

guest column

It's Time To Care

This winter, Detroit Jews for Justice (DJJ) asked ourselves, "Why is it time to care?" We wanted to inspire our Jewish community to action on an issue we feel profoundly reflects our values. When we learned that almost half of all private sector workers don't receive paid



Blair Nosan

sick leave, and that single mothers and people of color are disproportionately affected by this lack of rights, we knew that it was time to act.

Inspired by our tradition and refusing to accept the status quo, we set an ambitious goal to collect 1,000 signatures for the MI Time To Care campaign.

"Jews have a very proud history of leadership in the Labor Movement," said our director, Rabbi Alana Alpert. "We see this work as a continuation of a sacred legacy."

DJJ Organizing Team leaders Nora Feldhusen and Oren Brandvain said, "There are people in the Jewish community who are directly affected by this issue, particularly



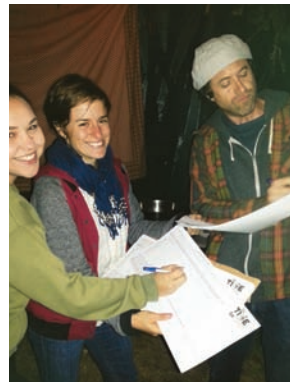
Eleanor Gamalski gets folks to sign the 'Time to Care' petitions as part of a Purim spiel.

those who are low-income, women and people of color."

Beyond contributing to the success of an important cause, DJJ also felt that our participation in the ballot initiative provided many opportunities for Metro Detroit Jews and Jewish institutions to gain organizing experience and to build relationships both inside and outside of DJJ.

We did it!

We rallied 50 leaders to circulate the petition, surpassing our goal in fewer than three months. Our leaders went to local institutions and events (Jewish and non-Jewish) to gather signatures on 22 occasions. In addition, we hosted five educational programs on Time to Care in partnership with local Jewish communities, including events at local synagogues and private homes. At these programs, we discussed the history of DJJ and our mission, offered background on



Alyah Al-azem, Nora Feldhusen and Sam Levinson signing petitions

earned sick time and the ballot initiative, collected signatures and trained circulators.

We have been thrilled by the success of our Time to Care efforts and particularly proud that it has helped us achieve our goal of showing emerging DJJ leaders and our broader Jewish community what social action that addresses racial and economic injustice can look like.

Next fall, we will continue our commitment to the Time to Care campaign, pending the issue getting on the ballot. We will engage members of the local Jewish community in Time to Care educational programming and recruit volunteers for Get Out the Vote activities preceding the election.

We hope you'll join us — because it is time to care! *

Blair Nosan is program director for Detroit Jews for Justice, www.detroitjewsforjustice.org.

commentary

Regional Transit Needed Now

I never want to have to tell someone, "Sorry, we can't help you." Yet the number of those looking for a daily ride to their job — the number we have to turn away — is startling.

In most cities around the country, seniors, people with disabilities and anyone without a vehicle can count on regional public transit to get them to work and their daily appointments. This, however, is not the case in Southeast Michigan, where too often severely disconnected and underfunded regional transit is unable to meet the needs of the most vulnerable population.

As part of Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit's mission to strengthen lives in Southeast Michigan, we offer door-to-door and cross-county rides. We are one of a few services like this and see an overwhelming demand of people who simply cannot easily or quickly get where they need to go.

We, unfortunately, just can't meet all the demand, as over 60 percent of our time is booked with standing appointments for people who need to get to an adult day



Yuliya Gaydayenko, LMSW, MA

program or rehabilitation facility multiple times a week. We are struggling with finding another provider to refer our clients to when we are unable to schedule the ride, as most of our riders need door-through-door assistance, rarely offered anywhere else.

Many people who rely on regional transit to maintain their independence are negatively impacted by the disjointed system

in Southeast Michigan. They often cannot rely on public transit if they need to travel across county lines, such as from Oakland to Wayne for a doctor's appointment.

It's not just seniors and people with disabilities or workers who are struggling. Our services depend on a team of committed volunteers. That commitment to making a difference is sometimes unfairly challenged by unreliable regional transit. We are regularly forced to travel and pick up our volunteers because they do not have access to connected regional transit to get them to us, especially if they live in a different county or even township than they volunteer in.

Connected public transit in Southeast Michigan is about increasing access and opportunity for everyone. According to the Brookings Institution, 78 percent of jobs in Southeast Michigan cannot be reached within 90 minutes on public transit. That's simply unacceptable.

We can and must do better. That's why we have joined A Coalition for Transit (ACT) to stand with others in Southeast Michigan and say "enough!" We need strong, connected regional transit across our four counties — Oakland, Wayne, Macomb and Washtenaw.

No one should ever be unable to get to their job, a doctor's appointment or the grocery store. The people we strive so hard to serve — and the future growth and vitality of our region — are counting on us to get this right.

Please visit www.acoalitionfortransit.com today to learn more and get involved. Together, we can make frequent, reliable and connected regional transit a reality in Southeast Michigan. *

Yuliya Gaydayenko, LMSW, MA, is senior director of Older Adult Services at Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit.

Arthur M. Horwitz
Publisher / Executive Editor
ahorwitz@renmedia.us

F. Kevin Browett
Chief Operating Officer
kbrowett@renmedia.us

Editorial
Managing Editor: Jackie Headapohl
jheadapohl@renmedia.us
Story Development Editor: Keri Guten Cohen
kcohen@thejewishnews.com
Arts & Life Editor: Lynne Konstantin
lkonstantin@renmedia.us
Senior Copy Editor: David Sachs
dsachs@renmedia.us
Editorial Assistant: Sy Manello
smanello@renmedia.us
Senior Columnist: Danny Raskin
dannyraskin@sbcglobal.net
Contributing Editor: Robert Sklar
rsklar@renmedia.us

Contributing Writers:
Ruthan Brodsky, Suzanne Chessler, Annabel Cohen, Don Cohen, Shari S. Cohen, Shelli Liebman Dorfman, Adam Finkel, Ryan Fishman, Stacy Gittleman, Judy Greenwald, Ronelle Grier, Esther Allweiss Ingber, Harry Kirsbaum, Barbara Lewis, Rabbi Jason Miller, Alan Muskovitz, Steve Stein

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dschultz@renmedia.us

Advertising Sales
Sales Director: Keith Farber
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Detroit Jewish News
Chairman: Michael H. Steinhart
President/Publisher: Arthur M. Horwitz
ahorwitz@renmedia.us
Chief Operating Officer: F. Kevin Browett
kbrowett@renmedia.us
Controller: Craig R. Phipps
Corporate Creative Director: Deborah Schultz
dschultz@renmedia.us

Fulfillment
circulationdesk@thejewishnews.com
Customer Service Manager: Zena Davis

Departments
General Offices: 248-354-6060
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