



SKILLS . JOBS . CAREERS

JVS's Jewish Heritage

History

In 1938 the Vocational Service of the Associated Jewish Philanthropies (now CJP) was founded to help refugees from Austria and Germany gain skills, secure jobs, build careers, and begin to achieve the American dream. After World War II, JVS assisted refugees from across Europe and also helped returning members of the armed forces and defense workers re-integrate back into the civilian workforce. In the 1950's and 1960's, Jewish Vocational Service provided services to Jewish refugees from Hungary and Cuba, and began providing training and employment services to individuals with disabilities. In the 1970's, Jewish Vocational Service began building its reputation for high-quality English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, by serving newly re-settled Soviet emigrés, and war refugees from Vietnam. From the 1980's to the present, Jewish Vocational Service expanded its services to include immigrants from more than 25 nations, and individuals with education, skills, and employment challenges from the greater Boston population and Boston's Jewish community.

Role in the Jewish Community Today

Today, Jewish Vocational Service is one of the largest workforce development organizations in New England, serving more than 15,000 individuals a year, and known nationally for the quality of its services. Services that provide skills, jobs, and careers within the Jewish community are focused primarily on individuals with disabilities, and professional workers and job seekers.

JVS's work in the broader community also plays an important role in the Jewish community. By serving diverse individuals facing many obstacles to economic success and the American Dream, Jewish Vocational Service is an important means for the Jewish community to perform its historic mission of Tikun Olam, act on the Jewish values of work, and carry out social justice activities in the greater Boston community.

Values

For its entire 75 years, Jewish Vocational Service's mission and services have been guided by a set of important values about social justice and the value of work, which while universal, are enhanced by traditional Jewish teachings. Jewish Vocational Service's Jewish values are important to understand and elucidate, because they are our legacy from the Jewish community.

Jewish Vocational Service's mission in the Jewish and broader Boston community stands on the foundation of several important values.



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- **The value of Tikkun Olam - The Repair of the World**

- As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes, in giving meaning to the idea of Tikkun Olam, “As long as there is hunger, poverty, and treatable disease in the world there is work for us to do. As long as nations fight, and men hate, and corruption stalks the corridors of power; as long as there is unemployment and homelessness, depression and despair, our task is not yet done, and we hear, if we listen carefully enough, the voice of God asking us, as he asked the first humans, ‘Where are you?’”

- **The value of Tzedakah**

- Tzedakah is usually translated as charity, though it is derived from the Hebrew word meaning “justice” or “righteousness”.
- Jewish Vocational Service’s particular focus on “skills, jobs and careers” is rooted in important Jewish teachings on the value of work.
- Maimonides writes that there are eight degrees of tzedakah, one higher than the other. The highest degree is that of the person who assists another in finding employment and helps to release another from dependency and poverty to achieve independent self-sufficiency.

- **The value of loving the stranger**

- Jewish Vocational Service’s history of providing skills, jobs, and careers for Jewish and other immigrants also has an important and very relevant narrative, both because of the Jewish community’s own immigrant experience in the United States, which helps the community understand other immigrants’ challenges, and its long-standing values captured in Jewish text.
 - For example, not once or twice, but many times the Torah tells us: “Do not oppress the stranger.” Indeed, we are urged to “love the stranger in our midst.” Many interpret the word “stranger” to mean the newcomer, the refugee, or one who is outside the mainstream, and it is with this that Jewish Vocational Service’s work welcomes and supports the “stranger”, whether an immigrant, a refugee, a low-income individual, an unemployed worker, or someone with a disability.
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