



It Begins with a Conversation: Creating a Place of Belonging for Jews of Color

As Rafi Forbush talked with friends who are also Jews of color in the days after the murder of George Floyd, he realized that there was a need for Jews of color (and their families) in the Twin Cities to gather and support each other.



It spurred him to found the Multiracial Jewish Association of Minnesota (MJA), a Twin Cities-based organization that supports and uplifts the local multi-racial Jewish community including black, indigenous, Asian, Latinx, Sephardi, Mizrahi, and multiracial or interracial families who identify as Jewish. “We want to reach people who have never been reached before, who have not felt welcomed,” said Forbush, who serves as acting executive director.

Nearly 2,000 Jewish adults in the Twin Cities identify as a person of color or as being of Hispanic or Latino origin according to the Twin Cities Jewish Population study. MJA works to build connections across racial identities and within the broader Jewish community. Through community building, education and advocacy, members create a space for people with shared experiences, educate organizations and leaders on how to be allies, and advocate for their collective place and purpose.

MJA has 35 households and almost 150 allies and supporters participating to date. To help get started, the organization received a St. Paul and Minneapolis Jewish Federations’ [YALA Mini Grant](#), funding for young adults to start their own Jewish project.

“It’s very easy to make this conversation about politics, but if we brush that aside and recognize Jews that are speaking up who don’t feel a sense of belonging then that helps steer the conversation and helps us focus on the Jewish elements, morals and values about this topic rather than about politics,” explained Forbush, who grew up in Mendota Heights and attended Talmud Torah of St. Paul.

Ensuring that Jews of color are part of our community’s rituals and traditions is also important. MJA brought multiracial Jewish families together at a Chanukah gathering and is planning more gatherings and programs for the first half of 2021. “With that connection we will have people sharing their experiences, which helps us navigate through those conversations,” Forbush said.

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As MJA continues to grow, it is looking for Jews of color to get involved as well as allies and supporters to volunteer in a variety of ways. They are pursuing 501(c3) status and accepting tax deductible donations through their fiscal agent, Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis.

"If we start having this conversation, we will start raising eyebrows, and ears will start opening, and it creates this space for people who have never had a sense of belonging before," said Forbush. "If we do this work as a community, we will get to a better place together." To learn more visit MJAMN.org.