Get Ready For The JFS Executive Luncheon

Mark your calendar for the JFS Executive Luncheon on Wednesday, May 8, at the Hyatt Regency at Colorado Convention Center, featuring Martha Stewart, the founder of the first multi-channel lifestyle company, Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, an entrepreneur, bestselling author of 99 to date lifestyle books, and Emmy Award-winning television show host.

The Executive Luncheon brings the Denver business and philanthropic communities together to learn more about JFS and honor this year’s annual Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck Community Leadership Award recipient, Temple Emanuel, before listening to a fun, moderated conversation with lifestyle guru Martha Stewart.

Tickets go on sale, Monday, April 1. Learn more about the event, including sponsor opportunities and ticket sale information, at jewishfamilyservice.org/luncheon or contact Kate Shephard at kateshephard@jewishfamilyservice.org or 720.248.4633.
Dear Friends,

It’s impossible to watch the news and not hear stories about how school districts in metro Denver (and across the country, for that matter) are seeing an unprecedented surge in the enrollment of migrant students. In the United States, all children are entitled to a public elementary and secondary education regardless of their citizenship or immigration status. And no matter your opinion about the migrant crisis, I hope we all can agree that children who are struggling—innocent children who are here because of the difficult decision their caregivers made to escape political unrest or economic uncertainty—desperately need mental health support to help them cope and heal from the traumas they have experienced.

I’m proud of our KidSuccess program, which places trained JFS therapists in schools, providing children and adolescents with access to free quality mental health counseling services so they can succeed academically and emotionally. I am equally devastated to hear our therapists share what they’re seeing—children who have experienced or witnessed violence, suffered unspeakable trauma, and endured harrowing journeys to the United States, their short lives filled with more heartbreak than anyone should live through.

In addition to having to navigate language barriers and integrate into a new way of life, these children also must deal with the effects of significant trauma, which can include an inability to concentrate, hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, dissociation, and an inability to sleep. One of our therapists shared an almost unbelievable story for this issue, and if you watched it in a movie, you might think ordeals like it don’t exist, but you would be mistaken.

Unfortunately, these students and schools need more support. Our therapists are overwhelmed, and their caseloads are unsustainable. Requests for additional therapists are growing as classrooms reach their capacity limits. We’re trying to meet the increasing needs, but I won’t lie. It’s challenging.

I hope when you hear about the Denver school situation, you think about how our KidSuccess therapists are on the front lines making a difference, welcoming children, providing the necessary resources for them to heal, and making sure they feel safe in their new community—and it is one of the most difficult, yet fulfilling, jobs.

With warm regards,

Linda P. Foster
President and CEO

---

KidSuccess therapist interactions with students at 15 Denver Public Schools

From 2022 to 2023, we experienced a 60% increase in appointments and a 160% increase in consultations.

---

Family Matters is a quarterly publication of Jewish Family Service, 3201 South Tamarac Drive, Denver, CO 80231, 303.597.5000
A change may be just down the road

In the past year, JFS has resettled 137 refugees from across the world, including those forced to flee their homelands due to economic hardship and persecution from countries such as Ukraine, Afghanistan, El Salvador, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. For refugees like David, who fled from Uganda and arrived in the United States this past July, JFS is the promise of a new beginning.

JFS is a permanent Reception & Placement agency working in partnership with HIAS, the Global Jewish Organization for Refugees. Like JFS, HIAS provides vital services to refugees so they can rebuild their lives.

When refugees like David enter the country through HIAS, they receive three months of financial support to cover initial housing and living expenses. However, these funds do not go far, leaving many refugees struggling to pay rent and buy appropriate clothes for the changing seasons, food, and essentials. Plus, many refugees do not find stable employment until month five of living in the United States, which often means there is a gap of two months where they do not have financial support, making them vulnerable to eviction, utility shut off, and debt.

Simply put, it’s unrealistic to think that a refugee can learn a new culture, find a job, and become self-sufficient in three months.

Our friend David spoke English well and was motivated to find a job. In his home country, he was a truck driver and a mechanic, but he could not find a job here in either of those areas. After two months of job hunting, David began working at Amazon’s warehouse facility. He has subsequently received a promotion and a cash bonus. David is now a full-time Amazon delivery driver, working his requested five 10-hour shifts each week—and he loves his job, co-workers, and manager. It’s not unusual for him to make 160 stops each day, delivering 250 packages!

‘JFS is like building a foundation on a house—my foundation for a new life. I have a house, a job, a car—everything in my new life is because of JFS,” shared David.

You can help JFS build more foundations for new lives by donating to our Yana Vishnitsky Refugee Resettlement program. Visit jewishfamilyservice.org/resettle to help those adjusting to life in Colorado. Sometimes, our newly resettled refugees need a little extra support to overcome their struggles or navigate their new surroundings, and that’s where you can make a tremendous difference.

“JFS IS LIKE BUILDING A FOUNDATION ON A HOUSE—MY FOUNDATION FOR A NEW LIFE. I HAVE A HOUSE, A JOB, A CAR—EVERYTHING IN MY NEW LIFE IS BECAUSE OF JFS.”

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS AND THEIR FAMILIES WELCOME TO CONNECT

JFS is bringing Holocaust survivors and their descendants together for a social gathering. If you are a Holocaust survivor or descendant of a survivor, join us for a short program, food, and time to connect.

Sunday, June 2 from 1 to 3 p.m. in the JFS Atrium, 3201 S. Tamarac Drive, Denver, CO 80231
RSVP at jewishfamilyservice.org/social-event.
We Must Act Against Hunger

Demand for JFS’s onsite and mobile food pantries is at an all-time high, and the number of families in need of food support in Denver continues to grow. Each week more and more families come to JFS for food. We now see an average of 16 new households each pantry day.

With the continued increase of new households needing food support, we currently serve more than three times the number of daily clients served before COVID-19. Pre-pandemic, JFS provided food assistance to just approximately 40 households per day (120 per week). JFS now regularly serves more than 150 total households each day. From July 2023 through January 2024, the JFS team served more than 15,000 households, feeding nearly 40,000 people.

We live in a time where having a job is no longer a reflection of whether a person can afford to pay their bills, buy food, or provide their family with the necessities they need to live. Between inflation, rising food prices, and soaring housing costs, enjoying regular healthy meals is an impossible reality for far too many people.

Surely, we can all agree that no one in our community should go hungry and that children need full stomachs so they can focus on classes and learn at school, it is unacceptable for older adults to choose between paying for medications over groceries, and parents shouldn’t have to sacrifice a meal so another family member can eat. And if we believe those things, it’s critical we feel compelled to step up to help those experiencing setbacks or dealing with other struggles. Let’s face it: No one wants to go to a food pantry, but receiving essentials and nourishing food to feed our bodies and fuel our minds is fundamental to our ability to thrive.

The amount of food and hygiene inequity we’re seeing at our Weinberg Food Pantry and our Mobile Food & Hygiene Pantry is unsustainable. We must invest in a community where no one goes hungry, and everyone has necessities when they fall on difficult times. Unfortunately, JFS isn’t unique.

Food pantries across Colorado are experiencing exactly what we are seeing. According to a 2021 Hunger Free Colorado Survey, 33% of Coloradans lack reliable access to nutritious food, and 16% of Colorado children are not getting adequate nutrition due to financial constraints. Not having enough food or enough of the right foods has lasting health effects and can lead to malnutrition, vitamin deficiencies, chronic diseases, and more.

In the long term, let’s work together to ensure a future where we end the food and hygiene poverty crisis, so people live healthier lives. But right now, we need everyone’s help to restock pantry shelves and offer relief to the growing number of individuals and families who need a hand-up.

Surely, we can all agree that healthy food and hygiene essentials are not luxuries and recognize that investing in people benefits everyone in our community. This moment is the time to rally and support our food pantries. Here are a few ways to get involved:

1. Make a monetary donation to JFS at jewishfamilyservice.org/donate/make-a-donation, which is the most effective way to help serve our food pantry clients. We can purchase food at wholesale or at lower costs, so your dollar stretches further.
2. Bring nonperishable food and most-needed items to our Weinberg Food Pantry. Learn more about our virtual food drive, Amazon Wish List, and our most-needed items at jewishfamilyservice.org/donate/donate-food.
3. Raise awareness. Follow JFS on social media to learn more and stay informed. Be sure to engage in the conversations and share information with your network.

Let’s show our neighbors some grace, help our food pantries stock their shelves, and be a part of the solution to end food insecurity throughout our community.
In Their Own Words: A JFS KidSuccess Therapist

In her Family Matters letter, JFS President and CEO Linda P. Foster shared what our KidSuccess therapists see in Denver area schools regarding migrant children. One of our therapists shared the following story about their McMeen Elementary School client.

At the age of 2, this client and her three siblings were sitting at the dinner table with their parents in a small town in Venezuela when a gang member entered their home and fatally shot their father in front of them. The oldest child, who was 7 at the time (and is now 11), still has scars from the burns of seven shell casings that flew from the man’s gun and hit her chest. Their mother, who had just given birth to the youngest child a few weeks before, decided to flee the country to protect her family.

With her C-section stitches still healing, she packed their things and brought them first to Colombia, where they unfortunately encountered more violence. At that point, the mother decided to make the journey to the United States with her children to seek a better life for them. She carried a backpack of belongings and walked and hitchhiked with her four children through 12 countries over the course of many months to arrive in Colorado last summer. The family begged for money and food when they could along the way.

When they arrived here, they had no place to live, no money, no documentation, no food, and no friends or family to help, so they lived on the streets and in shelters when there was space. They were fortunate enough to receive some short-term rental assistance from a local church for a few months, and they have been living in an apartment with no furniture. With this rental assistance ending soon, the mom is preparing to move her family back onto the streets for the winter. She has been unable to find employment, and saving enough money for housing, utilities, warm clothes, and food for her kids has been extremely difficult. This mom is trying her very best, and when she has money for ingredients, she makes arepas and sells them on the sidewalk.

This client sees a JFS therapist for weekly sessions in Spanish to support her processing of trauma and emotional dysregulation.

Fostering intergenerational friendships and reducing loneliness in Boulder County

Currently, 20 volunteers are serving in this role. Volunteers create an important social connection by providing companionship through regular visits to people who are at risk of feeling isolated due to aging, mobility impairments, or other reasons.

JFS currently has clients who are seeking a friendly visitor. These relationships often deepen into friendships that are genuinely meaningful to both people.

Volunteers are asked to commit for six months or more. A background check and COVID-19 vaccination are required for this role. Reach out to Tina, our Boulder Community Engagement Liaison, at ckantor@jewishfamilyservice.org for more information, or visit jewishfamilyservice.org/volunteer/boulder to start your volunteer application today.
Advancing Our Community Mental Health Services

For more than 40 years, the JFS Mental Health department has partnered with clients, families, and the community to create opportunities to achieve emotional wellness and stability. With a team of skilled mental health professionals, we are dedicated to helping, improving, and making a difference in the lives of those struggling with mental health issues in the metro Denver area.

We’re excited to share that JFS has received two grants that will strengthen our mental health services and allow us to do even more to help those who can benefit from mental health treatment.

JFS is developing and launching a new mental health program that focuses on connecting individuals who need psychiatric medication with a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner (PMHNP). They will be able to provide medication management and prescriptions thanks to a two-year Caring for Denver Community-Centered Solutions grant. The grant enables JFS to hire a full-time PMHNP and provide psychiatric medication support to clients working with therapists and clients seeking medication-only services. The PMHNP will work collaboratively with JFS therapists and external referring therapists to ensure proper medication and dosage are prescribed for acute and chronic mental health conditions to current clients. They will also accept outside referrals from therapy-only providers who struggle to keep up with medication-only client needs.

This expansion will increase access to psychiatric care providers and medication management for clients who are uninsured, underinsured, and covered by Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurance within the City and County of Denver.

The National Mental Health Workforce Collaborative grant from the Mental Health Institute at Metropolitan State University Denver aims to increase the number of qualified licensed mental health and substance use treatment clinicians while increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in patient-facing mental health and substance use treatment positions. Through this grant, JFS will receive partial funding for two unlicensed, post-master’s degree mental health therapists seeking licensure for our school-based KidSuccess team. Our innovative KidSuccess program places trained JFS therapists and graduate program interns in schools, providing children and adolescents with access to free, quality mental health counseling services so they can succeed academically and emotionally. Our new therapists will be able to help students even more as we eliminate barriers to behavioral health care by offering comprehensive, culturally competent in-school prevention, intervention services, and mental health treatment.

Learn more about JFS’s mental health services at jewishfamilyservice.org/services/denver-mental-health-services.
Create a Legacy Today

When you make a legacy gift to JFS, you leave your mark on our community. It’s a personal gift that will continue to deliver the values important to you long after you’re gone. It’s your legacy. As a planned giving donor, you can help ensure that the life-transforming work of JFS endures for generations to come. There will always be needs from vulnerable members of our community, and your gift will provide a safety net of hope. Please visit jewishfamilyservice.org/donate/jfs-legacy-society to learn how you can make a lasting difference.

Thank you to our JFS Legacy Society members who had the vision to include JFS as a beneficiary in their estate plans. Our current member list can be found at jewishfamilyservice.org/donate/jfs-legacy-society.

When an Idea Became a Reality, Good Continues to Happen

The JFS Weinberg Food Pantry did not begin because the need for food and other essentials suddenly emerged. Our food pantry started because the need grew beyond what several compassionate Denverites began in 1991 and could manage on their own.

When Barbara (Bobbie) Carr read articles about Jewish people throughout the Denver community, needing food, including newly resettled Russian immigrants, she was compelled to help. Together with her husband, Jerry (of blessed memory), friends Ralph (of blessed memory) and Carolyn Auerbach, and others, they started a Kosher Food Bank. The friends met weekly, interviewed prospective clients, purchased food from wholesalers, and gathered to sort, pack, and distribute the items with other community members. The group was dedicated to making sure there was always enough food for those in need and often worked with synagogues and individuals to raise funds—and, of course, generously donated themselves in addition to their time.

In 1994, when the community needs became too great and the operation too large for the founders and their friends to manage, JFS stepped in and adopted the pantry into the agency. In 2003, the pantry moved to its current location at our Denver headquarters. It became The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Food Pantry after the agency received funding from the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, which is dedicated to meeting the basic needs of people experiencing poverty.

Despite the administrative operation changes and a location move, the founders remained involved, and their goal of providing hunger relief for those in need is still at the forefront of what we do. For 20 years, the food pantry has provided a safety net for those in the community who are food insecure, and while the needs continue to increase, so does our commitment to help.

Not only were the Carrs the innovators behind our Weinberg Food Pantry, but they are also members of our JFS Legacy Society. Because they decided to leave JFS in their estate plans, their legacy will continue to make a life-changing difference to the thousands of families who rely on JFS to rebuild and transform their lives. We are so grateful for their compassion to support their neighbors in need and for their steadfast dedication to JFS.
Fill hearts and seder plates!

Please give generously to the Sally Steele Metzger Passover Fund and help bring Passover to Jewish households in our community.

jewishfamilyservice.org/donate/passover