



# STROUM JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER 2023 IMPACT REPORT





## COVER PHOTO

(left to right) Brooke and Ben Pariser, with their children, Ella and Emet; Peymaneh Mollazadehherisi and Amin Bashirinahanji; Austin and Lisa Williams; Stella Robins; and Michelle Flowers-Taylor and her daughter, Tamra Taylor.



## NEW SPORT COURT **\$60,000**

donated to the J for a new outdoor sport court, also shown in the cover photo.

*This project was made possible by a grant from JCamp 180® and generous donations from the Rabbi Arthur A. Jacobovitz Donor Advised Fund of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle and Judy and Joe Schocken.*

# WHAT A YEAR!

It's been a time of revitalization, welcoming new partnerships, building back membership, and truly embracing the friendship and connections that we've all missed the past few years.

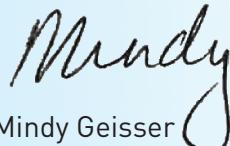
Thanks to you, during the past year we've elevated many familiar programs and launched new ones to create even more experiences that amplify profound Jewish connections for every generation, as we strive to be the Puget Sound's most open and welcoming community-centered Jewish organization. We're immeasurably grateful for your unwavering support, which has made everything possible.

Throughout this impact report, you'll see examples of a year full of life, energy, and smiles—inside our building and beyond. This year's holiday celebrations included three sold-out Maccabeats concerts and the return of our Purim Festival, where we welcomed more than a thousand friends to celebrate with us. In March, thousands of movie buffs joined us for the 28th Seattle Jewish Film Festival, in person and from their own homes. Our community made connections and learned new skills in pickleball and mahjong classes, our amazing aquatics team taught more than 600 swim lessons every week, and summer J Camp was more energetic and joyful than ever.

In these pages, you'll also meet members of our community who connect with the J in meaningful and unexpected ways: a couple that moved here from Iran and found a home away from home at the J; staff members who use their expertise to impact the next generation; a mother and daughter conquering their fears; and families that have passed down their love of the J through generations.

We hope these stories bring a smile to your face and make your heart flutter. There's just so much to celebrate.

Thank you, and may the coming year expand on the foundation that we have built—and continue to fortify—together.

  
Mindy Geisser  
Board of Directors President

  
Amy Lavin  
Chief Executive Officer



# CONNECTION

## VISION



To be the Puget Sound's most open and welcoming community-centered Jewish organization.

## MISSION



To offer experiences that amplify profound Jewish connections for every generation.

## SJCC EXPERIENCES ARE:



**Indelibly Jewish:** You can sense 'Jewish' in everything we are.

**Relevant:** We evolve with and in the world around us.

**Interconnected:** We are linked and connected to one another and the community around us.

**Sustainable:** Financially sound, resourced for the future, mindful of the world around us.

*Adopted summer 2023.*



# HOLIDAYS

Between September 2022 and August 2023, over **2,000** people celebrated Jewish holidays and shared traditions with us. We sang and danced, enjoyed hamantashen and challah, traveled to six neighborhoods with Hands on Hanukkah, and so much more.



## PURIM **1,000+**

attended the J's Purim Festival



## TU B'SHEVAT **500**

daffodils planted by students in our Early Childhood School, part of a worldwide living memorial for children who died in the Holocaust



## PASSOVER **360**

attended ECS Passover Seders



## TOT SHABBAT **475**

attended weekly music celebrations



## ECS SHABBAT **7,000**

loaves of challah braided by Early Childhood School students as they learn Jewish traditions

# EARLY CHILDHOOD

“The J’s Early Childhood School’s innovative practices nurture and develop Jewish identity,

not only for the children but families as well. Hebrew-English bilingual classes and the intentional recruitment of Israeli educators is a model worth sharing.... ECS teachers bring rich diversity into the school, creating a learning environment that lives up to the SJCC vision to be the region's most open and welcoming community-centered Jewish organization."

Veronica Maravankin  
Vice President, Sheva Center  
JCC Association of North America



# TRUCK DAY 380

kids, parents + teachers  
climbed and explored trucks  
and other community vehicles



# DOR L'DOR 350

family members attended  
this annual celebration with  
grandparents + special friends



# ECS ENROLLMENT **196**

students, with three English-Hebrew bilingual classrooms for 45 kids ages 3 and 4 years old, filled our hallways every day

# CHILDHOODS AT THE J SHAPED LIFELONG CONNECTIONS



# BROOKE, BEN, ELLA + EMET PARISER

Some of Brooke Pariser's earliest memories are from the J. "I lost my first tooth in the sandbox on the back playground, and I remember the entire school spent the day digging and searching for it," she said with a laugh. "And of course, I remember those same rainbow hallways in ECS."

Brooke's husband, Ben, and their kids, Ella and Emet, also had childhoods filled with J memories. Even though Ben grew up in Florida, he spent a few summers in Washington and attended summer camp at the J. Ella and Emet attended the Early Childhood School and summer camp.

"The J has completely formed my community and my kids' communities," Brooke said.

Brooke's mom, Iantha Sidell, also built her community at the J after she first converted to Judaism. "Many of my mom's friendships today were made at the J and she started her Jewish leadership journey there," Brooke said. "It's quite meaningful for me to have a similar experience and to see my kids continue to foster friendships with the children they connected to in ECS."

The school continues to have a big impact on Ella and Emet's lives and friend groups. When Emet was getting ready to start kindergarten in the fall of 2020, Brooke was worried about his options of virtual school or missing an entire year. So, she was thrilled when ECS started an in-person kindergarten program. "It was the best educational experience for him," she said.

As Ella starts middle school this fall, Brooke notes that all these years and different schools later, Ella's closest friends are still the ones she made in ECS. "This summer she spent three weeks at Camp Solomon Schechter and nine of the girls she was with at camp all grew up at ECS together," Brooke said.

After Emet left ECS, the Parisers found themselves at the J less often. But recently, Brooke felt the pull back to her childhood home. This year, she joined the J's board of directors (following in the footsteps of her mom, who served on the board for nine years) and is enjoying the opportunity to see the J from a broader perspective. "I love seeing the bigger picture and helping the J continue to provide for so many families like it's provided for mine," she said.

Ella and Emet's connection with the J is deeply ingrained in them both and Brooke hopes they continue to feel at home there, just like she always has. "I feel beyond lucky to watch my kids grow up in the same building that I did, surrounded by such an amazing community," Brooke said.



She notes that, no matter how long they've been away, whenever the kids come to the J, it feels like a homecoming. "When they walk into building, they run down the halls like they own the place. They've always felt welcomed and comfortable there," she said.

Brooke also loves watching Ella and Emet's Jewish journeys—which began at the J with Passover celebrations, Tot Shabbats, and Purim parades—continue to bloom. "The J was their first connection to Judaism and to the sense of belonging to a community, both the Jewish community and the community at large," Brooke said. "Those early experiences provided them with a sense of pride in their culture and their community that has molded their relationship with Judaism in such a profound way."



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“I hope I’m modeling the fact that you’re never too old to learn something new or to overcome a fear.”

Michelle Flowers-Taylor

# IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO JUMP IN

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## MICHELLE FLOWERS-TAYLOR + TAMRA TAYLOR

Michelle Flowers-Taylor loves swimming and boating with her family, which is something she never expected. "Growing up, I was a really poor swimmer," she said. "I was never comfortable in the water."

That all changed when her daughter, Tamra, started taking swim lessons at the J.

"I wanted her to have a different experience than I did," Michelle said. Which is why she and her husband, Landon, decided to enroll Tamra in swim lessons when she was 2 years old. "Since day one, she's been excited about her lessons. She really loves them," Michelle said.

Two years later, Tamra still loves being in the water, and she's also gained confidence and understands water safety. During a family vacation to the Bahamas last fall, Michelle was impressed that now 4-year-old Tamra knew to wait to go in the water until she had her life jacket on and was so self-assured when swimming.

In fact, Michelle was so impressed that she finally felt ready to try and overcome her own water fears. "I decided it was time for me to become a better swimmer," she said.

She signed up for private lessons at the J and after six weeks she was shocked at how much more confident she felt in the water. "I'm not ready for the Olympics yet," Michelle joked, "but I'm not afraid of the water anymore. I actually enjoy it!"

The Flowers-Taylor family lives on Mercer Island, which makes it all the more essential to Michelle that her family is competent in the water. "It's such an important life skill that everyone should know, especially if you live on an island," she said.

Michelle loves seeing Tamra have fun in the pool—diving to find toys at the bottom or doing water tricks—noting with a laugh that "she's a much better swimmer than I am." But Michelle also believes the impact of Tamra's lessons goes far beyond the pool. "It's improved her confidence. She's strong and she's going to be tall, and she's very physically active. I'm glad she's learning to be comfortable and confident in her body."

Michelle hopes Tamra is also learning from watching her tackle her own obstacles. "I hope I'm modeling the fact that you're never too old to learn something new or to overcome a fear," Michelle said. "Plus, I think she sees that even challenges can be overcome with consistency and effort."

While the Olympics might not be in the cards for Michelle, she's thrilled that her family can finally enjoy the water together. "It's such a fun thing for us to share," she said. "We get to be silly and splash around and make great memories for Tamra. It's really joyful and a great bonding experience."

# COMMUNITY

This past year, more than **1,000** people walked through our doors each day to workout, meet friends, and explore new interests. **700+** people participated in community events, including mahjong, bridge + arts classes, and family movie sing-alongs.



## MEMBERSHIP

**3,721**

members of all ages connected at the J



## GROUP FITNESS

**2,080**

classes—from dynamic yoga and high intensity interval training, to aquafit and Rock Steady Boxing for people living with Parkinson's Disease—helped people be active



## SWIM LESSONS

**3,141**

kids + adults learned to swim in the J pool



## J KIDS SPORTS

**417**

kids learned basketball, pickleball, soccer, and more in the launch of our new J Kids Sports program





## SUMMER J CAMP 1,208

campers made a summer of memories—the highest number in the history of the J



## SUMMER J CAMP

# 114

counselors created meaningful, fun, and safe experiences for kids all summer, and developed their own leadership and coaching skills to last a lifetime

# FINDING A HOME, FAR AWAY FROM HOME



# PEYMANEH MOLLAZADEHHERISI + AMIN BASHIRINAHANJI

When Peymaneh Mollazadehherisi and Amin Bashirinahanji moved to Seattle from Iran in September of 2022, their first time in the U.S., they didn't expect to stumble into an entire community. But that's exactly what they found at the J.

Peymaneh has a background in children's art education, so when she saw a job opening at the J's Early Childhood School, she eagerly applied. The first time she walked into the J, she knew she'd found somewhere special.

"Ever since my first interview, I feel like I'm at home when I'm here," she said. "I knew this would be a good place for me." Peymaneh joined the ECS faculty as a support teacher and has seen her own journey mirrored in the children. "I feel like I'm a student too," she said. "I learn so much from all the other teachers who are so patient and helpful, and I learn from the children too. I'm learning about U.S. culture and customs, I'm learning English—just like the children."

Amin noticed an immediate change in Peymaneh after she started working at the J. "When we were first here, we didn't know anyone and we had no family around, and Peymaneh was so homesick," he said. "But when she comes home from the J, she's happy at the end of the day. And that makes me happy."

Amin started joining Peymaneh for early morning workouts in the J's Fitness Center before heading off to his job in home renovation. He quickly felt the same connection that Peymaneh felt. "The J's slogan is 'everyone is welcome,' and it really does feel like that," he said. "Everyone is accepted here, no matter your beliefs or religion. I have never felt labeled as 'an immigrant' or 'someone who can't speak English well.' Everyone is always friendly, respectful, and kind."

One of the first people Amin connected with was Fitness Manager Austin Williams. "He always greets us with open arms like we are old friends," said Amin.

One morning, Austin noticed that Amin seemed unusually upset. When the two started talking, Amin expressed frustrations with his current job and told Austin he dreamed of finding a career that he enjoyed. Austin, who knew that Amin had a fitness background, suggested he look into personal training. Although Amin has always been an active person, it hadn't occurred to him as a career and he didn't know the steps to take.



Austin, who began his own personal training journey after encouragement from the J's former Fitness Manager Josh Cross, was happy to pay the support forward and offer Amin guidance through the certification process. Austin said, "One thing I love about the J is that people can be their authentic selves. I'm really happy that the J and I have played a small part in helping Amin discover a new path that's going to be great for him."

Now Amin is just a few months away from earning his personal training certification and excited for the future. "Austin changed my life direction, and now I can start a new career that I love," Amin said. "I never expected when I came here that I'd meet somebody who would guide my way in the U.S."

Amin and Peymaneh feel lucky that the J has become an anchor in their lives as they create a new home in the Seattle area. They may be far away from their families and community in Iran, but they're slowly finding a new community here, thanks to the J.

"The J changed our lives and brought happiness to my family," Amin said. "What more could we ask for?"





## HANUKKAH **1,200**

attended three sold-out concerts with the Maccabeats—in partnership with Samis Foundation and Seattle Hebrew Academy

# ARTS + IDEAS

The 2022-23 arts season connected our community through eclectic and invigorating Jewish entertainment, with **6,000+** tickets sold, in a lineup of captivating concerts, bestselling authors, renowned chefs, and the annual Seattle Jewish Film Festival.



## SEATTLE JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

### 4,000+

people watched 27 films from 13 countries



## FAMILY ARTS EVENTS

### 1,275

kids + parents attended comedy shows, movie sing-alongs, holiday cooking classes, and more



## CHEW ON THIS! ARTS EVENTS SERIES

### 400

people attended events with authors, chefs, and thought-leaders, including Melissa Rivers (*at left*)—New York Times bestselling author, and daughter of comedian Joan Rivers

# CHOOSING TO STAY CONNECTED



# KAREN ROBINS + STELLA ROBINS

It's clear from the moment Karen Robins sees her granddaughter, Stella, coming down the hall, that these two have a unique connection. "We've always had a special bond," Karen said, wrapping Stella in a big hug.

Stella attended the J's Early Childhood School—"I remember making crafts with you at grandparents' day," Karen said—and the family has supported the J for many years through their Robins Nest Family Foundation. Recently, they funded two hydroponic gardens that provide year-round, hands-on learning opportunities (and fresh veggies!) for children in ECS. They've also provided support for Dinner at Our House, a program where volunteers make dinners for teens experiencing homelessness.

It's always been important to Karen that her family understands the responsibility of giving back to their community. "It sounds old-fashioned, but charity begins at home," she said. "The J and our synagogue have been our home base for so much of our lives and we'd like them to continue to be there for the next generations."

Stella worked as a Summer J Camp counselor this year, helping the next generation make amazing memories. "Some of these kids are going to remember their time at camp for the rest of their lives, so I wanted to make sure their days here were great ones," she said.

She also enjoyed reconnecting with the Jewish community. "It feels like home to me. Coming back after so long, it's fun to see people I know from preschool but haven't seen in years."

Karen was delighted to hear that Stella reconnected with old friends—and the Jewish community—this summer. “I hope this will always be your community,” Karen said. “In my day, the Jewish community had to be your community. You weren’t allowed to join a country club or a sorority that wasn’t Jewish; you had no choice.”

"That's crazy," Stella interjected.

"It was a different world," Karen said. "Today, it's a conscious choice. We make a choice to stay connected to our people. It takes more effort, but it's so important."

How does Karen feel seeing Stella actively choose to stay involved in the Jewish community and the SJCC? She's quick to answer, with a beaming smile: "Proud, as always."



“In my day, the Jewish community had to be your community. Today, it’s a conscious choice. We make a choice to stay connected to our people.”

Karen Robins

# ADVANCING MENTAL HEALTH AT SUMMER J CAMP

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## LISA + AUSTIN WILLIAMS

When Summer J Camp counselor Jack Drake needed help managing some challenging campers this summer, he knew where to turn for guidance: J Camp's first-ever mental health coordinator, Lisa Williams.

"I don't know what I would have done without her," Jack said. Lisa, a longtime social worker, suggested some tools Jack could use to meet the campers' needs and, to his relief, it made a difference. "I'm really glad I could lean on Lisa and her expertise."

Thanks to a groundbreaking initiative from Foundation for Jewish Camp, funded by The Marcus Foundation, Lisa was part of a new program this summer focused on the mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health (MESSH) of our J Camp community. As one of 32 day camps selected to participate, J Camp will receive up to \$36,500 over the next four years to hire mental health professionals, enhance counselor training, develop wellness activities, and more.

Lisa is thrilled with the program's inaugural year. "It went phenomenally well," she said. "The kids and counselors gained valuable skills and confidence that helped them at camp and, I hope, beyond."

Throughout the summer, Lisa was actively involved in the daily life of J Camp. She helped kids navigate transitional moments, offered real-time therapeutic interventions, and joined activities.

She proudly watched as campers who were afraid of the water at the beginning of summer jumped into the pool after a few weeks of talking with her. She helped kids improve their patience and conflict-resolution skills, deal with homesickness, and more.

With the staff, she led weekly "mental health moments." Counselors asked for tools for everything from helping kids stay focused to giving feedback to a coworker. Often, Lisa said, they just needed a sounding board. "Active listening was a big part of my job," she said. "Sometimes they just needed someone to talk to."

According to a recent survey, more than 80% of camp staff members said they benefitted from Lisa's guidance. Jack said he's gained invaluable life skills. "Lisa helped me remember to take care of my own mental health and I feel more equipped to deal with tricky situations in the real world," he said. "I also think it made a difference for the kids to know they had someone to talk to if they were struggling."

Lisa hopes the entire camp community gained a better understanding of their mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health. "I hope they learned how to do something they didn't think was possible or realized that everyone feels the same way they do sometimes. I hope new relationships came out of this, and that kids feel confident in themselves and their abilities," she said. "But most of all, I hope they had the best summer possible."



It was certainly a memorable summer for Lisa, who, in addition to launching this new program, welcomed her first child this September with husband—and fellow J employee—Austin Williams. Seeing the impact Summer J Camp has on kids and teens makes Lisa excited for her son to one day join the ranks of happy campers at the J.

"I see these lineages of families that have been involved at J Camp for years and I think, 'that's going to be us,'" she said. "We'll hopefully be part of J Camp for a long time. We couldn't have picked a better place for our family to grow."

*Foundation for Jewish Camp's Yedid Nefesh initiative is generously funded by The Marcus Foundation.*

“I feel so fortunate that I’ve found a way to combine what I do with who I am.”

Austin Williams

## Read Fitness Manager Austin Williams' story

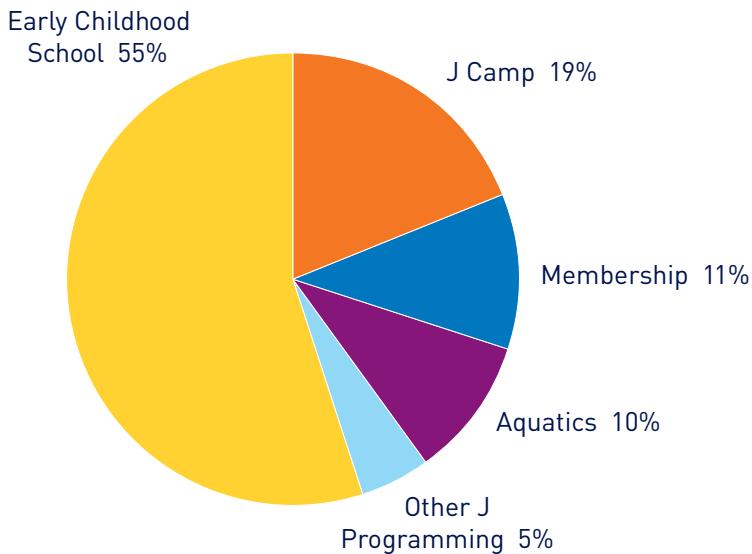


# FINANCIALS

## REVENUE + SUPPORT

Program Revenue	\$ 8,128,176
Contributed Support	1,265,354
COVID-related funding	962,083
Miscellaneous	403,512
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 10,759,125</b>

## PROGRAM REVENUE BREAKDOWN



## LEAVE A LEGACY

### BEQUEST FUNDS TOTAL \$ 789,976

You can designate the SJCC as a beneficiary in your estate planning by specifying monetary, stock, or real estate gifts; stipulating a percentage of the remainder of your estate; or designating the SJCC as the beneficiary of your life insurance, annuity, or retirements (IRA or 401k).

For more information, please contact SJCC Chief Development Officer Michelle Becque at [MichelleB@sjcc.org](mailto:MichelleB@sjcc.org) or 206-388-1998.

*Above financial information is for the fiscal year September 1, 2021, through August 31, 2022.*

Data from FY22 Audited Financials.  
Does not include US CARES Act loan forgiveness.

## WHY WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

This past year, we've secured new grants that helped us create an outdoor sport court and hire an experienced mental health professional to support J Camp all summer. With your continued support, we're able to invest in our staff who works tirelessly to move our mission forward and offer accessible rates to support people who wouldn't otherwise be able to participate in J programs. You help us reach people in their own neighborhoods through pop-up events, partnerships, and transportation options that make it easier for campers and active seniors to get to the J.

As we continue to expand SJCC programs, we've observed changing needs in our community. There's an increased need for social and emotional support for people of all ages, adaptive programs that allow people to engage both in person and online, and financial assistance amidst economic uncertainty.

Ultimately, this is all about reaching more people in more places with more meaningful programming to build deeper connection. By its very nature, reaching is expansive and those extensions need your support. Please help us continue in our pursuit to be the Puget Sound's most open and welcoming community-centered Jewish organization. We can't do it without you.

[Donate Now](#)



# LEADERSHIP

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2022–2023

Mindy Geisser	Camille Chotzen
<i>President</i>	Alex Gamoran
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<i>Immediate Past President</i>	Kelly John-Lewis
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<i>Treasurer</i>	Ian Morris
Natasha Greyber	Brooke Pariser
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	Barbara Sulman
	Rob Wolf

## SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Amy Lavin	<i>Chief Executive Officer</i>
Renée Cohen Goodwin	<i>Chief Operating Officer</i>
Michelle Becque	<i>Chief Development Officer</i>
Dana Weiner	<i>Senior Director, SJCC Experience</i>
Anna Fein	<i>Director, Programming</i>
Richard Openshaw	<i>Director, Accounting + Finance</i>
John Shaffer	<i>Director, Marketing + Strategic Communication</i>

## PAST PRESIDENTS

Norman Davis <sup>z'l</sup>	Cindy Masin
Sam Tarshis <sup>z'l</sup>	Joe Piha
Norman Clein <sup>z'l</sup>	Stan Rosen
Harold Glass <sup>z'l</sup>	Amy Stephson
Addis Guttman <sup>z'l</sup>	Pam Feinstein
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Herb Pruzan	Stuart Williams
Ted Daniels <sup>z'l</sup>	David Rind
Esther Fallick <sup>z'l</sup>	Alan Tesler
Bob Miller	Lindsey Schwartz
Eddie Fisher	Rusty Federman
Lucy Pruzan	Aaron Alhadeff
Gerry Ostroff	Aaron Wolff
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Joel Erlitz	Liz Friedman
Michael Morgan	Oren Nissim
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<sup>z'l</sup> Of blessed memory



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SAVE THE DATE  
APRIL 18, 2024

**CIRCLE OF FRIENDS LUNCHEON  
RETURNS TO CELEBRATE THE  
SJCC'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY**