

# Business Update

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## RCF, partners, are BUILDing Jewish ECE

### RCF leads effort to build early childhood enrollment

**A**n effort is underway to help synagogue and JCC early childhood education (ECE) centers increase enrollment, better engage Jewish families and build stronger connections to the Jewish community. Led by Rose Community Founda-

### Seeking stronger connections

tion, the initiative — known as BUILDing Jewish ECE ([www.buildingjewishece.org](http://www.buildingjewishece.org)) — involves a partnership between the Union for Reform Judaism and the JCC Association, and is open to all nine Denver and Boulder synagogues and JCCs with ECE Centers.

Two URJ synagogues and two JCCs comprise the current cohort, launched in July of 2014. Five other synagogues, including two conservative synagogues, will be part of a second cohort starting this summer when the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism joins the initiative.

After years of research and planning, RCF says the time is right to focus on an area of Jewish education that is often neglected, yet presents immense opportunities to engage families and welcome them into Jewish communities.

“We must bring families into Jewish communities at formative stages of their lives and their children’s development,” says Lisa Farber Miller, senior program officer at RCF.

“The JCC Association, URJ and USCJ recognize the importance of early childhood education and family engagement and that is why — for the first time ever — they are working so closely together.

“National leadership and local leaders of JCCs and congregations are all playing key roles in this truly collaborative, cross-denominational, cross-organizational initiative.

“Together, we can improve early childhood education and Jewish family engagement, and make these critical areas part of our national, communal agenda.”

**S**tudies demonstrate that parents, children, synagogues, JCCs and communities as a whole would benefit from stronger and more accessible Jewish ECE programs.

Parents are more likely to be involved and invested in Jewish home rituals and celebrations as a

five, the majority by age three.

Synagogues and JCCs would increase revenue with ECE centers that are integrated into the entire organization and are operating as effectively as possible.

“Our ECE centers need the best outreach strategies and tools to engage families at this critical life stage,” says Mark Horowitz, vice president of early childhood education and family engagement at the JCC Association.

“An influx of families with young children — on a scale that we know is possible — would be a game-changer for JCCs, synagogues and, truly, entire communities.

“The ECE centers in BUILDing Jewish ECE each offer something unique that appeals to a wide range of Jewish families. We view it as a Jewish obligation to market these dynamic engagement opportunities and bring families into these learning environments.”

Through the initiative, ECE centers receive coaching, training and guidance from the URJ, JCC Association and USCJ experts and others, along with a “Toolbox of Resources” to expedite long-term growth.

This includes website, social media

### Services and tools offered are valued at \$92,000 per institution

result of their child’s own involvement in those experiences at ECE centers.

The preschool years have proven to be a critical time in the development of a child’s personality and identity — including their religious identity.

Eighty-five percent of a child’s cognitive development is formed by age

and search engine optimization audits, new software and database support to improve marketing, tracking and enrollment; marketing materials and action plans along with a “mystery shopper program” to test a center’s effectiveness when a parent inquires about or visits the school.

All items are designed to increase



Lisa Farber Miller

branding, customer service, recruitment and retention.

The services and tools offered as part of the initiative are valued at \$92,000 per institution.

**B**UILDing Jewish ECE is a result of eight years of research and work conducted by the Colorado Jewish early childhood education initiative steering committee.

The committee supported a new early childhood director at the Colorado Agency for Jewish Education (CAJE), intensive professional development for teachers and directors, scholarships and financial support to ECE centers (including [www.MazelTot.org](http://www.MazelTot.org)).

A 2012 economic study that found that if Jewish ECE centers in the Denver-Boulder area were operat-

respectively.

Maxine Segal Handelman, early childhood education specialist at USCJ, will serve as the mentor-coach for the conservative congregations in cohort II.

Karen Stokes, an expert in ECE management and operations, will be a mentor-coach for additional cohort II synagogues.

Julie Wassom, president of The Julian Group, Inc., which markets ECE centers in the secular world, is the project director and marketing specialist.

“We’re working with experts to truly improve how we market our ECE center and how we connect with the broader Jewish community,” says Paul Gillis, a member of the Denver Loup JCC ECE leadership team and a parent of two children who attended the ECE center.

### A study shows that best practices at ECEs can increase shul revenue

ing at best practice standards, their congregations and JCCs’ revenues could increase \$720,000 annually, an average of 11%.

The study said that synagogues and ECE centers need programs, campaigns and marketing that create inclusive relationships with members and aggressively communicate what synagogues or JCCs offer to families.

RCF designed BUILDing Jewish ECE as a response to the study and reached out to the Jay & Rose Phillips Family Foundation of Colorado, URJ, JCCA and USCJ to assist in this work as partners.

Says Cathy Rolland, director of engaging families with young children at the URJ: “BUILDing Jewish ECE takes the best practices from the secular business world, particularly marketing, enrollment conversion and customer service, and helps apply them to ECE and family engagement.

“The URJ is excited to work with these great partners to break down even more community silos and to reach, engage and inspire all kinds of families.”

“If the JCC can continue to showcase its diverse offerings while helping to nurture positive relationships, more families will become engaged.

“My own family became more actively involved in the community after an enriching, high quality experience in the JCC ECE center.

“There are many other young families in our community who could benefit from embarking on a similar type of Jewish journey.”

Adds Farber Miller: “Early childhood education is one of the few times when Jewish communities have a demand-side economy working in their favor. In other words, many parents need and must pay for expensive early care and education for young children.

“Why, then, should we only attract a small percentage of parents with Jewish children into our ECE centers nationally?”

“The ECE Centers in BUILDing Jewish ECE are really learning labs for the Jewish world, offering a model for building and maintaining relationship-driven institutions with high caliber marketing and customer retention systems.”

**H**orowitz and Rolland serve as the mentor-coaches for the two JCCs and two Reform congregations,

What is the noblest pedigree? Loving kindness.

— Solomon ibn Gabirol

## Happy Passover

*Passover affirms the great truth that liberty is the inalienable right of every human being.*

- Morris Joseph



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