FAMILY TABLE talk

FARM TO FAMILY TABLE
How farm partnerships transform food access

DELICIOUS ARTISTRY
New mosaic greets Marketplace patrons

MORE SPACE, MORE OPTIONS

VOLUNTEERS SPEAK
“Life is very hard, but I was thrilled when I found out I would receive my food.”

-Rina, *Family Table Customer

FROM THE DESK OF JF&CS CEO GAIL SCHULMAN

When is a table not just table? When it is a gateway to comprehensive care and support for our neighbors in need. At the JF&CS Family Table food pantry, our job doesn't end with the delivery of nutritious kosher food and a caring connection. That’s just the beginning. Our “One Door to JF&CS” approach identifies the full suite of services a client may need, from domestic abuse support to combating trauma in young children to socialization for isolated older adults. The newly completed expansion of Family Table means the expansion of all our integrated human services. In this time of struggle for so many in the community, we are grateful for the chance to do more.

The mission of Family Table is to end hunger in the Greater Boston Jewish community while serving people who need our assistance regardless of religious affiliation.

Family Table fulfills its mission by providing kosher food, creating a caring Jewish connection, and empowering people to make healthy eating a part of their daily lives.

jfcsboston.org/Give
Director’s Message

It was a simple note, written in the hand of someone for whom English does not come easily:

I want to express my gratitude for your care and attention. I am scared to imagine how we would have lived if we had stayed in the country where we lived for fifty years... Thanks to everyone who gives us food in the Family Table program... each of the people who in any weather carry heavy bags of food. Your care and attention warm my heart. Thank you from all our hearts.

Reading this note reminded me how much impact we truly have in the lives of the people we serve. Family Table touches peoples’ lives in so many ways—with nutritious groceries, Jewish holiday foods, and a connection to a caring Jewish community. Sure, Family Table provides food, but “care and attention” is at the heart of all we do. Messages like this inspire us, and with the High Holy days approaching, they also remind us to reflect on the past year, its accomplishments and challenges, and to set a course for our work ahead.

COVID created so many logistical challenges over the past two years, but it also launched us into an expansion project that will enable Family Table to serve more people in need for years to come. We completed this major expansion project at our Waltham headquarters in November. Our new space includes brand new walk-in refrigeration and freezer units and expanded distribution and non-perishable storage spaces. This enabled us to increase the amount of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables at each of our distributions and to expand our Marketplace schedule to provided more flexible access for our clients. It’s been an extraordinary year of change at Family Table, but our team has become so adept at managing change over the past few years that I am confident that we will be able to continue to evolve our program to carry out our vision for Family Table in the years come.

At this time of reflection, I thank you for all you have done to support Family Table with your donations and with your heartfelt energy. In the spirit of tikkun olam (repairing the world), I look forward to continuing our work together in the coming year.

-Bernice Behar, Family Table Program Director

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Masthead

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SUMMER 2022
Beginning in 2012, the JF&CS Family Table Marketplace has been a lifeline to thousands of people experiencing food insecurity. Unlike our Family Table delivery service, Marketplace gives families an option to pick up groceries from the JF&CS headquarters in Waltham.

And now that the Marketplace is open to clients in the newly expanded Family Table space, those families will have more options for food access than ever before.

“When we expanded into our new space last year, it meant so many things. I can’t even say what a
meaningful difference it has made,” said Bernice Behar, JF&CS Family Table Program Director.

Family Table previously shared space with other JF&CS programs, which meant challenges for customers with mobility issues, needing to remove food and equipment, and other difficulties. With the expansion, Family Table tripled the size of its cold storage and added new staff and volunteers to provide more seamless service.

All of this has meant that old policies regarding food quantities and access times can now be upgraded.

“Before, we were able to distribute food to our Marketplace clients only two days a month, and because we had limited storage space, we had to place more limits than we would have liked on how much food people could take,” Behar said. “Now we are open every week, and clients can select as much food as they need. We’re one of very few food pantries able to implement a policy like this.”

Both clients and staff have noticed an immediate difference from the policies, which empower customers to take account of their unique needs when selecting items.

“It’s a cause I’m most passionate about and have been with the project since the beginning,” said Baila Janock, a longtime volunteer. “Now that we’re back up in business in our new space, we’ve been able to make a lot of changes. The clients now get to choose their days. It’s more like a grocery store now, and people don’t need to choose between filling up their bags with things like cereal, that take up a lot of room, with small items like tuna. I never liked telling people that they couldn’t take things, and what’s especially exciting now is that they can even choose from unlimited produce like amazing mushrooms and vegetables. This expanded schedule and options give amazing flexibility to the clients. I can’t tell you how many hugs I get!”

As for concerns that the new policies would lead to shortages, Behar said that overwhelmingly, things are working well for both the organization and the customers.

“A woman with two young children came in the other day, and she was so happy to be able to take home a case of fruit cups,” Behar said. “She told me that it will be such a relief to always have something nice for her children’s school lunches.”

At the end of the day, the main concern when setting policy at Family Table Marketplace now gets to be the needs of the clients, not the limitations of the space. And Behar says that makes all the difference.

“The impact is that our clients get what they need,” Behar said. “For us, it’s about trust. We trust the clients to take what they feel they need, and they trust us to know that the food is going to be there for them.”

“I can’t tell you how many hugs I get.”
-Baila Janock, Marketplace volunteer
A “BRAIDED” STRAND

New mosaic created by collaboration between the New England Mosaic Society and JF&CS staff greets Family Table Marketplace clients.

When you enter the doors of Family Table’s Waltham location at the JF&CS headquarters, a new sight greets you. Twelve feet long and representing a fusion of 42 talented artists, “Braided” is a mosaic that makes a powerful statement of artistry and values.

“As clients and staff come into the space, some of them stop and just say, ‘oh my God, that’s beautiful,’” said Bernice Behar, JF&CS Family Table Program Director. “It’s really spectacular.”

Behar said the mosaic came out of a desire to recognize the milestone of the Family Table expansion and honor the interplay between all of the services available at JF&CS. The new expansion means JF&CS will work support to help more families access not only food, but the full range services such as government benefits advocacy, or mental health coaches or parenting support or Holocaust survivor services.

“Our space expansion project took five years to accomplish and was the result of so many peoples’ hard work and dedication,” Behar said. “When it came time to figure out a way to acknowledge this accomplishment, we really didn’t want to do just a plaque. We wanted to do something artistic.”

As Behar and colleagues were working on the issue, Amy Marks, a Family Table volunteer and member of the New England Mosaic Society (NEMS), came forward with an opportunity to collaborate.

“It was absolutely perfect timing,” Behar said. “By working with NEMS, we were able to create a mosaic that captured the values that animate our agency.”

“NEMS was already thinking of a collaborative project as a way to help our members deal with their feelings of isolation during the pandemic,” said Emily Bhargava, who along with Marks is a co-chair of NEMS. “At the same time, my co-chair Amy suggested that Family Table would be a
great place for a mosaic. So, when we found that they were looking for an artistic way to honor this milestone, it just seemed like a perfect fit.”

Bhargava, a veteran of collaborative public art design, sought funding to complete the project in the form of a grant from the Waltham Cultural Council. She began working with members of NEMS and staff at JF&CS to envision the design.

“There was such a groundswell of interest among our members, and ultimately we had 42 of our artists sign up as part of the project,” Bhargava said. “We set up listening sessions with staff at JF&CS, who were interested in interpreting how the different parts of the organization worked together. That’s where the “Braided” design came from. We helped them translate the sense of mission they had for the work they do into concrete images, which each artist represented in their part of the final design.”

On June 12, Family Table opened its doors to the artists of NEMS and their families for a celebration of the art piece’s final installation. For many, it was the first time they had ever seen the design in its finished form.

“We, the artists of NEMS, had never worked together on a collaborative project this large before, and it was so meaningful to see all the designs together, the depth and complexity in person,” Bhargava said. “And as we engaged with the staff, it turned out there were more connections between our members and JF&CS than we had realized. One of our artists adopted her son through JF&CS. So it meant so much to so many of us that we could give back. And we’ve heard since then that the piece has opened connections with clients who come and use the space. They’re really responding to it.”

A plaque with a QR code explaining the meaning of “Braided” is planned for future installation, along with a commemorative list of donor names. But Braided Strand will not be the last time JF&CS collaborates with NEMS.

“We’re already working on another mosaic together,” Behar said. □
Without doubt, the number one economic story for 2022 has been the effects of inflation on Americans. While we all feel the effects at the pump or the market, one thing many fail to realize is how challenging the current climate is for nonprofit organizations that serve people in need.

“Right now, it’s tough for a lot of food assistance providers,” said Bernice Behar, JF&CS Family Table Program Director. “Getting delivery drivers and warehouse staff, coping with the rising cost of fuel - it’s all resulting in a lot of food pantries having a hard time sourcing certain items - especially fresh produce.”

Not so at JF&CS. In fact, clients at the Family Table Marketplace are greeted by the sight of heaps of fresh, high-quality produce - black and red radishes, corn, bok choy, Swiss chard, and even oyster mushrooms.

How has JF&CS managed to maintain and even enhance the quality and variety of its fresh offerings? By leaning on deep community partnerships – including with food rescue organization Boston Area Gleaners.

“For a number of years, we’ve been working with Boston Area...
Gleaners, and they have been able to bring us great produce,” Behar said. “And right as we were getting ready to open our new space, they were changing their own working model.”

A 501(c3) nonprofit, Boston Area Gleaners harvests and packs food “rescued” from local farms for communities across the region, delivering fresh food to a network of local food pantries, food banks, and meal programs. Much of it comes from surplus crops that farmers are not able harvest on their own. Gleaners sends volunteers into the fields to pick and pack these crops. In Fall 2021, the Gleaners also purchased a farm as a base of operations in Acton, allowing them to significantly enhance their approaches to food acquisition and distribution.

Every week, JF&CS Food Coordinator Vincent Vullo drives his truck to Boston Area Gleaners to pick up an assortment of delicious fruits and vegetables - about as short and sweet a supply chain as you could imagine.

“I pick up between 500 and 1200 pounds of amazing produce, and it gets distributed to our clients a few hours later. I like doing it; it’s a positive, friendly crew (at Boston Area Gleaners) and they’re very good at communicating what items are available.”

Having an on-call delivery person for JF&CS also helps Gleaners with their bottom line.

“It’s so helpful to have someone who’s basically a phone call away. Now we can get the food to the people who need it on the same day we bring it in,” said Usha Thakrar, Executive Director of Boston Area Gleaners. “It lets us focus on our primary mission of sourcing high-quality produce from area farms and reducing food waste.”

It is fair to say that most Family Table clients may never know that if it weren’t for the work of Boston Area Gleaners, the fresh fruits and vegetables at Family Table might otherwise have been left to waste in a field. What they see is a bounty of just-picked items ready for them to take home and enjoy.

“Just a few days ago, I surveyed the room and it looked better than a farmer’s market!” Behar said. “We had baskets of fresh-picked strawberries, beautiful bunches of carrots, and so much more. This partnership help us take our care for our clients to a whole other level.” □
For Karen Rosenberg, giving back is a family affair

Every morning, I get up, walk downstairs to the kitchen, and pause. I imagine if I could not open my well-stocked refrigerator and feed myself and my family a satisfying breakfast.

One Sunday morning each month, after preparing and consuming breakfast, I head straight over to the Jewish Family & Children’s Service Family Table food pantry at Temple Sinai in Marblehead. When I arrive at Family Table, I assist the team in sorting, packing and delivering groceries to clients who deal daily with food insecurity.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “food insecurity” as “the fact or an instance of being unable to consistently access or afford adequate food.” What would it be like to wake up each day and have to ask yourself the fundamental question: “Will I have enough to eat today?”

JF&CS Family Table assistance directly reduces the fear surrounding food insecurity and instills hope in each client. Over the last 10 years, the North Shore branch of JF&CS Family Table has provided hundreds of families in need with nutritious food, along with some toiletry items, Shabbat candles and a loaf of challah. Last year alone, Family Table distributed approximately 4,500 grocery bags, which equates to feeding 80 families per month on the North Shore. This is in addition to the hundreds of families who receive groceries from the Waltham and Canton distribution sites.

As a child, my parents taught me the merit of helping the hungry, and my husband and I have passed that message onto our four children; I knew it was important to bring each of them to volunteer at Family Table. Ever since the children were young, they have assisted in providing to those in dire need. Even now, it is still eye-opening for each of us to witness the enormous deficit that these clients face.

After packing up individualized grocery bags for each assigned client, I would drive our car to the client’s address and my children would jump out and deliver the grocery bags to the door. The experience helped shape them into compassionate and giving people. To this day, when my children are back home from college or work, we participate together, as a family, in JF&CS Family Table.

As one would expect, COVID has impacted these clients who already face hardships. Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a 45% increase in clients requiring assistance from Family Table’s North Shore division! How does an organization adjust?

To meet this increase, the Family Table North Shore location has expanded its storage and servicing space at Temple Sinai in Marblehead. Additionally, Family Table’s central facility in Waltham has recently completed a large expansion project.

JF&CS has addressed the infrastructure issues but what is still essential to the operation are volunteers. With this heightened demand, JF&CS Family Table program needs people willing to donate two to three hours of their time once a month on a Sunday, or as their schedule permits, to help those who are unable to help themselves. □
MEET OUR NEW STAFF

Hillel Bromberg
Distribution Assistant
Hillel has spent his professional career in the nonprofit world and is now working with our volunteers to make sure distributions run smoothly. He is also an avid cyclist and will join our Ride For Food team!

Olga Marchenko
Russian Translator
Olga moved to the U.S. from Russia about 20 years ago and helps bridge the gap with Russian-speaking clients. She is also an interpreter for Mass Health clinics and teaches ballet.

Beth Kitzis
Registered Dietician/Nutritionist
A former cupcake baker, Beth creates delicious recipes to pair with our fresh produce. She also provides one-on-one nutrition coaching through Community Servings and is active in children’s theater.

RIDE FOR FOOD 2022
Ride/Walk: Sunday, Oct. 2 | Dedham, MA
Family Table’s largest fundraiser of the year is coming up! On Oct. 2, Family Table will participate once again in the Ride for Food, an annual cycling event that raises critical dollars for hunger relief. Not a cyclist? You can Walk for Food too! Fundraisers have the option to walk a scenic 5K course on October 2nd on the Noble and Greenough School’s Cross-Country trail, guided by volunteers.

Last year our team raised $68,000 and our goal is to raise even more this year—all to provide healthy food for those in need. Every $1,250 raised will help Family Table provide groceries to one family for a year. We are grateful for your support as we work to fight food insecurity.
We are deeply grateful to the many synagogues, schools, and JCCs, for their commitment to Family Table. Altogether, the Jewish community provides nearly 70% of the food we distribute. We are especially thankful to the dedicated Site Coordinators (Family Table liaisons) of these communities who spearhead donation efforts, recruit volunteers, and keep the Family Table mission in focus.

Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund
Botwinick-Wolfensohn Foundation
Brookline Community Foundation
Bushrod H. Campbell and Adah F. Hall Charity Fund
Combined Jewish Philanthropies
Digital Federal Credit Union
Emergency Food and Shelter
National Board Program
Foundation for MetroWest
Grace K. & Wesley S. Alpert Charitable Foundation
Lawrence J. and Anne Rubenstein Charitable Foundation
Marblehead Female Humane Society
People’s United Community Foundation
Perpetual Benevolent Fund
Project Bread - The Walk for Hunger
RTI
Sol Goldman Charitable Trust

We also want to thank the hundreds of individuals and families who support Family Table throughout the year. Thanks to our in-kind supporters:

- Boston Area Gleaners
- Food Link
- Greater Boston Food Bank
- Hope and Comfort
- Lovin’ Spoonfuls
- Roche Brothers
- Trader Joe’s
- Zucker’s Bakery

FAMILY TABLE COLLECTION SITES

- Agudath Achim-Ezraoth Israel
- Ahavath Torah Congregation
- Beth Sasson, the Sephardic
- Congregation of Newton
- Beth Abraham Sephardic
- Congregation of New England
- Beth El Temple Center
- Beth Menachem Chabad
- B’nai TIKVOT South Area Jewish Congregation
- Chabad of Chestnut Hill
- Congregation Beth EI, Sudbury
- Congregation Beth EI-Atlas of Israel
- Congregation Beth Elohim
- Congregation Beth Shalom of the Blue Hills
- Congregation B’nai Torah, Sudbury
- Congregation Eitz Chayim
- Congregation Eitz Chaim
- Congregation Kehilath Bnai Israel
- Congregation Kehilath Israel
- Congregation Keren Shalom
- Congregation Mishkan Tefila
- Congregation Or Avid, Wayland
- Congregation Shirat Hayam
- Congregation Sons of Israel
- Epstein Hillel School
- Gann Academy
- Harvard Hillel
- JCC of Greater Boston, Newton
- JCCS
- JDC
- Maimonides School
- Minyan Sholem
- NewBridge on the Charles
- Newton Centre Minyan
- NSJCC
- Rashi School
- Solomon Schechter Day School
- St. James Hebrew Academy
- Temple Ahavath Achim
- Temple Beth Abraham
- Temple Beth David of the South Shore
- Temple Beth David, Westwood
- Temple Beth Eholim
- Temple Beth Emanuel
- Temple Beth Israel
- Temple Beth Shalom, Cambridge
- Temple Beth Shalom, Needham
- Temple Beth Zion
- Temple B’nai Abraham
- Temple B’nai Brith
- Temple Chayai Shalom
- Temple Emanuel-Newton
- Temple Emeth
- Temple Emunah, Lexington
- Temple Hillel B’nai Torah
- Temple Israel
- Temple Israel of Natick
- Temple Israel of Sharon
- Temple Israel of Wayland
- Temple Kiryat Shalom
- Temple Kol Shalom, Emeth
- Temple Kol Shalom of Medford
- Temple Kol Shalom, Newton
- Temple Shir Tikvah, Weyland
- Temple Shir Tikvah, Winchester
- Temple Sinai, Brookline
- Temple Sinai, Marblehead
- Temple Sinai, Sharon
- Temple Tifereth Shalom
- The Boston Synagogue
- Young Israel of Brookline
- Young Israel of Sharon
- Young Israel of Sharon

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To get involved, please email familytable@jcsboston.org or call (781) 693-5593.