



Jewish Family Services
of silicon valley

Executive Director 2018 Annual Meeting Speech Mindy Berkowitz

Good evening everyone! Tonight is an auspicious night – It’s Rosh Chodesh, bringing in the Hebrew month of Tammuz. It’s also June 13th – 613- along with the 40th anniversary of Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley. As Allison Zur, our Development Manager excitedly pointed out to me, 613 is traditionally cited as the number of mitzvot in the Torah. At JFS SV, we know that our Torah values inspire all the work we do. The number 40 appears myriad times throughout Jewish history and wisdom. It represents transition or change; the concept of renewal; a new beginning. In the story of Noah, the rain poured for 40 days. Moses was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and came down with the stone tablets. In Kabbalah, 40 represents the four sides of the world. There are 40 days between the first day of Elul, when we begin to blow the Shofar to prepare for Rosh Hashana, until Yom Kippur. According to the Talmud at age 40 a person transitions from one level of wisdom to the next. One reaches a state of *binah* - the deep level of wisdom. So we’re in great Jewish company here tonight celebrating 40 years of Jewish Family Services: mitzvot, mensches, miracles – and magic.

Last year I said to Tami Levi and Zoya Lazer “it’s going to be a different year” – and it sure was. We got the sense that we would need to respond differently to funding challenges as well as to some harsh political realities that would impact the people we help in ways we never could have imagined. It was a year where we didn’t say “no”, but “let’s find a way.”

As most of you know, we were the Little Mouse that Roared. In December we joined with Jewish Family Service of Seattle as co-plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit challenging the 3rd refugee ban Executive Order, imposed by President Trump. This Executive Order blocks refugee resettlement from eleven countries, indefinitely stopping the program for refugees already living in the United States to be reunited with their spouses and children. At this moment in time we are still awaiting news as to how the Supreme Court will vote on the matter. But we do know this: we brought attention to the plight of the people we help who just want to bring their family members to Silicon Valley. And some of them have since benefited from additional legal aid and publicity. For those of you who are curious, it didn’t cost us a penny. We were represented pro bono by several fine legal firms.

I am so proud of our Board for deliberating so carefully in deciding to go ahead with the lawsuit. And I am bursting my buttons with pride over the way our entire staff has come together to support our clients and each other as we’ve learned to live in a post-resettlement world. We’re all learning to work differently but still move forward.

On each of your chairs you will see an invitation to an important event we're holding next week to update you all on the refugee crisis here at home and across our country. I hope you'll make every effort to attend. It's going to be an evening like none other. Please come – and tell your friends all about it.

This year was also about some great new beginnings.

In July we opened a branch office at Chai House. Under Lisa Warner's direction, Chai House residents have much-needed social services, friendly caring staff – like Zara Musayeva - and a safe place onsite where they live. I know that the coming year will bring even more growth of our program at Chai House and I'm so grateful to Lisa, Zara, and Chai House Board Chair Gail Long for the fine work they do.

In January we hired our first development manager, Allison Zur. Allison has been a friendly, enthusiastic fundraiser and I am so glad she is on board. In addition to strengthening donor relations, she's raising money for JFS *and* growing our YA-LIVE Young Adult Leadership Initiative for Volunteer Engagement group, which elected its first Board a few months ago.

It has been a great year for partnerships. An exciting one for JFS has been our work with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Northern California. The Mormon's policy of volunteering and helping people must be, "Just say YES!" Their untiring dedication to ensuring that refugees and other poor families have what they need has been incredible. They came to our rescue to ensure that our Passover Food Drive went off without a hitch. Some members of the Mormon community are here tonight as we honor some of their members. We are grateful to celebrate with you tonight.

Another wonderful partnership that we JFS staff enjoy is that of the one we have with our Board of Directors. We have such a great Board! We sadly say goodbye tonight to President Rich Namm as he and Patti begin a new life in Nipomo. At the same time, we happily welcome Joe Isaacson to the Presidential helm.

Tonight we celebrate 10 years of Embrace-A-Family. How exciting is that! This is a program that brings together so many people in our community to do so much good – I'm so glad that there are so many Embrace-A-Family donors and volunteers – and recipients – here tonight.

I'd also like to focus a bit on the good work that happens every day at Jewish Family Services that gives us hope. It's the everyday miracles and magic performed by our mensches, our JFS staff. As I do each year, I'd like to ask you to stand and remain standing as I call your name so that we can all recognize you: Allison Zur, Avital Agam, Azita Eshagh, Caroline Golpashin, Chad Lama, Elena Kulvets, Galina Chyorny, John Bracken, Lisa Warner, Lori Cinnamon, Natalie Lazar, Sandra Pannell, Sheila Monheit,

Tami Levi, Valerie DuBose, Zara Musayeva – and last but far from least – Zoya Lazer.
Please give them a hand.

So thank all of you – staff, Board, volunteers, donors, and of course our dear clients –
for being part of a team that says yes instead of no; who find a way to bring blessings to
our world.