D ear friends,

I was chatting with some colleagues, recently, about Pesach, community, and the many challenges and opportunities we have faced together, and anticipate for the future. As our conversation deepened, we drew an interesting and appropriate link between community building and the timeless story in the Haggadah which speaks of four children; the wise, contrary, simple, and the one who is unable to ask a question. I’ve heard many opinions as to the ‘true’ meaning of this section of the Seder, usually focused on the wholeness of Jewish life and the need for, and existence of multiple perspectives. No matter how engaged, how contrary, or how ill informed, there is a place for everyone at the Seder table and, by extension, in Jewish communal life. Building a strong, pluralistic community is a labour of love, persistence, and dedication. Just as we discuss four children at the Seder, by extension we can look at various characters in community development.

The wise child represents the community member who is fully engaged. He or she knows the services, programs, agencies, and opportunities that exist, and engages in all areas of the community that meet his or her needs. The wise child might volunteer, generously support a variety of agencies, and work in partnership to identify and address not only areas of strength, but those of weakness. This child stands by the community, and embraces a pluralistic view, one that provides for multiple opinions, and a comprehensive continuum of engagement. He or she is the lifeblood of a successful, thriving community, and Jewish Calgary is blessed to have many of them.

The contrary child of the community finds fault in much of what exists, and espouses a singular view. Only his or her approach matters, and those of others are deemed incorrect or inappropriate. To him or her the existing infrastructure will never be suitable; there will always be a better way of doing things. Often, they will have many suggestions but will not demonstrate an interest in actively engaging to make a difference. This child of the community has amazing energy and passion, and the challenge is to harness those attributes for positive impact.

The simple child stands for those who know the basics of community, perhaps they are familiar with a singular agency or program, and possess a simplified view of what community means. He or she cannot differentiate between who provides which services, or even for whom each service is appropriate. There is an attraction to a certain simplicity, but community members who represent the simple child are shortchanging the community and themselves by not wholly engaging or fully contributing. Bringing excitement and focus to the mix, we must work to broaden their levels of engagement, and continue to communicate with them effectively.

As for the child who does not even know how to ask a question, this child represents the segment of our community on the periphery, those with limited knowledge or limited interest about organized Jewish communal life. We have not engaged them, have not educated them about opportunities which services, or even for whom each service is appropriate. Any which child currently represents your view of community and your level of engagement, there is room at Jewish Calgary’s table for you. There is much good already in place, and we are working diligently to build future initiatives and services to address the necessary infrastructure for a strong, pluralistic, and warm community. Please accept our invitation to be part of something special, and make this Pesach your time of renewed involvement.

On behalf of the entire Calgary Jewish Federation staff and volunteer leadership team, we wish you and yours a Chag Pesach Kasher v’Sameach,

Adam Silver
CEO, Calgary Jewish Federation
Federation’s PJ Library® will be collecting children’s books on Sunday April 19 from 10:30am to noon. Please bring a book or two (or more!) to the Calgary JCC to donate to children in need. Stay for stories, crafts and snacks. It’s a great way to teach your child about tzedakah, and have some fun at the same time!

Contact Kathie Wainer at 403-537-8592 or kwainer@jewishcalgary.org if you’d like to volunteer.

All eyes and ears were on Morah Amy Goldberg as she read from the PJ Library® book “The Mitten String” to a captivated audience on March 15th. In keeping with the story of a deaf mother, Pnina Rubensohn from Alberta Children’s Hospital Hearing Clinic taught the children and their parents some basic sign language. The children also learned to finger knit with yarn – another tie-in to the story. Crafts and snacks rounded out the event. “The Mitten String” is a wonderful book that teaches the values of inclusion and courage, and that ‘doing the right thing’ is appropriate for any age.

Books like this are available for qualified children free of charge through Federation’s PJ Library program.

For more information please contact Kathie Wainer at 403-537-8592 or kwainer@jewishcalgary.org

They see fun & friendship, we see the Jewish future

One Happy Camper provides grants of up to $5,000 to children attending Jewish overnight camp for the first time.*

Visit OnelHappCamper.org to find your camp and apply.

For information, contact Judy Shapiro at 403-444-3153 or jshapiro@jewishcalgary.org

*Some conditions apply