *Family Matters Campaign* will ensure that the neediest members of our community are safe, fed, clothed and sheltered.
- **Enable JFS to respond strategically to the emerging needs of our rapidly changing society.** The *Family Matters Campaign* will provide an operating reserve and endowment to give JFS the flexibility to respond to previously unmet and unimagined needs.
- **Provide dignified physical spaces to better serve the full spectrum of emotional and social needs of our clients.** Construction of a new building, an addition to our current Jessie Danz Building (already owned by JFS), that

will locate the majority of JFS programs under one roof. We will serve clients better by enhancing confidentiality, increasing program space, improving security and adhering to rapidly changing industry best practices in service delivery. Offering clients multiple services under one roof will meet the many needs of clients, program participants, staff and volunteers holistically, comfortably and reliably.

An enormous boost to this endeavor is a half-million dollar stimulus grant from the Federal Government, just awarded to us through the City of Seattle, to renovate the *Food Bank* at JFS into a state-of-the-art facility.

The *Family Matters Campaign* is our community's chance to set a course for JFS for years and generations to come. To chart a course of stability, dignity and security. That is what lies at the crossroads of help and hope. What is hope?

Emily Dickinson's definition is, "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul." That is our charge. To provide hope to individuals, families and to our community, because for all of us, our Family Matters.

This is what we do as individuals and this is what we do as a community...

**...because
Family Matters;
always has,
always will.**

**Please visit www.jfsseattle.org
to learn how you can support the
JFS Family Matters Campaign.**

We're all in this together.



JEWISH **FAMILY** SERVICE

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A Commitment to Community since 1892

