



Half-time family educator positions now available

A unique opportunity for half-time family educator positions has come to Western Massachusetts with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation approval of a thirty-five thousand dollar family education programming package. This package includes a half-time family educator position with a salary of approximately twenty thousand dollars. Not only is the HGF funding over \$26K in this package, but the grant match has been lowered from thirty to twenty-five percent. Thus, a grantee site can leverage its financial commitment of \$8,750 into \$35K worth of quality family programs and also receive increased educator training from the Director of *Sulamot*.



Families at the Jewish Community of Amherst studied healing prayers and created a healing banner in a program run by Jody Rosenbloom. Buttons with healing wishes and thoughts were pinned on the banner.

This generous offer from the HGF is intended to assist with family educator recruitment and retention in Western Massachusetts and to increase the amount of inter-generational learning at local synagogues and day schools. A half-time, salaried position will help to create a stronger career path for educators who want to learn to lead family programming. Currently, there are no family educator positions in Western Massachusetts other than those funded by the *Sulamot* Initiative. Outreach programming is also an expectation of this grant.

Two institutions have expressed a readiness to advance to this Level Gimel grant for next year: Temple Beth El (in Springfield) and Congregation Knesset Israel (in Pittsfield.) To qualify, an institution must have several years of good compliance with *Sulamot* guidelines and the educator must attend the Whizin Institute for Jewish Family Education of the University of Judaism or an equivalent training program. During the year, increased consultation is provided by the Director of *Sulamot* in addition to supervision at the grantee institution.

The new Gimel grant is an expression of the generosity and the commitment of the HGF to enhance the vibrancy of the Jewish community in Western Massachusetts.

Sulamot training focuses on best practices

The *Sulamot* training sessions this year focused on the theme of best practices in family education theory. Several approaches to this theme were utilized during the year, both didactic and experiential.

During the year, family educators presented and analyzed examples of their most successful programs, linking their work to principles of family education theory. For both novice and senior family educators, the review of effective programming served to sharpen their repertoire of skills and to provide ideas for future programs. Another helpful training discussion used the case studies in Vicki Kelman's *Jewish Family Education: A Casebook for the Twenty-first Century*.

At the December *Sulamot* training conference, Dr. Lisa Grant (Associate Professor of Jewish Education at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York) discussed characteristics of adult Jewish knowers and how best to reach them. Dr. Grant provided several effective strategies for teaching the adult learner based on developmental needs and teachable moments.

In the spring, the Director of *Sulamot* facilitated the analysis of a felt making workshop done the previous month in which *Sulamot* educators took the role of parents having to learn a new craft skill and to face their feelings of inadequacy. Out of the discussion, several tips emerged to help decrease the anxiety of adults learning new skills. Giving positive feedback, lots of individual encouragement, having samples of the completed project on hand, and giving clear instructions were important as well as lightening the task with humor. The experience sensitized the educators to the feelings and concerns of parents who are taking on new Jewish activities in the home and want to get it "right."



Families at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, Sinai Academy, Congregation Knesset Israel and Temple Anshe Amunim participate in the creation of a huge LEGO model of the city of Jerusalem.

A Yearlong Theme: 350 Years of Jews in America

by Janice Colbert (*Temple Israel, Greenfield, MA*)

This past year, Jews all over the United States commemorated the 350th anniversary of the first Jews who came to America. Temple Israel in Greenfield joined in this effort by focusing all its *Sulamot* programming on this theme.

We inaugurated our theme with a boat ride on the Connecticut River that simulated conditions for the twenty-three Jews who sailed from Recife, Brazil, to the Carribean and then to New Amsterdam (New York City) in 1654. Our program "Jewish American Women of Valor" introduced families to trail blazing American Jewish women—artists, reformers, activists, politicians, scientists and athletes—who played an important role in American history. Participants viewed a poster exhibit from the Jewish Women's Archives and took part in skits highlighting the lives of the women.



Janice Colbert stands next to the family history quilt made by Temple Israel families.

Throughout the year, families had the opportunity to reflect on their own Jewish American background and heritage by designing their own quilt square. The square became part of a Temple Israel family quilt commemorating 350 years of Jews in America. Each family presented their quilt square and the story of a Jewish American who had made a difference in their life or who had made an important contribution to Jews in America. We are in the process of completing the quilt which will hang in Temple Israel as a reminder of this important milestone in our Jewish American history.

The 350th theme was explored using a variety of modalities. A film series offered families with children of different ages a chance to view age appropriate movies that dealt with Jewish immigration and life in America.

A special Shabbat program after services explained the impact of American Jews on prayer and spirituality. A popular food program called "Bagels and Blintzes" enabled families to not only learn about the history of food in America but to make and taste their own bagels and blintzes.

After an orientation, a day long trip to New York City brought families to the oldest congregation in America, Shearith Israel, as well as to the site of the first Jewish settlement in America.



Temple Israel families learn the finer points of making bagels from a local baker.

Program Plans but Family Life Interferes

by Paula Lee Hellman, (*Hevreh of Southern Berkshire*)

Oh, what a *Sulamot* program I had planned! It was the kind of *Sulamot* program of which I could be proud. It was a program that came out of the curriculum and the questions that the curriculum provoked. It was a program for which I had prepared the families in advance, even to the extent of providing each family with a terrific book to read that supported both the curriculum and the questions that the class and parents were discussing. In short, I had a great program planned.

Kitah Gimmel has nine students in the class. Responses to my phone calls and emails told me to expect seven families to attend the program. Seven families, some with two parents, at least one with an additional sibling. And I planned accordingly.

The program was entitled: "Partners With God." I had prepared stories to read and a four-corners exercise for parents. I developed a *Purim* workshop for the children on how the characters in *Megillat Estair* acted as "partners with God," and how the children through *shelach manot* (gifts of food) could also act as partners with God. The class teacher would work with the children while I discussed with their parents the book by Rifat Sonsino and Daniel B Syme called "Finding God - Some Jewish Responses."

I bought snacks for twenty people. I set up Hevreh's library with collage materials for the craft project in which families working together would produce a poster showing ways in which their families acted as partners with God. This values clarification exercise would reinforce values within the family and then be shared with the other families.

But! March 20, 2005 was a remarkably unlucky day for Hevreh's third grade. Two families (representing seven people) called in sick.

Two families did not call in and did not come. (When contacted later, they apologized for not calling and explained that there was sickness in their families.) One child arrived that morning with no parent in tow! The solo child was distraught and dismayed that his father had just left. With a little effort, we located his father by cell phone. The father arrived, but late.

So there I was. All ready for seven children and at least eleven parents and siblings, with a program planned for that number. Instead, I had to start the program with three students (one upset) two parents and a three-year old sibling. Needless to say, I had to think quickly about engaging the entire group. Clearly a four-corners exercise would not work with so few participants and the *shelach manot* exercise for the children was less enticing with only three children.

So I told the stories that were part of the handouts for families, and we had a general discussion. The class teacher took the three children aside for the *Purim* part of the program. With only three parents—only one of whom had delved into the book—the conversation was shortened. The children rejoined their parents for snack and we talked about how the *motzi* blessing over bread implies partnership with God. The family collage project was fun for all and not effected by the size of the group.

The people who were present enjoyed the program, which was nice to see. However, it was a disappointment for me, even though I know that it isn't always numbers that make a program great. I planned an effective program for the families, but the realities of family life interfered with it.



Spotlight on the Sulamot Educator

Myrna Hammerling

Director of the Hebrew School and Adult Education at Cong. Knesset Israel in Pittsfield, MA

Myrna Hammerling is a Brooklyn native who moved to the Berkshires in 1976. She has been a *Sulamot* family educator since 2001, when she became Principal of Congregation Knesset Israel after having been an instructor and lay leader in the congregation for many years. She will be one of the two *Sulamot* family educators chosen to pilot the new Level Gimel grant next year. This new grant will include a half-time family educator position.

Myrna's goal as a Jewish educator is "to impact life-long learners, who will be inspired to keep a Judaic identity throughout each stage of their lives." She is very excited about the path of her own Jewish learning and growth, and she conveys this to her students. A little known fact about her is that in 1978, she taught a course at the Berkshire Community College entitled "Women of the Scriptures."

She served as President of Congregation Knesset Israel during a year when the congregation was without a rabbi. She calls this "the best education that I ever could've had" about the congregation, about working with volunteers, leading a rabbinic search effort, and learning to write *divrai torah*. This year inspired her to continue her own learning and in 1997, she received a Masters in Judaic Studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary. She also holds a Masters in Education from Brooklyn College.



Seeing everyone "where they are, as being made *b'tselem elohim* (in the image of God)," is an important goal of Myrna's – especially when she faces the challenges of less engaged families in the religious school. Her enthusiasm for Jewish learning is contagious and she hopes to inspire

families to progress on their Jewish journeys through her work at the synagogue.

She is especially looking forward to working with parents of preschoolers, whom she sees as very motivated to learn along with their children. She hopes to make family education a more integrated part of the religious school curriculum as well as the larger congregational community.

Myrna lives with her husband, Elie, in Pittsfield. She has two children: son Eric (age 36) lives in West Hartford and has a five and a half year old son, Mateo; daughter Jaimie (age 34) lives in Brookline and will be married in January. Among Myrna's hobbies are knitting, cooking and reading books about Torah. She also serves on the *chevra kadisha* (volunteer burial society) of Congregation Knesset Israel.

You're Wearing That?

By Myrna Hammerling

I thought that a program on attire would be a great way to encourage dialogue between parents and teens about self image, appearance, judging others and the Jewish values of modesty and appropriate clothing for various settings. I had not led a family education program for our 8-12th graders and I decided to modify a program that had been created by educator Vicki Kelman in San Francisco.

I asked families to do a little spring cleaning and to bring outgrown clothing as their "admission ticket" to the program. The families did a great job of cleaning out their closets, and I was able to donate an entire car trunk full of clothing to the Goodwill collection in our area.

Kelman's program had a variety of activities including *chevruta* (dyadic study) groups with and without family members that helped to develop thinking,

listening and speaking skills. A favorite activity in my program was when participants responded to ten principles of orthodox attire and *tzniut* (modesty) set forth by Rabbi Lamm, the former Chancellor of Yeshiva University. Going to one side of the room signified agreement or disagreement with Rabbi Lamm's statements while staying in the middle of the room showed uncertainty. Seeing who was standing next to you or across the room was instructive; sometimes the generations were together and at other times they were poles apart. Brief explanations of the rationale for each choice were shared with the group.

After an exploration of Talmudic sources and several realistic case studies, participants looked at their own family's current values around attire. Parents and students created family guidelines together. For all families attending, this provided a pattern of open communication to use when addressing future situations together. It made me feel good to see both parents and students showing genuine respect for each other's opinions and really hearing each other's thinking.



Congregation Knesset Israel parents and teens create collages about appropriate clothing for women at a program run by Myrna Hammerling.



At Heritage Academy, a Saba and Savta Day program organized by Tali Edry allowed students to interview their grandparents about being Jewish.

Shalom from the *Sulamot* Assistant

by Barbara Fingold

Last October 2004, I took over as the *Sulamot* Assistant. Career specialists say that we average three to four careers in our lifetime. I guess that is a reasonable expectation; at least in my case, since this is my third career.



Since 1978, my husband and I have co-owned and operated Bart's Homemade. For many years, we owned two retail dessert cafés. We continue to make and distribute Bart's Super-Premium and Snow's Premium ice creams in Greenfield, MA. Prior to dabbling in ice cream, I was a family therapist and social worker in a variety of settings.

Now that I've become a seasoned *Sulamot* Jewish Family Education Assistant, I feel ready to add my thoughts to the mix, as we call it in the ice cream trade. I have designed some spreadsheets that will streamline the grant application and report process. The *Sulamot* lists and files can also be made more accessible, and that will make all of our jobs easier and thus more pleasant.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the 2005-2006 grant year. Likewise, I encourage all of you to check out our library and nine years of program files. The *Sulamot* office has a wealth of information and ideas that could be helpful in designing family programs. If you phone or Email me in advance, I will gladly peruse our files and you can pick things up at your convenience. I'm looking forward to an exciting year ahead.

I hope your *Sulamot* training and programs provide invaluable inspiration and growth for all of you.

Parent feedback:

"I just have to tell you this story . . ."

By Judi Wisch — *with an email from a parent in italics*

(Beit Ahavah in Northampton, MA)

"I just have to tell you this story . . ."

That's how the email opened; the email sent to me in June on the day the story took place. For me, the story was an unsolicited gift that showed the power of families and Jewish educators working together.

Today, Isabel is riding home in the car from her gymnastics class with her dad, Steve. She has just achieved a major feat in gymnastics by climbing to the top of the rope for the first time ever.

Our first family education program this past year was "Shehecheyanu: Special Times." The goals of the program were to learn the Shehecheyanu blessing, to be able to identify moments to say the Shehecheyanu, to create a Shehecheyanu family journal, and to have families learn and work together.

She tells Steve that she has had a "very proud day" and goes on to list three "very proud things" that have happened: she learned to get through a game of Solitaire on a hand-held electronic toy her grandparents gave her; she wrote a letter to her future first grade teacher; and she climbed the rope.

Steve B and his daughter Isabel were one of 25 families that attended the Shehecheyanu family event. Lisa O, the mom who sent me the story, did not attend that day.

Steve comments that it's been a day of firsts. He says it makes him think about saying the Shehecheyanu and he starts to sing. Isabel cuts him off and says she wants to sing it herself and proceeds to sing the whole blessing on her own, completely unabashed in the beautiful tune we've learned at Beit Ahavah.

During the year we would practice singing the Shehecheyanu to the Tzvika Pik tune whenever the opportunity arose.

First, when Steve told me the story, I thought that Isabel suggested the blessing on her own and I was astounded. Then when I understood that the suggestion came from Steve, I was still pretty impressed. That's a pretty big change for Steve in his ability/ knowledge/organic sense of Jewish ritual. He said he was surprised that Isabel knew the words and tune so well, and Isabel explained that we had said it on the beginning of the hike. To say it again today 1) made perfect sense to her, and 2) she had the skill to.

I share this story because it represents a true impact that Beit Ahavah is having on our family. I absolutely love how a broader Jewish awareness is finding its way into our lives. I came with it, and Steve wanted to get it somewhat through me, but we are really getting it and making it together. Just two years of somewhat spotty attendance at the monthly Sunday family program and Tot Shabbat has given us the means to build a Jewish identity and practice AS A FAMILY. I think that's remarkable and it's exactly what I had hoped for . . . Thank you.

This one story gave me a glimpse of the impact of our work. *Sulamot* training constantly emphasizes the importance of families taking some learning home after a program. In this case, an important Jewish way of engaging with life was taken home.



מזל טוב

Mazal Tov to family educator Tali and Yehudah Edry on the birth of their daughter, Yuval.

Sulamot is located in the Resource Center for Jewish Education, in the lower level of Heritage Academy in Longmeadow, MA.

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