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Stroum Jewish Community Center's Giving Initiative for Teens (GIFT) Awards more than \$21,000 to Local Non-Profits

Seattle, WA (May 23, 2019)—The Stroum Jewish Community Center's teen philanthropy board, the Giving Initiative for Teens (GIFT), completed its inaugural year at a ceremony on Wednesday night, where they awarded more than \$21,000 in grants to local non-profits.

GIFT is part of a national program that teaches teens about grant-making, non-profit management, fundraising, and Jewish values. Thirty-four high schoolers were part of the program, meeting monthly to decide the issue areas they wanted to focus on, create an RFP (Request for Proposal), conduct site visits for applicant organizations, and select final beneficiaries.

"GIFT is such an amazing program because it encourages engagement in the community and empowers teens to be part of a grant-making process from start to finish," said Jessica Ost, SJCC Program Manager, Teen Philanthropy.

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.

They received 34 applicants and selected six organizations to support with the money they raised: Eastside Legal Assistance Program, Jewish Family Service, Kent Youth and Family Services, King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, Mary's Place, and Sound Mental Health. Recipient organizations were honored at a Grant Celebration on May 22.

The teens all come from Jewish backgrounds, but it can be challenging to stay connected to the Jewish community when they are pulled in so many directions, said 16-year-old Danielle Lavitt. "It's hard to get to temple as often as I used to, but my monthly GIFT meetings helped me stay connected to the community and to other Jewish teens."

The emphasis on Jewish values showed the participants that their belief system can be applied to their everyday lives outside of synagogue. "Whenever I'm making big decisions I can think about my Jewish values," said 16-year-old Matt Feldman. Boaz Malakoff, 17, agreed: "GIFT showed me that Judaism can have a real-world impact beyond the spiritual aspect."



Not only did the teens realize that applying their values to their lives and decisions was important, they realized the power of fighting for their beliefs, Malakoff said. “I learned it’s important to use your voice, to find some way to be active, and to not be afraid to be the lone voice advocating for what you believe in.”

GIFT is currently seeking applicants for the 2019-20 school year. Mentors and teachers can also nominate students. Details and application forms can be found [here](#). Application deadline is May 31.

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.

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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.