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SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY RALLIES TO HELP FAMILIES IN NEED DURING THE PANDEMIC

Everyone knows someone affected by coronavirus. But ten young Sephardic philanthropic women sought to help other women and families they may never meet, whose stories touched them deeply.

Through connections in the community, this committee of women had heard that two nonprofits supported by the Jewish community were desperately in need of baby supplies. To help UJA-Federation of New York nonprofit partners Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council) and the Edith and Carl Marks Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst (Marks JCH) fill their urgent need, the committee decided the best way to reach the most people in the shortest amount of time was through a two-week Instagram campaign featuring the hashtag #UJAmoms4moms and asking for baby product donations.

Offers of assistance flooded the posts. The response was so overwhelming they had to rely on the local JCC of the Jersey Shore in Deal, New Jersey, where most of the donations were made, to help store the items before they could be picked up by Met Council.

The final haul included nearly \$40,000 worth of products, including more than 900 boxes of diapers (more than 118,000 diapers), more than 1,800 packs of wipes, 507 canisters of formula, 50 teethingers, 200 baby toys, 50 A+D ointments, 50 baby soap sets, and 205 bibs.

“Families are struggling to afford baby products, and as a community of mostly moms ourselves, we felt it was imperative to help provide these essential items for their households,” said Esther Hedaya, a committee member. “At the same time, we’re giving parents the dignity of being able to care for their children.”

“These were donations made with thought and intention,” said Hedaya. “It wasn’t just about buying any kind of baby essential. Hundreds of women and men were asking about sizing, formula type, scented wipes or unscented, and so on.”

Donations also came in from local companies Dimples, Kissy Kissy, and First Quality Enterprise Inc.

Marks JCH required supplies to support 50 families, many including single parents and victims of domestic violence who experience financial burdens and struggle to afford basic items for their children. Since the pandemic, Marks JCH has seen a staggering increase in domestic violence cases, heightening the need for the products from the diaper drive. The majority of parents receiving the goods have received cash assistance through UJA grants to Marks JCH. The parents are given the baby essentials in addition to the cash assistance, which frees up funds for the families to spend on rent, food, and other household expenses.

Met Council, which normally supplies food to 40 pantries, has been distributing food to over 100 sites each month since the pandemic, and has been regularly seeing pantry clients asking for baby essentials. Met Council was able to supply dozens of their food pantry sites with diapers, wipes, and formula, in addition to the food they receive monthly. The products were also delivered directly to hundreds of families through Met Council's Domestic Violence Program.

“It was incredible to see what the committee of young Sephardic women pulled together and achieved in a matter of days,” said Walter Rahmey, a UJA Young Sephardic Leadership Committee chair. “We all admire and appreciate the dedicated women who oversaw the collection, purchasing and delivery of diapers and baby formula for families who need them.”

“Our committee was made up of strong, compassionate Sephardic women,” added Hedaya. “Each woman cared so deeply, as if she knew each mother receiving the donations. It was a cause near and dear to our hearts.”

To continue their work to support families in need, the committee has launched a web-based [fundraiser](#) for monetary contributions for UJA nonprofit partners to continue the purchase of baby essentials.

About UJA-Federation of New York

Working with a network of hundreds of nonprofits, UJA extends its reach from New York to Israel to nearly 70 other countries around the world, touching the lives of 4.5 million people each year. To date, UJA has allocated \$67 million to help respond to the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Aid has supported New Yorkers facing food insecurity, UJA partner organizations providing essential health and human services to New Yorkers, Jewish Community Centers, low-income students, single parents, and dignified Jewish burials. For more information, please visit www.ujafedny.org.