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Media Contacts:

Jessica Ost, Program Manager, Teen Philanthropy

JessicaO@sjcc.org | 206-388-1987

Sara Schweid, Communications Manager

SaraS@sjcc.org | 206-388-1988

Stroum Jewish Community Center's Giving Initiative for Teens (GIFT) Selects Fundraising Priorities for 2018-19

Seattle, WA (December 10, 2018) — The Stroum Jewish Community Center's new teen philanthropy board, the Giving Initiative for Teens (GIFT), has selected its funding priorities for the 2018-19 school year.

GIFT is part of a national program working to teach teens about grant-making, non-profit management, fundraising, and Jewish values. The SJCC launched the program this past September and has seen an extraordinary response. A key element of the curriculum is the selection of the beneficiary organizations. This is important for two key reasons: it encourages engagement in the community and empowers teens to be part of a grant-making process from start to finish.

"GIFT allows us to be passionate about current issues in our society and carefully select organizations that we would like to help," says 17-year-old Olivia Levitan. "It shows that teens can make a difference."

In this inaugural year of the program, GIFT activated two cohorts of 9th-12th graders. Inspired by the Jewish values of "compassion" and "do not stand idly by," one group decided to focus on domestic violence and the other on mental health.

"These issues are, sadly, a very real part of teens' lives," said Program Manager Jessica Ost, who oversees the GIFT program. "They see their peers deal with mental health issues and they hear about domestic violence in the news. They want to make a difference for people affected by these issues." Jessica Starnes, age 15, is part of the group focused on mental health, and she echoed this: "Mental health illnesses affect so many people around us that I think we just scan right over the issue sometimes. It's a problem that so many people face, sometimes without realizing it, so I'm excited to research what local organizations are currently doing to help the situation."

Now that funding priorities have been selected, the groups will create a Request for Proposal (RFP), inviting local organization to apply for grants. The teens will review the submissions and determine which organizations they want to interview as prospective beneficiaries. When that's complete, they'll

decide which organizations' grant request they want to support. Throughout the year, the teens will raise funds for these organizations. "By having the GIFT participants fundraise to support the grants, they further demonstrate their commitment to these issues," Ost says.

Organizations interested in applying for GIFT grants, can find the RFP [here](#). People who wish to support their fundraising efforts, please donate [here](#) or [here](#).

The Giving Initiative for Teens is in its first year at the Stroum Jewish Community Center and is off to a strong start. The initial goal was to have a single group of up to 20 teens, but the SJCC received so many qualified and passionate applicants that two cohorts were created. We're lucky to have 34 teens participating in the inaugural year. They range in age from 14 to 18 and hail from Mercer Island, Bellevue, Seattle, Issaquah, Sammamish, and Lake Forest Park.

One of the most valuable aspects of the GIFT program is that it's more than just a fundraising lesson – teens learn how non-profits are run and how grants are allocated, while also gaining valuable leadership, collaboration, and active listening skills, which will be applicable to any future work environments.

The GIFT program is part of the Jewish Teen Funders Network Foundation (JTFN) Board Incubator, which is generously funded by Laura Lauder and the Maimonides Fund. The Foundation Board Incubator brings the success and impact of Jewish teen philanthropy programs across North America and into cities around the world. Seattle is one of the newest incubator communities, joining San Diego, Detroit, Boston, Philadelphia, Toronto, Melbourne, and Israel. GIFT at the SJCC is funded by JTFN, the Samis Foundation, and the Bianco Family.

The teens of the 2018-19 GIFT program will continue to meet monthly throughout the school year to work on fundraising, assess applicant organizations, and allocate their grants. Applications for prospective beneficiary organizations will be open through January 28, 2019. Participant applications for the 2019-10 school year will open in late spring.

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About Stroum Jewish Community Center

The Stroum Jewish Community Center inspires connections to build community and ensure Jewish continuity. Together we create outstanding programs, partnerships and spaces that welcome everyone to learn, grow and celebrate Jewish life and culture. Learn more at www.sjcc.org.

Samis Foundation

The Samis Foundation was created in 1994 to reinvest the profits of Samuel Israel's real estate business to support Jewish education locally, and other program areas in Israel. The foundation imagines a Jewish community in which all Jewish children have access to intensive and immersive Jewish education and experiences. Learn more at www.samisfoundation.org.

Jewish Teen Funders Network

The Jewish Teen Funders Network (JTFN) serves as a central resource for the quickly growing field of Jewish teen philanthropy. We work to grow and strengthen the field of Jewish teen philanthropy in North America. JTFN was created in 2006 as a program of the Jewish Funders Network, an international organization dedicated to maximizing the quality and impact of Jewish philanthropy. Learn more at www.jtfn.org.

