



THE JEWISH VOICE

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FEATURING JEWISH NEWS AND EVENTS

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Federation, Alpert Jewish Family Service Meet with Lawmakers

Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), a division of Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County, along with Federation partner agency Alpert Jewish Family Service (JFS), recently hosted an important session with Florida state legislators to request action in support of Palm Beach County's older adults, families, and individuals with special needs and praise the recent legislation against antisemitism. The meeting included legislative aides from the offices of State Sen. Lori Berman, State Sen. Bobby Powell, and State Reps. Matt Willhite, Tina Polsky, Joseph Casello, and Mike Caruso.

The group toured the Melvin & Claire Levine Jewish Residential & Family Service campus to learn about JFS's mental health and social services, including its Mental Health First Aid training initiative, which has trained more than 50 instructors and certified more than 5,200 individuals in Palm Beach County about how to best respond to a critical range of mental health and addiction issues faced by adults and children. With a 25 percent increase of suicide in Palm Beach County, according to a recent report by the Palm Beach County Medical Examiner's Office, the agency advocated for legislative support and additional funding to expand the vital program.

Marc Hopin, CFO and Interim CEO of Alpert JFS, discussed the growth of the Jewish population that has resulted in the need for additional services. "In one of the most prosperous communities in the country, thousands are struggling to make ends meet. A recent Jewish community study revealed that 20 percent of the Jewish community describe themselves as just getting along, nearly poor, or poor. It is estimated that 5,000 Holocaust survivors who live in Palm Beach County are living in poverty. Alpert JFS depends on the generosity of the community to meet the human service needs of those who are struggling. That's



Tara Laxer, Development Officer; Dr. Elaine Rotenberg, Clinical Director of Alpert JFS; Marc Hopin, CFO and Interim CEO of Alpert JFS; Jo Gon, Vice President JCRC at Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County; Thomas Valeo, State Rep. Matt Willhite's office; Alexis Montalvo, State Rep. Tina Polsky's office; Tricia Mischler, State Rep. Joe Casello's office; Nazbi Chowdhury, State Sen. Bobby Powell's office; Shawn Hall, State Sen. Lori Berman's office; Stacey Lampert, JCRC Chair

why Alpert JFS' fundraising goal for this fiscal year is \$3 million and it will be seeking an additional \$500,000 from state appropriations."

Dr. Elaine Rotenberg, JFS Clinical Director, added, "We were delighted to meet with these dedicated public officials and highlight the work that Alpert JFS is doing to strengthen our community. When people are struggling, they often do not know where to turn, so it's vital to raise awareness for the comprehensive care we provide to those in need."

Representatives from JCRC, a division of Jewish Federation that focuses its advocacy efforts on issues of concern to the Jewish community, were also in attendance

and thanked the representatives for their support on the antisemitism legislation, which was passed unanimously by the legislature and signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis in May. JCRC's advocacy also extends to community issues such as human trafficking and homelessness in the Palm Beaches.

Stacey Lampert, JCRC Chair, stated, "Antisemitism is on the rise across our country and around the world, so the time to act is now. We're encouraged by the opportunity to meet with the representatives to express our gratitude for the recent legislation as well as reiterate the urgent need to address the most pressing social justice issues that are impacting the Jewish community today."

An Out-of-the Box Bat Mitzvah Project

In preparation for her bat mitzvah, Moussia and Rabbi Vigler created their family tree, dating all the way back to

Adam and Eve in 131 successive generations. It took about six months of research, poring over history and ancient Torah books to piece together the links in the family tree.

In a very meaningful presentation, Moussia served as a "butterfly flying between the trees in the family garden," as she introduced the community to her illustrious ancestors. She highlighted seven women about whom she spoke and in whose footsteps she would like to follow. They included Eve, Sarah, Ruth, the Persian Princess Dara, Rebbetzin Menucha Rochel of Hebron, and her great-grandmothers. Each was accompanied by a brief video presentation



Debbie Dajka, Moussia Vigler, Joelle Dajka

acted out by some of the Vigler children and produced by Rebbetzin Chana.

The family tree was published and distributed to all the guests of the bat mitzvah. Each entry in the tree has a brief biography and important dates, whenever such information was available.

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