This past May, the therapists at Schoke Jewish Family Service stumbled upon a need that was common for many of their clients. Therapists working with widows and widowers noticed these adults no longer needed to just talk about their grief; they needed to get back out in the world and learn to socialize without their partners. An exciting new idea was born. Starting in June, Schoke JFS began Sunday Social Strolls, group that meets each week in a different park around Fairfield County. Hosted by Hannah Pollack, one of our agency’s clinicians, the group is offered specifically to widows and widowers. The strolls give these folks a place to talk and laugh with others who understand what they are going through and also want to move past their isolation and grief. Each week the group has attracted new members who in turn bring friends and make new ones.

We have received a lot of positive feedback, including gratitude for the opportunity to gather in person and the judgment-free space to talk about the real burdens of widowhood. One new member contacted the agency to say “Hannah did a great job on Sunday. It’s not easy but she has the knack.” Another called in to say, “I love to go out with the group and I always enjoy my time with them.”

Though the summer is wrapping up and this walking group is coming to a close, Schoke Jewish Family Service is excited to announce that we will bring everyone back together this fall. With dates still to be determined, widows and widowers can expect more opportunities to spend time together with Hannah and Schoke JFS. We are planning the next round of activities as less movement-based so more people feel comfortable and capable of attending.

If you or someone you love is interested in joining Sunday Social Strolls or its next iteration, please reach out to Brooke Davidson, LCSW, Director of Clinical and Family Life Services, bdavidson@ctjfs.org or 203-921-4161.

One of Schoke Jewish Family Service’s priorities is to respond to the needs of overlooked populations. As this pandemic endured, we noticed adults in their 20s and 30s lost many outlets for socialization and relaxation. And as working from home has become permanent, the lines between work and play have become increasingly blurry.

To give young adults more opportunities to join in activities with like-minded peers, we are reinvigorating our Jewish Twenties and Thirties (JTT) events. We know these events have the potential to create long-lasting friendships between young Jews and support a meaningful connection to their Jewish identity.

Schoke JFS staff members, Hannah Pollack and Mark Katz, who are also part of the 20s/30s community, will host the upcoming calendar of events. Hannah and Mark are working hard to collect feedback to plan events that appeal to everyone.

Are you interested in signing up for JTT or know someone who is? Please reach out to our JTT team at jtt@ctjfs.org for more details and to be added to our email list. Learn more about our upcoming events on the JTT Facebook group: www.facebook.com/groups/Jewish2030

Thank you to the Gold family for their ongoing support of the Helen Marksamer Jewish Twenties and Thirties Program.
What’s Next…?

“What’s next?” was a favorite line of the immortal President Jed Bartlett of “The West Wing.” That was Bartlett’s way of saying that, while they were busy, it was time to move on to new matters. At Schoke JFS we are ready for “What’s next?”

These pandemic years put us in a defensive position of reacting to our suddenly changing environment. We geared up for an explosive demand for our services and a shift to addressing food insecurity with greater emphasis and urgency. We proactively addressed our staffing needs that accompanied the changing environment. The fabulous additions of Leah Schechter as Chief Program Officer and Amy Goodman as Chief Advancement Officer are highlights of these changes. To make these and other necessary changes, we needed to raise significant amounts of money as well.

We have succeeded in meeting these challenges. While we continue to operate in this new environment, now we know it is time to ask “What’s next?”

For years, a series of long-range or strategic plans has guided Schoke JFS. At times the plan has been primarily tactical and other times it has leaned more strategic. We have recently embarked on the creation of a new plan with a heavy emphasis on the strategic. This new plan starts with a recognition of all the changes we have already implemented and will guide our direction for the next several years.

A task force, led by Ken Neuhaus, our Board Chair Elect, and Amy Goodman, our Chief Advancement Officer, has begun the process of identifying focus areas requiring a deep dive. While no specific focus areas have been finalized, some examples include:

- How do we determine current community needs in our broad catchment area? Once determined, how do we prioritize our resources in addressing these needs?
- Likely, we will review our governance structure. While successful to date, our Board, standing committees, and working relationship between lay leaders and staff were established for an organization we no longer resemble today. What are the changes we need to make in response?
- We plan to explore new methods of community engagement. Some of the critical areas we are exploring are: Are we doing enough to support our volunteers so they will continue their commitment, devoting their personal time and playing an important role in how we deliver our services? How are we partnering with other agencies? Are there others with whom we should partner?

Over the next several months, we will consider “What’s next?”. The detail work that explores these and other focus areas will involve Board members, staff, and members of our community.

We invite your input. Reach out to either of us with your thoughts, suggestions and recommendations. We will do our best to keep the community informed of our work. Stay tuned for more.

Shana tovah – we wish you a happy and healthy New Year!

Matt Greenberg, President & CEO
Paul Gordon, Board Chair
The Freedberg Family Kosher Food Pantry is always grateful for the generous donations and outpouring of support we receive from our partners. Because we serve anyone in need, when donations are offered they allow us to continue the vital work of feeding our community.

Imagine how ecstatic we were when we received a brand-new refrigerator! Thanks to a donation from AJ Madison and their Community Fridge Initiative 2022, the pantry now has extra capacity to continue addressing food insecurity.

We’ve wasted no time putting the new fridge to work - from delicious dairy products for our pantry clients during Shavuot, Shabbat meals for our Anachnu clients every Friday, organic produce donated by a local CSA and given to our food program clients each week, and distributions of bulk eggs. The new fridge and extra space enable us to expand how we’re able to provide for and serve our clients.

Thank you AJ Madison and Renovation Angel for your Community Fridge Initiative donation!

400,000+ residents of CT struggle with hunger

Pull Up Your Seat At The Gathering Table

Your monthly donation to The Gathering Table supports our food insecurity programs including CT’s first kosher mobile food pantry!

Please scan QR Code or go to: ctjfs.org/thegatheringtablemonthly/
After five weeks of training on Zoom, the graduates of the Spring 2022 Home Companion Training Program celebrated their accomplishment at Latham Park in Stamford, CT. The Schoke JFS Home Companion staff was on hand to congratulate them including Isrella Knopf, LMSW, Director of Senior Services, Vanessa Butler, Administrative Assistant, and Lysa Cannon, Program Assistant.

The fifteen new aides will go out into the community and provide seniors, including a number of centenarians, with companionship and care in their homes.

The Home Companion Training Program provides forty hours of class work and testing over a five-week period. The course is taught by Isrella Knopf and covers the nutritional and socialization needs of an aging population as well as how to handle medical situations an aide might encounter. All aides must pass this rigorous training program before being eligible to be placed in a home.

Congratulations to the newest graduating class of the Schoke JFS Home Companion Training Program!

If you need a home companion for a family member or for yourself, please contact Isrella Knopf at 203-921-4161 or isrellak@ctjfs.org. Our fees for aides are among the most competitive in the area.
Care for the most vulnerable among us

Schoke Jewish Family Service witnessed firsthand how the youngest among us remain the most vulnerable to the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their mental health.

At Schoke JFS, we work to support our community’s most vulnerable. We take steps to ensure access to mental health services for children and their caregivers.

The struggles of attempting to provide these services during this crisis period has been challenging particularly due to a shortage of clinicians able to meet the increased need. In some settings, like schools, other people, like teachers, are often called upon to fill these gaps. Not all teachers have the training and clinical background to identify mental health symptoms and to use social emotional behavior tools in an ongoing way in their classrooms to help support these children. The teachers themselves need support as do the parents of the affected children.

Support for Parents and Caregivers

Recently, we offered two virtual events geared towards supporting parents, and in turn, supporting their children’s mental health and wellbeing.

Dr. Catherine Pearlman, author of *Ignore It*, presented tools to parents who encounter challenging behaviors with their children. Dr. Pearlman told the audience that ignoring undesirable conduct can actually lead to increased parental satisfaction and inspire positive changes for your child.

After the most recent school shooting, Christine Montgomery, a clinician from Clifford Beers Community Care Center in New Haven, who specializes in community trauma response, spoke about how children typically respond to trauma. She provided resources for parents on how to support their children after tragic events. She explained that behavioral concerns in children and teens following a tragedy is normal; they have fewer coping skills and are learning how to process their emotions and responses. She said that those behaviors will typically disappear within 30 days. If they persist longer, it may be helpful to seek professional support.

Schoke JFS is a resource for you and your family.

We continue to increase our efforts to offer support groups and individual counseling to every population. Additionally, we are working to provide better resources for those in the community who support others, such as caregivers, parents and teachers.

Stay tuned for more free virtual events in the future. Reach out to Brooke Davidson, LCSW, Director of Clinical and Family Life Services, bdavidson@ctjfs.org or 203-921-4161, to further discuss how to support your children or if you have ideas for helpful events.
We have had the honor to volunteer for and support Schoke Jewish Family Service for over 30 years. Connie’s mother lost her parents, brother and twelve other members of her immediate family in the Holocaust so Jewish continuity and the flourishing of the Jewish community has always been paramount to her and we share this commitment. So, it was natural for us to become active participants in Schoke JFS, the champion for the most vulnerable in our community.

An ever-changing, ever-evolving social service agency, Schoke JFS is the community advocate that continuously and empathetically responds to our local societal challenges. Our involvement in Schoke JFS gave us the opportunity to help take care of our Jewish community and the community at large, all driven by the Jewish and American values of fairness, equality and Tzedakah.

We want this legacy to continue to flourish into the future for our children, grandson, and others.

That's why we became Schoke Jewish Family Service Life & Legacy donors.

Connie and Alan Freeman

To join, or to learn more about our Legacy Giving Circle please visit our website ctjfs.org/legacy or contact Lisa Rich, 203-921-4161 or lrich@ctjfs.org.

Schoke JFS extends our deepest appreciation to the following people and their families for their support through a Legacy Gift:

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A program of the HAROLD GRINSPOON FOUNDATION
Rethinking Tzedakah - How to Make Sure That Your Help Makes a Difference

Ruth*, homeless for some time, battled years of financial insecurity and subsequent mental health struggles. Ruth was referred to Schoke JFS by a local communal partner who had paid for her two-night hotel stay but could not pay for any additional nights. Ruth was now turning to Schoke JFS seeking housing and a hotel extension, begging not to return to the streets. Sadly, our case manager had the extremely difficult task of telling Ruth the unfortunate truth: our agency cannot pay for her to stay in a hotel, and the wait list for emergency shelters can be days or even weeks long. Tragically, individuals remain homeless on the street during the interim.

Ruth was confused, scared and angry. Unfortunately, she was thrust back into homelessness, now even worse for the wear. The generosity of the communal partner that was so well-intentioned caused Ruth greater harm, both physically and emotionally.

In 2019, the Schoke JFS Case Management department handled 9 homelessness cases; by the end of 2020, our agency managed 16 homelessness cases, a 78% increase over the previous year.

This data evinces the serious economic struggles in Fairfield County and the awful predicaments many of our fellow community members are facing. For those of us who have been in a situation with someone in crisis, we often initially feel helpless. How much more so when confronted by the horrors of homelessness? It is a terrifying idea to imagine - finding yourself without shelter.

It can be anguishing to confront this plight, the most basic human need for safety and security. Often, extremely compassionate and well-intentioned people, when experiencing their own feelings of helplessness and fear, may cater to their altruism and understanding of tzedakah and take immediate action.

Tzedakah, understood as charitable giving, is a cornerstone of Judaism - whether it be handing food or cash to a homeless individual on the street corner or, in the case of Ruth, putting them up for an evening in a hotel. The very act of helping in a concrete manner creates a feeling of immediate relief for both donor and recipient. Yet, does this kind of tzedakah actually benefit the recipient?

When confronted with the tragedy of homelessness, it is important to recognize our own feelings first in order to manage our response to the situation. We can turn to oft-quoted adage, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” True chesed (kindness or compassion) may not necessarily be placing a bandage on the immediate issue; rather, true chesed may require setting in motion action steps that can ultimately heal the larger problem.

When faced with a crisis such as homelessness, know that you can reach out to Schoke JFS for support. Our trained social workers are equipped with resources and guidance to address the best option or choice for the individual in crisis. Not every case will have an ideal outcome; some of the issues are larger than what our agency is able to handle. However, together we work toward healing the larger problems for an outcome with long-lasting efficacy. In this case, your tzedakah can have an enduring impact and make real change.

If our case managers had met Ruth before her eventual thrust back onto the streets, we might have had the opportunity to offer a more robust array of supportive services. We might have connected Ruth with the wide range of resources that walk her down the road of recovery and self-advocacy for years to come, rather than getting her off the streets for just one night.

It starts with making the correct phone call. Next time you confront a tough situation, one that most likely requires social work, first appreciate your own sense of compassion and social justice. Be grateful for your impulse toward chesed and offering tzedakah stirred within you. Embrace your big heart! Next, call Rebekah Kanefsky, Director of Case Management, at 203-921-4161 or rkanefsky@ctjfs.org. We can help you make your actions effective for both donor and recipient alike.

*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of clients
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Join our committed donors in making a difference in people’s lives by going to:

www.ctjfs.org/friendscampaign
In the beginning of the pandemic, Mikhail*, the 85-year-old Holocaust survivor from the former Soviet Union was referred to Schoke JFS by another agency. Being a very active and creative man, Mikhail suffered from a lack of communication and felt lonely and hopeless. He used to write songs and poetry - and now he didn’t have an audience. The isolation was killing him.

How did Schoke JFS respond? We invited Mikhail to join our virtual events through the Anachnu program and his life changed! When we organized his personal concert, he made many new friends! When Mikhail and his wife started to receive Shabbat meals, they were very happy. It wasn’t only an amazing help but it also let them know we care about them!

Recently, Mikhail contacted us when his hearing declined dramatically and he couldn’t afford a hearing aid. He shared his pain and concern, losing his ability to communicate, facing difficulties participating in our programs, and without inspiration to create.

Thanks to Schoke JFS and Kavod SHEF, we were able to help him secure the hearing aid he needed. Mikhail couldn’t believe it happened without any bureaucratic delays. He again found joy in living!

*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of clients

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3 of Our 50 Zinbarg Camp Scholarship Recipients

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For more information go to: www.ctjfs.org
At the Schoke JFS Virtual Grocery Store you can fill your shopping basket and help feed families in need!

Here are some suggestions of how to use the Virtual Store:

- Pick a night of the week or month that you and your family will fill a shopping cart with the items you are having that week for dinner.
- Fill a shopping cart with your favorite items and make it a recurring monthly shopping trip.
- Pick one item and order enough for one family each day of the month.
- Use with a school, class or group to make a collective gift to the Freedberg Family Kosher Food Pantry.
- Pressed for time? Order a half or full cart, and we will pick the items for you.

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