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Jewish community rallies to help its own

Marissa Brooks



(From left) Adam Pack, Myers Park Methodist; Jennifer Golynsky, JFS volunteer; Stacy Baum, JFS vocational specialist; John Box, Project Noah Task Force representative from the Levine Jewish Community Center; and Harvey Smith, JFS volunteer and owner of Carolina Business Coach, discuss the Back2Work program. Photo courtesy of Karen Knoble

- Learn more:

Jewish Family Services, 5007 Providence Road, Ste. 105, 28226; 704-364-6594;
www.jfscharlotte.org.

Last year, when the economy started tanking and the banks were falling apart, three Charlotte Jewish community leaders got together to discuss solutions.

"Congregants who were previously under moderate economic stress were now facing potential evictions and foreclosures," said Temple Beth El's Senior Rabbi Judith Schindler. "Congregants who were always comfortable were now fearful."

"The Jewish community has its share of chronic poor, and we noticed quickly that this recession was also affecting people who have financially supported agencies in the past," said Sue Worrel, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte.

"At the core of the Federation's mission is Jews helping Jews."

Schindler and Worrel met with Stephanie Starr, executive director of Jewish Family Services - the Jewish community's social services resource center - to discuss the community's financial concerns.

"We knew that the best response would be for us to draw together representatives from each institution so that we could respond collectively to the tremendous issues we were facing," said Schindler.

Worrel said, "We wanted to make it as easy on the members of our community as possible, to enable them to maintain dignity and not to have to ask for help six different ways."

In order to provide that support, the three created "Project Noah: Weathering the Storm - The Jewish Community's Response to the Economic Decline." Temple Beth El, Temple Israel, the Levine Jewish Community Center, the Charlotte Jewish Preschool, the Jewish Preschool on Sardis, the Charlotte Jewish Day School, Jewish Family Services and the Federation nominated representatives to serve on the Project Noah task force.

"It was a diverse and visionary group," said Project Noah Chairwoman Karen Knoble, 51, who had served as president of JFS for several years.

"For every subcommittee, a JFS employee was involved," said Starr, 42, who along with Worrel, 47, oversaw the project.

The task force met on a regular basis for 12 to 15 months beginning in March 2009. It developed mission and vision statements designed to use collective resources to "restore hope, maintain dignity and promote self-reliance for individuals and families throughout the Charlotte Jewish community." The task force brought in additional volunteers to help implement programs.

The Vocational Work Group - Lisa Vogel, John Box and Jessica Daitch - coordinated an online job board and programs for prospective entrepreneurs. Stacy Baum, JFS career and vocational services specialist, coordinated the Job Seeker Support Group and Nosh (snack) and Network.

The Programming Work Group - Jill Lipson, Sharon Lachow-Blumberg and Knoble - developed an online list of Healthcare Resources and programs that included: "Shekel Savvy: Managing Your Dollars and Cents" and "Got Coach," an interactive workshop with a panel of certified professional coaches. Shekel Savvy was a collaboration with Myers Park United Methodist Church, Myers Park Baptist and St. Gabriel's Catholic Church. "Got Coach" was a collaboration with Myers Park United Methodist.

The Volunteer Work Group - Ed Bograd, Knoble and Starr - coordinated the construction of Food Pantry Donation Boxes and the creation of a Volunteer Corps: lawyers, accountants, physicians and dentists who offer pro bono services. The group still is looking for veterinarian volunteers.

Sara-Lynne Levine, Daitch and Knoble worked with Linda Bass, JFS development and communications director, on the extensive marketing efforts that ensured the entire Charlotte Jewish community was aware of Project Noah's resources.

The task force members closed the project in May: "We achieved our objectives," said Starr.

"The vision was that even when Project Noah ceased that our work would be sustainable and make JFS stronger and more accessible in the community," said Knoble.

"Now people really just need jobs."

Marissa Brooks is a freelance writer from the Arboretum area. Have a story idea for Marissa? E-mail her at mbrookspt@earthlink.net.

Read more: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/07/28/1579429/jewish-community-rallies-to-help.html#ixzz0v0HC1NNW>