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Community supports JAFCO children

By Phyllis Steinberg

The more than 350 disadvantaged children who receive assistance in the Jewish Adoption and Foster Care Options (JAFCO) programs will have a happier Hanukkah holiday this year because of a South Florida community-wide effort to collect gifts for them.

"Synagogues, Jewish community centers and private individuals in the tri-county area have signed up to provide toys for Hanukkah for children in our programs," said Sarah Franco, JAFCO executive director.

JAFCO which receives only 20 percent of its budget from government funding and the remainder from donations is thrilled with the support it is receiving this year from organizations and individuals in the community.

"For many of the children in our programs, this will be the first year they will be celebrating Hanukkah," said Rebecca Solomon, JAFCO assistant director of development.



Shushan Feios, 4, of Fort Lauderdale, adds a truck to the shelves of toys being collected at the Soref JCC in Plantation. The preschoolers are doing their part to provide gifts for JAFCO children. Staff photo/John Hines

The JAFCO children ranging in age from newborn through college age fill out a "Wish List" of eight items they would like to receive for the holiday. The lists are then sent to area organizations participating in the program.

"So far this year we have many organizations participating in the 'Wish List' including: Kol Tikvah Congregation in Parkland, the Ross JCC in Boynton Beach, Soref JCC in Plantation, Alper JCC in South Miami, Ramat Shalom sisterhood in Plantation, Temple Ahava Olam in Miami, Temple Judea in Miami, Temple Shaarei Kodesh in Boca Raton, Donna Klein Jewish Academy in Boca Raton, The Zale Early Childhood Learning Center at the Levis JCC in Boca Raton, Temple Beth Am in Pincrest, Temple B'nai Sephardim in Hollywood and Temple Beth Am in Margate," Solomon said.

JAFCO chapters in the tri-county area are also collecting gifts for the JAFCO children.

"We have 50 children who live on campus in our JAFCO Villages and another 300 who are served by other programs," Solomon said.

The children at Temple Beth Am in Pincrest have many gifts prepared for the JAFCO children.

"The children in our youth department, religious school and day school are all participating in selecting gifts for the JAFCO children," said Rabbi Rachel Greengrass, associate rabbi at Temple Beth Am. "The fifth grade day school class has also taken on a special project for the JAFCO children. They have been doing chores at home and getting paid for them. The entire class will be going to Target with the money they earned and plan to purchase gifts for the JAFCO kids with the money they earned."

The preschoolers in the Soref JCC program are also doing their part to provide gifts for the JAFCO kids.

"The JAFCO program is a great partner with us," said Judy Kissel, Soref JCC early childhood and camp director. "We have some of their children in our preschool and camp programs. Our preschoolers stand in front of the WISH board and pick a gift that they would like to give to the JAFCO children. It is a great values tool and learning experience for our kids. They give up one night of Hanukkah gifts to give a JAFCO child a gift."

Penny Klombers, director of the early childhood education at the Levis JCC Betty and Marvin Zale Early Childhood Learning Center said the 400 children in the preschool participate in the JAFCO toy drive.

"We have a Hanukkah bulletin board in our lobby and children and their parents select gifts wanted by JAFCO kids and then go shopping with their children to purchase the gifts," Klombers said. "This project helps the children in our school to get involved in helping the less fortunate in the community. It also helps them to see that they can make a difference in a child's life."

JAFCO was founded in 1992 and operates a family preservation program with support services for families in need. The organization supervises an independent living program for young adults. JAFCO also has a multi-systemic therapy program for teenagers at risk, an adoption and foster care program and an emergency shelter. It also offers assistance for children with developmental disabilities.

"We also have a senior caregiver program for grandparents who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren," Solomon said.

For information about JAFCO call 954-749-7230.

For those in the community who would like to donate items for the "Wish List" are encouraged to purchase gift cards to stores as well as donate CD's, DVD's and video games. JAFCO is located at 4200 N. University Dr. in Sunrise. For information, call 954-749-7230.