

B'nai Tzedek Young Philanthropy Grant Program

PROJECT TITLE:

I. Proposal Summary (Executive Summary) for use on ballot.

The Proposal Summary should be about one paragraph of 1-3 sentences and should include the most general description of the use that will be made of the funds. Be concise and compelling, your readers are age 13-32.

Our organization seeks funding to support *Just Like Me*, its award-winning, Magic Wardrobe Theatre Program, which was created to teach tolerance, the importance of diversity and the significance of inclusivity in today's polarized society and create dialogue between younger generations and Holocaust survivors.

Funds will directly support creating and implementing a new version of this show in which young actors, ages 10 to 12, tell first person stories of courageous survivors to highlight the importance of speaking up for justice, celebrating diversity and encouraging cultural understanding while creating parallels between Jewish persecution and intolerance in society today.

Just Like Me will reach hundreds of members of the greater Jacksonville community and bring diverse communities together, with a specific target of elementary-age students in local public and private schools, to create awareness of increasing intolerance, directly aligning with issues we currently face in the southern United States.

II. Project Description (Program Narrative)

What is the problem or need you are trying to address and how will you do it?

Do your best to keep this document to 1 page.

This section *should provide the reader with an* explanation of the problem or need the program will address as well as who and how many people will be impacted by this funding. Remember funding is over 3 years in the amount of \$5,000 per year, totaling \$15,000.

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Just Like Me was originally written to encourage intergenerational dialogue between Holocaust survivors and younger generations to highlight the importance of speaking up for justice, celebrating diversity and encouraging tolerance and cultural understanding.

Just Like Me was enormously successful in its initial iteration. Children ages 10 to 12 performed for 300 attendees and received a standing ovation. Since then, this program was invited to four local public schools to reach an additional 700 students. "Never Again" has been made real for another generation to understand.

In its current state, our organization does not have the resources to recreate this program beyond its original performance. Funding would allow for three additional performances to be created, over three years, and would fund pre and post-performance visits to participating schools to ensure ongoing follow-up. Schools would be offered this program for free. This program was not created to be fiscally lucrative and additional funding is necessary for it to continue to exist.

A three-pronged approach to this program allows for reinforcement of the values the program conveys. Introductory programming is offered to participating schools as well as a follow-up study guide, including interactive exercises creating the parallel of the Holocaust to the world today. The introductory school visit lays the groundwork with information and historical content. During this visit, we discuss a variety of topics, such as why did the Holocaust happen, could it happen again, why didn't anyone stand up for their friends and neighbors, how did Germany losing World War I help set the stage for Hitler and other relevant topics.

The show interweaves storytelling via first-person narratives, which are a valuable resource for challenging messages of intolerance and division in our current social and political climate. The follow-up study guide, which includes interactive exercises to be implemented in the classroom, continues to tie the messages of tolerance and inclusion conveyed in the show to the lives of the participating elementary school children. The goal is to help youth participants understand the commonalities between each other and the survivor characters portrayed in *Just Like Me*.

This program is also an amazing opportunity for the young people interviewing the survivors and the survivors themselves. Having someone listen to their story and become engaged and invested in what they went through brought so much validation to the participating survivors. Youth participants asked questions and showed a very genuine interest in the journeys, losses and lives built from the Holocaust. Survivors were thrilled to know their stories would be part of a program that might open someone's mind to learn more about this dark part of our history.

The first-person narratives are a valuable resource for challenging messages of intolerance and division in our current social and political climate. We strive to grasp the opportunity to hear these remaining survivors while they are still able to share their stories. The play focuses on fostering meaningful intergenerational dialogues between a diverse segment of our community's youth and those who experienced, firsthand, oppression and hatred from others. Sharing these stories with diverse groups of elementary age school children gives the survivors a sense of reassurance that the atrocities they suffered were not in vain and that the younger generation will now be their voice.

The young actors meet with survivors and then write monologues for each survivor. Theatre professionals interweave the monologues with morals and ethics to connect the atrocities of the Holocaust to present day and create a multi-media presentation. The presentation includes photos, maps, newspaper articles, propaganda and the children's research on pre-war towns and villages.

The show will be presented to children in Duval County Public Schools, local private schools, local youth groups, church groups, synagogues and other non-profit organizations. Survivors will be invited to attend as guests.

Just Like Me is a powerful, thought provoking program to promote a positive dialogue and inspire tolerance. The need for this program is critical for local elementary students. Support is essential as it will directly underwrite costs of this production with the opportunity for an annual reach of approximately 1000 members of the greater Jacksonville community.