

JCRI's Refugee Dinner

When the Stranger Becomes Your Neighbor, Fellow Citizen, Friend

The Jewish Community Refugee Initiative (JCRI) held its Welcoming the Stranger to the Table kick-off dinner for National Refugee Shabbat 2018 on October 7 at Temple Israel. The dinner, made possible by an Impact and Innovation grant of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, was sold out with nearly 140 people in attendance.

Temple Israel's sukkah had been disassembled the morning of October 7. Yet that evening, Rabbi Murray Ezring, standing in front of a packed Leon and Sandra Levine Social Hall, used his invocation to explain to the audience of refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, seated beside members of the Jewish community, that Sukkot is a joyous holiday where, under temporary fragile dwellings, we remember that we are the children and descendants of refugees, and that makes us love each other and all people and be aware of our sacred obligations towards the stranger.

Before the serving of a Middle-Eastern dinner, Amy Lefkof, Co-Chair of JCRI, introduced two refugee couples: a Jewish couple from the former Soviet Union who were resettled in the United States in 1991 by HIAS (founded as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), and a young Kurdish couple from Northern Iraq, resettled in 2014 in Charlotte by HIAS's local affiliate Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency. The audience was told HIAS asks us to join them in helping today's refugees, not because the refugees are Jewish, but because we are. To help those ref-



Peter Hindel, member of Temple Beth El, and Syrian refugee Basher Mansour and his mother Ezhour Al Sokkari

ugees in attendance, JCRI member David Cohen explained how net proceeds from the evening would help these refugees pay down their relocation expenses.

Keynote speaker, Merrill Zack,



Fruitful Friend Zanib Rashid, a Kurdish refugee from Iraq, with Amy Lefkof, co-chair of JCRI.

HIAS Senior Director of Community Engagement, explained how current United States immigration and refugee policies are causing pain to refugees overseas and asylees at our southern border. Despite the fact that current refugee numbers surpass even those of post WWII, Zack announced that for fiscal year 2019, President Trump set the refugee admissions goal at an all-time low of 30,000 refugees. She noted that this number is just a ceiling; the goal in FY 2018 was 45,000, but less than half that number was admitted. Zack explained

how consistent low ceiling numbers erode the U.S. infrastructure for refugee resettlement.

Rabbi Judy Schindler, Director of the Stan Greenspon Center for Peace and Social Justice, whose family was assisted by HIAS when they arrived at Ellis Island in 1938, appealed to the Jewish community's collective conscience by recalling how Jews on board the St. Louis, filled with Holocaust refugees, were turned away, and 254 of those passengers were murdered on their return to Europe. She warned: "Xenophobia is dangerous and will impact not only our foreign neighbors, but all of us."

Citing the book she co-authored with Judy Seldin-Cohen, *Recharging Judaism*, Rabbi Schindler laid out a ladder of civic engagement for helping refugees, encouraging members



Jewish Community Refugee Initiative program for Welcoming the Stranger to the Table dinner.

of the audience to step up somewhere on the ladder: volunteering with local refugee organizations, educating themselves by reading articles on immigration policy, donating to help with resettlement costs, advocating by calling elected officials or a letter to the editor, organizing by working with agencies trying to raise the refugee admissions ceiling, and joining a national movement

working towards immigration reform.

Theresa Matheny, from Refugee Support Services (RSS), explained RSS's Fruitful Friend program which pairs local refugees with American families. At almost every table that evening, a Jewish Fruitful Friend family sat next to their refugee family. Peter Hindel, a member of Temple Beth El, and Basher Mansour, a Syrian refugee whose torture left him wheelchair-bound, were one pair who came to the stage. Mansour explained his arduous journey from Syria to a Jordanian refugee camp to the U.S. He said he loves Peter and Linda Hindel like family and credited Peter with getting him needed physical therapy.

Marsha Hirsch, Director of Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency (CRRRA), HIAS's local affiliate, spoke how refugees become contributors to our community. Since 1996, Charlotte has welcomed over 10,000 refugees through the assistance of CRRRA and Catholic Charities. Hirsch pointed out how refugee resettlement is a public-private partnership that requires hours of volunteerism and local donations of clothes and household items. The end result: "That stranger becomes your neighbor and eventually your fellow citizen" and "they also become your friend."

The evening concluded with Temple Beth El's Rabbi Asher Knight explaining why the Torah portion Lech L'cha "Go, move from here" was chosen for National Refugee Shabbat. Not only did Abraham and Sarah "set out on a journey that took them from the land that they had known to an unfamiliar land and a new future," but one midrash explains

If you were unable to attend the refugee dinner, but would like more information about refugee issues, or would like to volunteer or make a donation to one of the organizations that were represented at the dinner, here is the contact info:
Stan Greenspon Center for Peace and Social Justice:
www.stangreenspon-center.org
Refugee Support Services:
www.refugeesupportservices.org
Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency:
www.carolinarefugee.org
HIAS: www.hias.org/getinvolved
Jewish Community Refugee Initiative:
www.charlottejcri.org
aflefkof@carolina.rr.com

that the reason Abraham left his father's home was because "he was dissatisfied with the world he saw around him." Employing Rabbi Jonathan Sack's phrase "sacred discontent" to describe the impetus for Abraham's journey "a protest that the world is not as it ought to be," Rabbi Knight urged the audience to "Go, move from here; being complacent is not an option."

Together, former refugees and members of the Jewish community left, perhaps walking, as Rabbi Knight urged, "towards the world as it should be, a world of wholeness and holiness, a world of promise and possibility." ☆

Photos courtesy of Lawonna Daves.

Moishe House: WE ARE 2018!

By Rachel Southmayd, Moishe House Communications Manager

There are a lot of people out there who like to talk about what millennials don't do. We don't participate in organized Jewish life, we don't take on leadership roles in our communities, we don't give philanthropically of our time or our money.

All due respect to those people, but they've clearly never heard of Moishe House, especially not Moishe House's annual WE ARE campaign.

More than 300 days of the year, Moishe House residents and Moishe House Without Walls (MHWOW) hosts work to create the most interesting and engaging Jewish programming for their peers. Meanwhile, a team of Moishe House staff and lay leaders work to identify and maintain relationships with federations, foundations, and individual donors who believe in the young adults all over the world who are creating their own Jewish communities.

But for six weeks of the year we flip that script. We ask Moishe House residents, community members, and MHWOW hosts to think of all of the time and money that Moishe House has invested in them over the course of the year and make a meaningful gift to the organization. We ask them to support their own houses and MHWOW and show that they believe in the mission and vision of Moishe House - Jewish young adults taking charge and leading the way in developing incredible, rich, unique communities - just as much as any other donor.

WE ARE matters not because of the dollars raised, although we have a goal of \$110,000 in 2018, but because of the number of peo-

ple who come together to make it happen. We had more than 1,900 donations last year, from far-flung places all over the world. The vast majority of them are 20-somethings, or their friends and family members. The people who run and attend Moishe House programs are the same people who are donating.

We believe in these people and every year during WE ARE, they show that they believe in us. And we couldn't be more grateful.

The 2018 WE ARE campaign launched on October 3. Be part of Moishe House's largest single fundraising campaign yet by visiting www.moishehouse.org/weare. ☆

WE ARE
 2018



When hurricane Florence hit the coast of North Carolina, many people were left without resources. In order to get kosher food to the Jewish community, Bentzion Groner enlisted the help of a helicopter pilot he knew and had food delivered to the Chabad. Here he is seen packing some of the boxes before the flight took off. Photo courtesy Rabbi Yossi Groner.