

Judy Halper, CEO, JFCS Minneapolis

My husband and I decided to join a synagogue 25 years ago as our oldest child was approaching bat mitzvah. We did a little synagogue hopping and landed in a congregation on Rosh Hashanah where we thought we would be most comfortable. When the rabbi of the synagogue delivered his sermon, he walked to the lectern, looked out at the congregation, and while we waited for his first words, he dramatically began to sing instead the words to Seasons of Love, from the hit play, Rent...525,600 minutes, 525,000 moments so dear. 525,600 minutes – how do you measure, measure a year?

When I tell you that you could have heard a pin drop, I mean it. You could have. The year was 1994, and I honestly couldn't tell you what was going on because I frankly don't remember. But it must have been a heck of a year! I can tell you it was the most meaningful, memorable sermon I ever heard, though don't ask me to tell you precisely the rest of what the rabbi said. I recall that his message was about gathering up our daily experiences along with the ones that are truly once-in-a-lifetime or transformational, and urging us to find meaning and purpose, or to just notice.

So, friends, what will we say about 2020? Will we ever forget this year, despite perhaps our desire to do so? Will we remember all the help our Network offered through our individual family service and workforce agencies, the critical care we provided with boundless compassion to our clients who were hungry or homeless, the wrapping our arms around our staff to comfort them as they faced insurmountable requests for assistance, and the struggles we faced in continuing to keep our doors open, or at least our computer screens on so that we could be "there" for all who needed us? I think if we remember how much we helped, rather than the pain and sacrifice, it will have been a good 525,600 minutes.

I recently asked that same rabbi I referenced a few minutes ago for his thoughts on how we should approach getting through these days of remote funerals and zoom shivas. He paused as he did 25 years ago and simply said, "our history tells us that this, too, shall pass." We will get through this.

I won't attempt to sing....not my strength...the remaining words to Season of Love are as follows:

How do you measure a life of a woman or a man? In truths that she learned, or in times that he cried? In bridges he burned, or the way that she died? It's time now to sing out though the story never ends. Let's celebrate remember a year in a life of friends.

I am truly grateful for this opportunity to serve as President of the Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies Board of Directors. I am proud of what all of us have created a few 525,600 minutes ago, and all that we are accomplishing. It is so far beyond what I imagined it could be. We have so much to be grateful for due to the leadership of Reuben Rotman, and his talented team. We're lucky. I also want to extend a big thank you to Perry Ohren, who as our first Board Chair, worked much harder than he'll ever admit, never missed a minute to lead with strength and humor, and always offered kindness to all of us, his colleagues.

I am also so very proud of the organization I am lucky enough to lead, the Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis, where I have worked for the past 26 years, 15 as its CEO. I want to thank my amazing team of incredible professionals who are dedicated leaders with endless compassion. They make my job easy and a pleasure. I also want to welcome Kevin Rhein to the NJHSA Board. Kevin has been a corporate and community leader in Minneapolis and he will make a great addition to our Board! Finally, I want to thank my JFCS Minneapolis Board of Directors who believe in the power of our organization to build a strong community one person at a time, and supports my work at the national level.

Thank you for this opportunity at this critical time. I look forward to the next 525,600 minutes and feel confident that we will remember the challenges and the difference we made.