

JEVS Human Services: Celebrating 75 Years of Championing Independence



BY BOB LEVINE

ONE OF MY FAVORITE proverbs notes that if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you can feed him for a lifetime. For me, it is perhaps the best embodiment of the Jewish principle of *tikkun olam* that I was taught by my parents, and which I have experienced through my experiences with the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia's Center for Social Responsibility and Committee for the Jewish Poor.

The nexus of these principles for me these days is JEVS Human Services, which helps people from all walks of life realize individual independence.

Founded as Jewish Employment and Vocational Service on the principle of *tikkun olam* — the shared responsibility to repair the world — JEVS' work began 75 years ago through the assistance of Jewish refugees who were fleeing Europe and atrocities of the Holocaust.

I think back to countless stories of immigrants who came to America to make a better life for their families. Receiving

limited financial help while they resettled, they actively sought out opportunities to build their own American dream, whether that dream included pursuing education, starting a business or working hard at their given vocation.

It did not take long for JEVS' founders to realize that helping all area residents — Jews and non-Jews alike — gain a foothold and make positive changes in their lives strengthened the *entire* community. Shortly after its founding, JEVS expanded its outreach and services, and today — as one of the largest social service providers in the region — JEVS is blind to color, creed, religion, age, background, abilities or disabilities. We only require that an individual has a need, willingness to accept a “hand up” and desire to improve their circumstances or achieve a better quality of life.

We know that long-term dependency on public assistance creates a cycle that is difficult to break. While people receiving a “handout” may be relieved for a time, dependency can become a way of life.

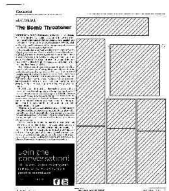
On the other hand, people

who are supported with the tools of self-sufficiency — who are taught to “fish” with education and training, for example — are put on the path to independence. They support themselves and their families, they make contributions to society and frequently strive to help others facing similar challenges they themselves have now overcome.

JEVS' consistent standard of excellence in providing these services serves as a model for other organizations. The individual stories of success in overcoming adversity that I have seen and heard as a board member are truly inspiring to me as an individual and make me want to do more for the organization and our community.

These are challenging times for America and Americans.

With the rise of anti-Semitic attacks on Jewish sites and the indications of rising anti-Semitism in general, we need organizations that provide emergency assistance to help *all* people get back on their feet. We need organizations like JEVS to help break cycles of dependence by teaching people to “fish” or to help those who cannot fish due to disability still enjoy their best



quality of life, actively socialize and foster a sense of contribution — all of which makes America the very best it can be.

Whether helping develop skills for career success, helping people with disabilities keep and find jobs, or expanding programming for youth aimed at ending poverty and disconnection, our clients are given the chance to turn things around and become the people they want to be.

Congratulations to JEVS, its staff and past and present leaders for making its mission a reality. Looking forward to the next 75 years! ●

Bob Levine is a member of the [JEVS Human Services](#) board of directors.