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Gateways marks 10 years of bringing Jewish education to all

By Rachel Fadlon



A teen volunteer helps Jesse prepare to read from the Torah during Gateways' Sunday program

It all began ten years ago when two local, grassroots organizations – Etgar L'Noar and the Jewish Special Education Collaborative – merged,” said Arlene Remz, executive director of Gateways. “Before the merger, I ran the organization out of my house! At the time, we had a Sunday program, a B’nai Mitzvah program and provided services in three local Jewish day schools.”

Gateways: Access to Jewish Education is a unique, regional model for serving students with special needs across all Jewish educational settings. “Our goal is to ensure there are choices available to students with special needs just like there are for their typical peers,” explained Remz. Gateways works to ensure that families have a variety of high quality options in Jewish education for students with a wide range of learning needs.

“In the early years, I used to plan the programs, make copies, buy supplies and snacks, substitute teach the classes and then clean everything up,” Remz recalled. “Today we have a staff of over 50 outstanding professionals who provide resources, services and support in local day schools, preschools, synagogues and run our own independent programs.”

“Each year, we push the envelope a bit further and look for more ways to include more Jewish children,” said Remz. “Last year, we introduced a pilot program for children who are unable to attend Jewish preschools because of their special needs. We also created a partnership on the North Shore between a synagogue, day school and Jewish community center so that they could all receive professional development.”

Over the last decade, Gateways – which has become a core partner agency of Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) – has initiated a multitude of new and innovative programs. They have been recognized as one of the most innovative Jewish nonprofits in North America. “In the past three years alone, we have introduced Social Thinking© in many day schools and pre-schools; presented Understanding Our Differences© in six day schools; adapted the “Rosh Hodesh, It’s a Girl Thing” curriculum for the students in our Sunday

program,; and published a book.” said Remz. Last Passover, Gateways published “The Gateways Haggadah” and is currently working with Behrman House to publish another book for Shabbat.

“We saw how successful our Passover resources were for our own students and we wanted to share our materials, so that children everywhere could participate successfully in the seder,” said author and Gateways staff member Rebecca Redner.

“Over the past decade, we have watched Gateways blossom and grow from a grass-roots, parent driven initiative to a multi-faceted, sophisticated organization,” said Marni Smilow Levitt, president of Gateways’ board. “We achieved what few start-up non-profits manage to do: we have arrived at the ten-year mark with a clear mission and vision, strong effective leadership, diverse programming that meets the needs of our community and a path towards continued growth and financial stability.”

Now, Levitt added, “What Gateways will need in the post start-up phase of organizational life is continued financial and strategic support from the community.”

On November 21 the organization will celebrate its tenth anniversary with a special gala celebration, where past president Rachel Chafetz will be honored. Chafetz has been involved with Gateways since the beginning. “She began as a volunteer in our B’nai Mitzvah program nine years ago. She has served on our education committee, as v.p. of development, and as president of our board of trustees. Today, she is one of our biggest supporters and cheerleaders: involving her family and friends, and championing Gateways throughout the community,” said Remz.

The gala will be an opportunity to showcase the work that Gateways has done and announce #OpenTheGates, an initiative to make inclusion in Jewish education a priority in the Boston Jewish community. “We have already created amazing partnerships within the community,” said Remz, “We are looking to strengthen those partnerships and turn to the whole community for their support of Jewish education for all.”

Rachel Fadlon is director, marketing and communications, for Gateways. For more information go to www.jgateways.org.