



Celebrating 25 Years of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation

Responding to the Needs of
Disadvantaged Jewish Households



JHF helped establish the Squirrel Hill Health Center, which has provided quality and affordable medical, behavioral, and social services for a decade.

More than 20 years ago, the Jewish Healthcare Foundation (JHF) understood that poverty was a reality in the Jewish community. A JHF survey revealed that at least one in ten households had incomes that would qualify them for at least partial Food Stamps benefits – a finding supported by other communal studies. It became clear that access to food and affordable health care were real issues for the Jewish community.

Two initiatives stand out among JHF's efforts to address the health-related needs of community members facing challenging financial circumstances.

Squirrel Hill Community Food Pantry

In the mid-1990s, Rainbow Kitchen – an organization providing food and other services to low-income households in the broader community – approached JHF to ask for help in meeting the food needs of newly-arrived immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, many of whom were Jewish. At the time, there were 300 food pantries in Allegheny County, but none addressed Jewish dietary needs.

In response, JHF developed a strategic plan and then made a grant in 1998 to establish

what was then called the Kosher Food Super Pantry. Today, the renamed Squirrel Hill Community Food Pantry continues to distribute kosher food to hundreds of families and individuals who live with the threat of hunger in the heart of the Jewish community and throughout the 15217 zip code.

The pantry, a program of Jewish Family & Children's Service, is open to those of all religions and backgrounds, including immigrants, the elderly (half of the pantry's users are seniors), and the working poor. The small staff, together with many dedicated volunteers, also provides social support services for families in need.

Squirrel Hill Health Center

At a 2001 meeting at the White House, JHF President and

CEO Karen Wolk Feinstein, PhD, learned that President Bush was looking for ways to serve the uninsured. Dr. Feinstein, an early founder of a Neighborhood Health Center during the War on Poverty, suggested expanding the funding available for federally qualified health centers (FQHCs).

When, a few months later, the White House announced that additional funding was available, JHF staff thought that this gave the Foundation an opportunity to address the needs of low-income households in the spirit of Montefiore Hospital, which once had two community health centers located in Hazelwood and Greenfield.

“What if we could create an FQHC in Squirrel Hill that would care for the poor, and provide quality primary care with a public health focus? And, what if it had a special niche to care for any new immigrant group – as Jews were so often strangers in strange lands?” asked Dr. Feinstein.

Dodie Roskies (a long-time JHF consultant and current director of JGenesPittsburgh) worked with Foundation COO/CPO Nancy Zionts to develop the complex plan required to open what would be called

the Squirrel Hill Health Center (SHHC).

Since opening in 2006, SHHC has physically expanded once and is bursting at the seams a second time. It serves a population from more than 25 countries and cultures. SHHC staff speaks multiple languages and translation services are available, which has made SHHC a home to Pittsburgh's growing community of international immigrants and refugees.

In addition to comprehensive primary care, SHHC provides behavioral health services, dental care, case management, and access to supportive services. It has added mobile services, and is known for best practices on the local, state, and national levels. With an infusion of recent federal funding, SHHC has opened another clinic in Brentwood.

Reflecting on the outcome, Chuck Cohen, president of the JHF board when SHHC was launched, says, “We created an infrastructure for reviving the noble mission of the former Montefiore Hospital neighborhood health clinic. The Squirrel Hill Health Center was launched with generous infusions of distinct JHF values, aimed at quality, and financial start-up capital.”



Thanks to the contributions of dedicated staff and volunteers, the JHF-developed Squirrel Hill Community Food Pantry provides nutritious meals and social support services to families in need. (Photo credit: Squirrel Hill Community Food Pantry)

Over the next year, this monthly series, marking JHF's 25th anniversary, gives us a chance to remember, take stock, express gratitude, and celebrate successes.

Learn more about JHF's journey to better health and health care by ordering our 25th Anniversary ROOTS magazine (contact Carla Barricella at: barricella@jhf.org).

Next Month: JHF's efforts to improve public health