



Jewish Family Services of silicon valley

Executive Director Annual Meeting Speech 2017

Throughout the year as I've had the opportunity to address the JFS community, these words remain relevant: "***This is a very different year.***"

For many of us, it didn't feel like "life as usual" following the 2016 election, but you should know that we at Jewish Family Services recommitted ourselves to the good people we work with who happen to be refugees or immigrants, disabled, gay or poor. It is our mission to give people who are unemployed and discouraged a "hand up" to get back on their feet. We give people who are **ca**ring for loved ones, strategies to **co**pe. We **counsel** and **comfort** people facing losses. We work hard to **ensure** that holocaust survivors – and **all seniors** - have medical care, food and in-home support to live their lives in dignity.

As I've said, we do this work because our Jewish values compel us to do so.

And you know what? This is a different year for **another** reason, a **good** reason: **this year we celebrate 40 years of Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley in our community.** So, let's focus now on the good work our staff and **662 volunteers** did to make life better for over 7,000 people this past year.

Refugees were certainly in the news this past year as Presidential Executive Orders made resettlement difficult, unpredictable – and scary – for the refugees and their family members with whom we diligently worked to give new homes in America. So many of our friends opened their hearts - and pocketbooks – to support JFS' protection of refugees. We are extremely grateful to Terasa and Diane Perkins for honoring their mom Ruth, a former JFS Board member by endowing the **Ruth Perkins Emergency Fund for Refugee Services.** I know that Ruth would be so proud. I'd like to take this opportunity to send a special **yasher koach** – a Jewish "shout out" if you will – to our staff who make sure that refugees are protected and have the chance to become productive Americans: Director of Refugee and Career Services Zoya Lazer, Resettlement Coordinator Azita Eshagh, Coordinator of VESL Education Natalie Lazer, Vocational Case Manager Caroline Golpashin, and Career Counselor Chad Lama.

It was a year of expansion.

Through the guidance and expertise of Director of Clinical and Social Services Lisa Warner, we began a group for people who lost loved ones as well as a group for those living with mental illness. We've partnered with Congregations Shir Hadash and Sinai to bring comfort to people going through these difficult times. We've also grown our counseling services, and expect to continue this in the coming year.

We are **excited** to announce a new partnership. Beginning in mid-July, after nearly 30 years of providing weekly case management for Chai House residents, **JFS will have an onsite office at Chai House** and will provide **expanded** social services to Chai House residents. Lisa and new Senior Services Social Worker Yanex Orellana will join our dedicated Senior Services Case Manager, Avital Agam, who has helped Chai House folks for nearly 3 decades.

Our **9th Annual Embrace-A-Family** was our biggest ever in so many ways. We had many generous donors contributing over 1,600 gifts and \$13,000 worth of gift cards; several new groups of volunteers from Jewish as well as secular organizations; 116 volunteers and 26 locations for dreidel boards. Wow! We're discovering more and more that we can count on partnerships from all over the community to make the changes we all want to see in this world. I am grateful for Lori Cinnamon, our Manager of Community and Volunteer Engagement who spearheaded this successful effort. She couldn't have done it without the strong support of Elena Kulvets, Administration Manager; Valerie Dubose, Administration Assistant, Leah Wilson our MSW Intern, and Sheila Monheit, our Volunteer Coordinator. Thank you all for making Embrace-A-Family a shining star.

Our fabulous and amazing **Knitzvah volunteers** always blow our minds with their prolific, gorgeous creations. This year, they created nearly 3,500 beautifully made items that JFS clients and those from 30 other agencies benefited from.

Tonight is also about **our unsung heroes** who bring integrity and caring to the work they do. We'll be honoring them throughout the evening for quietly making their corner of the world a better place. Three of them are JFS staff whose names I have not yet mentioned: Galina Chyorny, who lovingly cares for holocaust survivors and Russian speaking seniors; Sandra Pannell, who empowers our Project NOAH clients; and Tami Levi, who is the most talented finance manager I've ever met.

In the coming year, we will continue to expand. Lisa and I are looking into a new partnership with Sharsheret, an organization that supports Jewish women facing breast and ovarian cancer. Zoya and I will increase our speaking engagements so that more people can learn how they can support refugees. We're increasing our reach and partnering with synagogues in Fremont, Los Altos Hills and Morgan Hill...and we're already planning Good Morning JFS! for March 21st, 2018.

And so, as always, we go forward with hope. If you haven't already, please join the good people of Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley who are **passionate** about making the world a **better place**. It is **more important** than ever – and **yes...we...can**.

Thank you for supporting JFS.

Mindy Berkowitz
Executive Director