

My Grown Up and Me!

Sunday Funday is in full-swing at the My Grown Up & Me Storytime!

Meet other grown ups and kiddos while we sing songs, play in different spaces, and read PJ Library Books together. This storytime is designed for infants and toddlers.

**April 14th
10:00 AM**

JCC of Greater Buffalo,
Holland Family Building,
Indoor Playground



To Register:

Email Nicole: nicole@buffalojewishfederation.org

FREE!

TOT SHABBAT WITH PJ LIBRARY

Explore different spaces in Jewish Buffalo and experience each congregation or agency's unique Shabbat culture and hospitality

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Starts @
5:45 PM

**April 12th
Hillel of Buffalo
Commons Suite 101B,
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Questions? Send them to Nicole:
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COMMUNITY

The 2019 JCPA Conference...and You

By Nina Lukin

Nina Lukin, Co-Chair of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) attended the national Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) annual conference in Washington this past February with Executive Committee member Deborah Goldman and Executive Director Mara Koven-Gelman. While there, they met Buffalonian Valentino Dixon. This is her report from the event.



Nina Lukin and Valentino Dixon

145 Days. Valentino Dixon was exonerated and released from prison 145 days ago. He served a 27-year sentence for a crime he didn't commit. Less than five months later, he was sharing his story at the annual JCPA conference in front of 250 attendees representing 65 communities. Valentino didn't focus on his wrongful conviction. Rather, he was an impassioned and compelling speaker on the subject of criminal justice reform.

The inequities people of color suffer at the hands of the justice system constitute one of the most pressing civil rights issues in the U.S. Mass incarceration disproportionately hurts minorities. Imprisonment diminishes employment opportunities post-release, destabilizes families, increases rates of poverty, and can exacerbate mental health problems. However, more than 50 years after the passage of landmark civil rights legislation, our society still struggles to fully embrace equality. Our nation and our local community have an unprecedented opportunity to transform its approach to reducing mass incarceration and the associated fiscal and social trade-offs in other

governmental costs that go along with it.

If you're wondering about the intersectionality of Jewish Community Relations and Criminal Justice Reform, the Jewish community has a long and distinguished track record on fighting for racial equality and civil rights. For 75 years, JCPA has convened the local networks to mobilize the grassroots on key issues and advocate for those interests.

The JCPA conference allowed me to understand how nuanced and complex situations can be and yet how I can help to move Buffalo forward in addressing the principle mandate of the Jewish community relations field: working to repair the world through Jewish activism. How?

- Heightening community **awareness**
- Building **alliances** with policy makers, advocates, and communities impacted
- Inspiring civic and social **involvement**
- Encouraging **deliberation** on key issues of local importance
- Empowering the Jewish community to **take action** on criminal justice

What does that look like for people seeking to get involved here in Buffalo? Go to City Council meetings, observe how your representatives voted on key issues, attend court watch trainings, read about law enforcement practices, obtain the facts on how bail setting works in Erie County, read articles from outside your echo chamber, train on restorative justice practices, volunteer for a recidivism-reduction program, offer your social work/legal services skill set pro bono, research misdemeanor incarceration rate disparities among races, visit with individuals who have served their time and have a permanent criminal record....discover how their record impacts their employment, housing options, education re-entry, credit applications, etc.

Acknowledge the human capital impact!

Roy Waterman, JCPA's Criminal Justice Initiative Project Manager, specializes in changing mindsets, re-scripting the narrative around the realities of formerly incarcerated people. He spoke from the heart when he said, "Minorities need people that don't look like them to advocate for them to be treated with dignity, passion, and justice." This rung so true to me and is in alignment with how I believe Jews alone will not diminish anti-Semitism. Racial bigotry, religious persecution, Islamophobia, gender-bias, anti-LGBTQ or any other form of hatred cannot be wiped out unless we confront it.

Please take a moment to read Valentino's story and view his extraordinary art work available for sale at www.valentinodixon.com. If you are interested in being part of any of the JCRC projects, contact Mara Koven-Gelman at maraj@buffalojewishfederation.org.

What about the Fifth Son?

Rabbi Laizer Labkovski

As we prepare for the holiday of Passover, it is a fitting time to focus on one of the very first parts of the Seder when we declare "Let all who are hungry sit down with us to eat, and let all who are in need of their Pesach supplies join us for the Seder."

This year marks the 25th year since Chani and I came to Buffalo as emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe to spread the love and joy of Judaism to every Jew regardless of affiliation and background. As we reach this milestone and think back to the warm manner in which we were welcomed into this community, we are filled with gratitude for all of the warmth and love that the Buffalo Jewish community has shown us over the years. We realize how thankful we are to be here, and how proud and fortunate we are to be a part of the Buffalo community.

Over the last 25 years, it was also our privilege to give back to the local community, and, with G-d's constant assistance and blessings, we can now look back to many successful years. Besides the many educational and Jewish cultural programs that we have created and helped grow, we feel privileged to have so many opportunities and ways to help those who are most vulnerable and most in need, with the numerous programs we run for over 1000 residents of the local senior citizen's homes and hospitals. We managed to bring the warmth of Judaism and the joy of the Holidays to them, as well as a word of encouragement or a shoulder to lean on in a time of need.

Five years ago we brought back the Kosher Meals on Wheels program that delivers more than 10,000 delicious and nutritious meals to the elderly and isolated members of our Jewish community every year. We ensure that they know that they are neither neglected nor forgotten.



We have just begun the "Let's do Kosher lunch" program, which allows seniors to come and eat a variety of healthy and delicious Kosher foods, while enjoying the chance to socialize with others. It was another means to reach out to these valued members of our community, and show them the respect and appreciation that they deserve.

In the course of the Seder, we also discuss the "Four Sons" and the questions that they pose, from the "Wise Son" who wants to know all of the particulars of Passover observances, to the "Wicked Son" who challenges and mocks them. There is a "Simple Son" who simply asks "What's this?" There is even a son whose only form of participation is simply being there. With everything happening around him, not a single question occupies his mind.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe went a step further. Modern society has had an impact upon the Jewish people: today we have yet another son. The son who does not even attend a seder. Yes, it is true. There are many Jews out there who are not going to attend a seder this Passover. They can be put into three basic categories: 1) They have

no place to attend. 2) They do not care to attend. 3) They do not know of Passover or its Seder.

Just as there are answers for the Four Sons, there must be answers for this Fifth Son as well. For those who have nowhere to attend, we must aggressively advertise the invitation found within the Haggadah, "All those who are hungry, let them come and eat! Whoever is in need, let him come and partake of the Passover!"

For those who do not care to attend, we must positively reinforce their Jewish identity and expose them to the beauty of Torah observance, in general, and of the Seder in particular. Most importantly, we must communicate with them in a language they can understand and identify with.

Those who do not know that it is Passover or that there is such a thing as a Seder are perhaps the most worrisome of the groups. Most likely, they do not have the fond memories of Passovers past. They are, in fact, in danger of losing their Jewish identity altogether, G-d forbid. As Jews, we are all responsible for the welfare of one another. We must therefore endeavor to introduce these people to their great inheritance, the Torah, the grandeur of their Judaism.

This Passover once again the Jewish Discovery Center will be hosting the first and second Seder, and I want to take this opportunity to personally invite you to join in. If you know of anyone who needs a Seder meal brought to their home, please let us know, and we will be happy to have it delivered to them.

Do your part, and seek out the Fifth Son, wherever or whoever she or he might be, and invite them to a Seder, were they too can enjoy the warmth that the Buffalo Jewish community has to offer.

Rabbi Laizer Labkovski is a Rabbi and teacher with the Jewish Discovery Center.

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