



**To:** Attendees of *Responding to Economic Crisis: A Summit of the Jewish Community*, and interested community members.

**From:** Stephen Slaten and Etta Lappen Davis

**Date:** June 20, 2010

**Re:** Results of the Summit and Next Steps

A Summit on the Jewish community's response to the economic crisis was planned by David Bunker, Etta Lappen Davis, Howard Fixler, Mindy Hall, Steven Kressler, Jeff Narod and Stephen Slaten, representing JFS Worcester, Connections of Central Mass, JFCM, and various synagogues.

### **Purpose**

The Summit was convened because the economic downturn continues to affect many people from all walks of life throughout our region. Many of the jobs being created are temporary; monthly layoffs continue to exceed the number of new permanent jobs. Although congregations, Jewish organizations and individuals have responded generously and government benefits provide some relief, this remains a period of unprecedented hardship for many families who still struggle to find suitable employment and meet basic needs. As Jews concerned with Tikkun Olam, the Committee felt compelled to discuss what individuals and organizations can do to help. Since the Summit, Congress has not approved extension of unemployment benefits affecting 90,000 in Massachusetts.

### **Summit Summary**

The Summit on June 8<sup>th</sup> was attended by approximately 45 members of the community from different professions and walks of life, age ranges, affiliations, and from throughout Central Mass. The attendees divided into 5 groups, discussing three questions. The small groups then reported back to the full group, with Summit facilitator Etta Lappen Davis recording the range of responses to the following questions:

Question 1: What needs are you seeing among your neighbors, congregants, colleagues, and friends? What needs do you or your family members have as a result of the economic crisis?

- The range of needs reported included employment, job search support, benefits, food, clothing, housing, medical care, spiritual, social support, budgeting, options for managing debts, and reducing the stigma of needing help.

Question 2: How are those needs being addressed? What needs are not being met, or not being addressed sufficiently?

- Reported unmet needs and insufficient services included: retraining, confidential outreach, access to financial planning and mental health counseling, "safety net," affordability of

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important services/activities (synagogue membership, child care, activities for children, college tuitions, etc.), and available information on resources and rights.

Question 3: What do you think the Jewish Community, synagogues, Federation, JFS, and/or Connections can do to best respond to these needs?

- The recommendations included (but were not limited to): creating a directory/clearinghouse of community services/resources, coordinating help offered through synagogues and other faith-based organizations, gleaning, clothing and service/skill swaps, reaching out to those having trouble asking for help and/or who think there is not help available, providing basic financial skills training to counselors and Rabbis, recruiting volunteers, house sharing, establishing an interest free loan fund, and advocating for favorable legislation.

### **Analysis and Next Steps**

The Summit Planning Committee met on June 14 to review the suggestions. **The group recommended the following short-term priorities:**

1. Survey and catalogue what current synagogues and organizations are already doing to help.
2. Create a Directory of Resources for a range of categories (cash assistance, housing, food, job search, health care, etc.) and for different parts of the County. A web-based version can contain links to more detailed information.
3. Organize a clothing swap
4. Create a forum for other “swaps” – housing, work, etc.
5. Investigate requirements for providing free loans, such as a Hebrew Free Loan Society or Yad Chessed in Boston.
6. Provide a training seminar for mental health professionals and clergy to familiarize them with basic personal finance management skills and assessment of financial challenges facing clients/congregants.
7. Create a workshop open to the public on practical ways to reduce personal and household expenses and save money.
8. “Connections Cares” - Recruit volunteers to provide an hour or two of consultation and referral on professional matters (e.g. money management, bankruptcy, foreclosure prevention, debt reduction, job search strategies, interviewing techniques, etc.) or daily living tasks (e.g. yard cleanup, snow removal, computer training, etc.). Investigate strategies to identify target audience, and match with appropriate volunteers. Create mechanism to coordinate efforts and resources across Jewish organizations. Explore opportunities to coordinate with other faith based groups.

**The Planning Committee recommends the following next steps in order to begin to implement the above priorities.**

1. Establish a Steering Committee to organize the effort, continue to set priorities and draft policies.
2. JFS will serve as central coordination and communication point in the community. JFS will hire a project organizer two days/week with allocation from JFCM.
3. Recruit volunteers to serve on “task forces” for items #2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 above.
4. Utilize existing mechanisms in the synagogues, organizations, and media to publicize and inform.
5. Identify someone with technology skills to post information on JFS website and provide organizations with links. Make use of JewishCentral.org, synagogue and organization websites, Connections LinkedIn group, and other electronic media for dissemination of information and recruitment of volunteers.
6. Identify someone to write/design the text of resource directory and “press releases.”



We thank those who have already stepped up and volunteered to help. Now we ask for more volunteers and people to identify their interests in volunteering.

Please complete this form and return to Stephen Slaten, PhD, Executive Director, JFS Worcester, 646 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA 01609, or E-mail your interests and comments to [SSlaten@JFSWorcester.org](mailto:SSlaten@JFSWorcester.org).

**Feel free to share this form and the Results of the Summit and Next Steps Memo with anyone who might be interested in helping!**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Alternate Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please number (1-3) in order which areas in which you would like to volunteer help in taking the next steps. If you are only interested in one area, please list that as "1".

- Connections Steering Committee (See action step #1 above.)
- Set up "Connections Cares" structure and process for volunteers to provide consultation and volunteer services to individuals and families in need

Serve on a Task Force for:

- Resource Directory
- Organize Clothing Swap
- Organize other "Swaps"
- Investigate feasibility in establishing a "free loan" fund
- Create workshop for public on ways to cut household budgets and save money
- Utilize writing and technology skills to publicize these efforts and disseminate information

For future reference we will post this memo on the JFS website, [www.jfsworcester.org](http://www.jfsworcester.org), and other community websites.

Thank you!