

Gobble and Gifts: JFCS and you can nurture community

BY JENN DIRECTOR KNUDSEN

Jewish Family & Child Service is running back-to-back programs to provide for the community this holiday season – its Thanksgiving Food Box and Family-to-Family (previously Adopt-a-Family) gift-card programs.

This marks JFCS's 20th year of providing turkeys to those in need. But its annual Thanksgiving Food Box program also is about community – around a holiday table and working toward a common goal.

Eleven community partners and three grocery stores have joined forces with JFCS to provide more than 150 food boxes. This translates into feeding about 600 individuals who are clients of JFCS' four programs: Counseling, Emergency Aid, Disability Support Services and Holocaust Survivor Services.

Congregation Kesser Israel is one of JFCS' new community partners.

"Kesser Israel wanted to join together with JFCS on this project, because it's our responsibility to stand together as a people to help people," says Aviel Brodtkin, the synagogue's community engagement director. "We can achieve more good by uniting with other Jewish organizations."

Each box includes a turkey, stuffing, vegetable broth, cranberry sauce, potatoes and pumpkin pie. (JFCS accommodates special requests and dietary restrictions, such as kosher and gluten free.) Families also will receive a \$25 gift card to Fred Meyer so they can select personal favorites to round out their festive meals.

"Portland Jewish Academy has been participating in the Thanksgiving Food Box Program and Family-to-Family for many years," says Elana Cohn-Rozansky, PJA's service-learning coordinator and longtime liaison between her community and JFCS.

On Nov. 21, JFCS staff will gather at the MJCC to pack the Thanksgiving boxes, and more than 40 vaccinated volunteers representing the agency will deliver them to clients' doorsteps all around greater Portland.

One client recently told JFCS Emergency Aid Manager Caitlin DeBoer, "The box is a blessing for us every year."

Concurrent to ensuring hundreds get their gobble on for Thanksgiving, JFCS is gathering gift cards from Fred Meyer for its Family-to-Family program that begins Nov. 28, the first night of Chanukah.

Client families will receive gift cards via mail inside holiday cards created by school children at PJA and Maayan Torah Day School to bring more cheer to the season.

"Especially after the last year and half, it's



JFCS volunteers gather at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center in 2019 (before the pandemic) for the annual Thanksgiving Food Box program. This year, volunteers can't help pack, but they are signing up to drive meals to clients' homes for contactless delivery.

important for us to show a united front as a community, and working together only makes us all stronger," says Michelle Caplan, Congregation Neveh Shalom's director of congregant connections.

JFCS' 2021 partner organizations providing food, money and gift cards are Beit Haverim, Congregation Beth Israel, Congregation Kesser Israel, Congregation Shir Tikvah, Congregation Neveh Shalom, Congregation Shaarie Torah, Eastside Jewish Commons, Maayan Torah Day School, Mittleman Jewish Community Center, Portland Jewish Academy and The Gan. Fred Meyer, New Seasons and Safeway are generously providing either discounted or free perishables and non-perishables, as well as many gift cards.

Congregation Beth Israel's Religious School students amassed \$800 in *tzedakah* the year before the pandemic but did not have the chance to distribute it – until now.

"It is a tradition in Judaism to give *tzedakah* during each religious holiday, especially those that center around a large festive meal," says CBI Education Director Ben Sandler. "CBI students are extending this tradition to the Thanksgiving meal this year for members of the community in need."

For all Thanksgiving Food Boxes and Family-to-Family details – including how to donate, volunteer and more – visit jfcc-portland.org/holiday-giving-2021/.



Leanna Parsons, operations and outreach coordinator for Tivnu: Building Justice.

Gap year program adds three staffers

Tivnu: Building Justice has three new faces helping 20 gap year participants connect with Jewish life and social justice through individualized internships, discover the Pacific Northwest and create a home together in Portland.

Leanna Parsons is now the Portland-based operations and outreach coordinator. Nina First and Abby Israel joined the team as *madrachimot* (resident advisors) for the two households.

"Leanna's organizational savvy, can-do attitude and winning personality have already added immensely to the Tivnu team," says Tivnu founder Steve Eisenbach-Budner. "Her work and presence are already greatly appreciated by all who come into contact with her – participants, colleagues and parents."

A Bay Area native, Leanna was previously the program and engagement associate at Hillel of Silicon Valley in San Jose, Calif. At Hillel, Leanna led social and Jewish educational programs for college-aged undergraduates at two universities and three community colleges. Before joining the Jewish professional world, Leanna worked in education, traveling to Rishon LeZion, Israel, to teach English in a local elementary school. She has a bachelor's degree in legal studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz. In her spare time, Leanna enjoys hiking, powerlifting and reading with her cat curled in her lap.

"I am so excited to have joined the team at Tivnu this fall. I work to support the resident advisors and current gap year participants with logistical help, social media management and site operations. Additionally, I work closely with our Executive Director Steve and our Program Director Adinah to recruit the next cohort of Tivnu."

Abby and Nina both bring terrific experience, ideas and enthusiasm to their work with the Tivnuniks as *madrachimot*. (*Madrachim* is male plural and *madrichot* is female plural, but Tivnu uses [terminology used by the Habonim Dror Youth Movement](#) to include both as well as non-binary people. "It is not yet part of mainstream

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