



JEWISH COMMUNITY SERVICES

A nonprofit agency serving the Hawaii Jewish Community

Summer 2020

SERVICE IS IN OUR NAME

Do you know what it takes to assist in bringing wellness and loving care to our Jewish community? It takes dedication, unselfish giving of time and energy, plus adding a smile and giving hope to each and every member of the community that you touch.

The Jewish Community Services board of directors and the staff, since the inception of the JCS, have provided many, many services to our community, including assisting adults and children with food, transportation and medical care, helping out with apartment rent, visiting patients with extended hospitalization, and counseling.

In the beginning, almost all the cases and referrals were on Oahu. As some time passed, JCS began to also serve our neighbor island communities. The following is but one story of providing critical support on a neighbor island, even in this time of a national crisis for everyone.



René Siracusa

René was referred to Jodie Gerson, the JCS service provider, by her rabbi at Congregation Ahava 'Aina in East Hawaii. She was a perfect candidate for the Jeanette LeVine Fund. This fund provides case management through JCS and rental support for low income seniors throughout the state. As her illness progressed, Jodie worked with the rabbi, the family and the hospice team to make sure her important needs were met.

"René Siracusa was a long-time friend, beloved community member, founding board member, grant writer, farmer, activist, change maker, non-profit guru, and more", stated Rabbi Rachel Short of Ahava 'Aina, Mountain View, island of Hawaii. "To call René a mensch would be an understatement. René was a Tzadik.



Rabbi Rachel Short

"When she was diagnosed with cancer, it was extremely difficult. I watched as one of the strongest women I have ever known began to slowly deteriorate. René had always been completely independent, so I knew when she was asking for help, that she really needed it. She had always supported others, donating all of her money to charity, to the point she had nothing left to take care of herself.

"Since she had spent her entire life supporting Jewish organizations, writing grants, and more, it was such a relief to be able to put her family in contact with Jodie and JCS. As soon as René's daughter was put in touch with Jodie, she was immediately at ease. Jodie was helpful in so many ways, helping her to navigate many difficult things and adding an ease to an extremely difficult situation.

"JCS was also able to help pay for René's living and funeral expenses. Thanks to their support, René's end of life, transition and passing was a beautifully moving, peaceful, traditional, Jewish experience.

"Words cannot begin to describe the gratitude for Jodie, JCS, and their amazing team. I know René and her family feel the same", concludes Rabbi Short.

NEW WEBSITE EXPANDS QUEST FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION



In today's world good two-way communication is essential, even vital, to stay well informed and to have connections with your family, your friends and organizations that serve you.

At Jewish Community Services the conversation has been around for a while on how to better serve the state's Jewish community, yet maintain the proper amount of funding to serve those who are in need.

From various comments from the Jewish community came the notion that our community needed a central clearinghouse, a one stop location for everything Jewish in Hawaii.

The answer came in December 2019 when several JCS Board members attended a meeting of Jewish community leaders and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. A conversation started about how to best upgrade the JCS webpage. The Foundation, through Corbett Kalama, Executive VP and COO Hawaii, offered to begin a partnership with JCS to underwrite the creation of a totally revamped and restructured webpage.

Calls were made and contacts started and the journey began. JCS Board Member Harvey Gordon generously undertook the leadership role in transferring some of the previous website material

to the new platform and making assignments for new material for the site.

It's been a long-time dream of many board members, as well as the community, that there be an event calendar for every Hawaii island and a community directory that would list the Jewish organizations statewide. And now that has become a reality at jcs-hi.org. Harvey conducted a training by Zoom, which was well attended and enthusiastically received, for stakeholders to support the calendaring and directory.

In addition to the above listed entries when visiting the web site, you'll be able to learn about the JCS services, how you can help support our community and be able to read the JCS Newsletters as past and future newsletters will be posted online. A new addition to the site is the tag of Jewish Life in Hawaii. This provides information about local Jewish resources and highlights the length and breadth of Hawaii's Jewish community.

We hope that you will visit the revised web site soon and we would love to hear your comments. Is there anything you believe could be improved or anything that could be added to the site? Please let us know via email at admin@jcs-hi.org.

JCS SERVICES INCREASE DURING PANDEMIC

By Jodie Gerson



To no one's surprise, the pandemic has driven an increase in requests for support. Our referrals come from our congregations, the JCS website, community members and former recipients.

Since January, JCS received more than 60 new requests for assistance with relocation, funerals, housing, food, supplies, and counseling. In July, we saw the highest number of new requests in over 2 years.

The Covid crisis has required us to intensify our services. Formerly JCS could provide funds for food, medicines and other necessities. Now we also have to secure and deliver them.

With the increase in anxiety from the "remain safe at home" order and several people's lack of connection to our thriving community, many sought community connections and counseling. We have families and individuals who been furloughed or unemployed due to the effects of COVID and need ongoing assistance. Some of these individuals face additional immigration concerns due to their unemployment and are not eligible for federal or state assistance and JCS struggles to assist them long term.

Many ask what other types of requests does JCS receive? Over the past year we have handled requests for connections to Jewish congregations, employment and welfare assistance, checking on family members, home health resources, housing assistance and connections to case management services. Since I am only a part-time employee, I do my best to connect requestees to providers and services who can provide longer term assistance. On average, I assist 56 individual(s) a month, some needing ongoing contact and others providing resources and referrals.



Jodie Gerson

Some of our clients are unique. Over the past few months we also worked with a couple of Holocaust survivors connecting them to services, such as our Jeannette LeVine program, which assists seniors with their monthly rental expense. I also discovered and connected them to the Blue Card, a program whose mission is to provide direct financial assistance to needy Holocaust survivors. This is a resource we just learned about. It was a surprise to discover that we have Holocaust survivors living in Hawaii.

If you are aware of anyone in need of services, I can be contacted at (808) 258-7121



September 1-30 please visit Foodland stores to donate to the Give Aloha Community Matching Program. At the register ask to donate to Jewish Community Services #77215

Give Aloha, Foodland's Annual Community Matching Gifts Program, was created in 1999 to honor Foodland's founder, Maurice J. "Sully" Sullivan. Each year, Foodland contributes more than \$250,000 to match customer donations for all organizations combined. Since the program began in 1999, a total of more than \$30.9 million has been raised for Hawaii's charities including Jewish Community Services. Learn more at: <https://www.foodland.com/our-community/give-aloah>

JCS PARTNERS WITH WEINBERG FOUNDATION INITIATIVE FOR HAWAII'S JEWISH COMMUNITY

In December 2019, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation invited a group of leaders from Hawaii's Jewish community to meet together to discuss the issues and needs statewide. Attending the meeting were representatives of all of the major Jewish organizations as well as the staff and Chairman of the Board of the foundation. It was a very robust and diverse conversation. It also provided a wonderful opportunity and first step for leaders throughout the state to meet each other and build bridges for the future.



Following this meeting, the board of JCS held a series of discussions regarding what role we can and should play in meeting some of the needs expressed. As a first step, we expanded our mission from the sole focus of helping those in need to strengthening the Jewish community through providing connection and communication. The website is the first product of this effort.

In a follow up meeting with the Weinberg Foundation, it was agreed that we would pursue a partnership in the areas of increasing resources for needy individuals and receive support for a strategic planning process to examine the organizational needs of JCS as we look to the future. An important challenge to that planning process is that no one really knows the scope of the needs of the Jewish community in Hawaii. To that end, JCS and the Weinberg Foundation are considering a statewide needs assessment process to better understand how we each can contribute. Stay tuned!

THANK YOU'S FROM A GRATEFUL COMMUNITY



“Thank you for all the work that you and JCS are doing. Personally, I would be in dire straits without the support of Jewish Community Services.”

“Thank you so very much for the attention that you have given me. It truly does make me feel like I have somebody in my corner. Very grateful for you Jodie.”

“In my worst dreams I never imagined we would be in such a helpless situation, I do not believe, I am so thankful to God who brought me here to the amazing rabbi who helps us and the best Jewish community in the world doing a mission that has no price. I wish in the future I would get to be on the giving side and give back double and multiplied.”

“Wow, what a quick response, I just emailed you asking for assistance, and you responded on a Sunday. I am thankful and overwhelmed by the amount of information and resources you have available, thank you.”

And that is just a small handful of notes the JCS Board and Jodie receive each week. And please note, we can't provide all of the requested services without your support. When asked, please continue to give from your heart to assist us assist our Jewish community.

SURVEY RESULTS & UPCOMING JCS ACTIVITIES

Mahalo to you for responding to our survey regarding the scheduled Annual Dinner in November 2020, as well as participating in other programming via Zoom. Sixty percent of the surveys were returned, which is a great response rate, and many of you took the time to include comments.

There were three questions about the event, two about holding it as scheduled November 8th, and one about postponing it until February 2021. Only about half (51%) of the respondents said they were very likely or likely to attend the dinner in person as scheduled; there was a small increase (55%) who said they would attend if it was held in an open location. There were several comments expressing concern about the number of people at a table, as they felt that the usual ten/table was too many, even if it was outside.

When asked if they would attend if the dinner was postponed until February 2021, the percentage increased to 76% who said they were very likely or likely to attend

As a result, the Board decided to postpone the dinner until **May 23, 2021**. We felt that February might be too soon for many in our community. We

continue to keep our “fingers crossed” that we will be able to hold the dinner in May. **Save the date!!**

We also wanted to know if the community would be interested in participating in a Zoom program with one or more interesting speakers. The responses were positive, with 59% responding that they were very likely or likely to join in a Zoom gathering.



As a result, JCS is in the process of identifying one or more speakers of interest to our JCS community for a Zoom event in November 2020. We will contact you with more information once the plans are finalized.

Thanks again for your valuable input, as we want to be responsive to your concerns, needs and ideas and for your continued support of JCS activities. Stay Safe!!



Photos from previous JCS dinners



Jewish Community Services

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JEWISH COMMUNITY SERVICES

Our mission is to support and enhance Jewish life in Hawaii through communication, coordination and provision of appropriate social services to those in need.

To learn more about the important work that JCS does in our community or to make a donation online visit our new website.

www.jcs-hi.org

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