



Photography by Avital Rotbart

The members of Roots & Branches Foundation 2014-2015

Jewish Values and Grantmaking

by Alyssa Levy and Marlow Hoffman

They say for every three Jewish people there are four opinions. Our group of 18 members (with 24 opinions) felt passionate about a multitude of Jewish values. Each of our values plays an important role in shaping our community, but ultimately we came to a consensus on the two that were most important to our group. After many discussions, we decided the following two Jewish values would guide our grant-making:

V'hechezakta bo, supporting those who need help in becoming self-sufficient, and *tzedakah*, giving to those in need to right the scales of justice.

Through the lens of these values, we examined a variety of social and community issues, eventually honing in on breaking the cycle of poverty by funding programs that served both parents and their children, ages five or younger, through parenting skills, financial literacy, social and emotional development, nutrition and school readiness.

Guided by these values and grant priorities, we distributed a request for proposals to the community to find organizations that aligned with our goals. The organizations we selected

best exemplify not only our grant priorities, but also these Jewish values.

We chose:

- Growing Home's *Seedlings Parent Institute*, which hosts skill-building workshops for parents
- Mile High Montessori's *Babies Ready for College*, a skill-building and early literacy program
- New Legacy Charter High School, a charter high school for pregnant and parenting teens

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Roots & Branches Foundation made three grants totaling

\$75,680

in 2014-2015.

A Dual-Generation Grantmaking Approach

by **Brian Tannenbaum**

Our Roots & Branches cohort identified a variety of qualities to look for in potential grantees, but our biggest concern was to make a lasting impact with the grants we would ultimately award. Over several weeks of meeting, we considered a wide variety of community issues to address with our grants. Eventually, after many tough decisions, we decided to focus on supporting low income families in the Greater Denver community and providing educational opportunities to their children during the early childhood years.

Because making a lasting impact was so important to us, we decided to focus on programs that aid their beneficiaries in becoming self-sufficient, rather than programs focused on addressing crisis scenarios or other day-to-day needs of recipients. After reviewing some of the current information on the state of poverty in the United States and in the Greater Denver community, our group took notice of the fact that one of the greatest predictors of a person's future socioeconomic status is the socioeconomic status of their parents. Similarly, much of the research showed that parents' involvement in their children's education is also a great predictor of a child's success in higher education or the workplace. It became apparent that to address poverty and make a lasting impact, the group would need to view poverty from a holistic standpoint, and begin to focus on its cyclical nature.

Given that poverty *is* cyclical, our cohort had to consider that lack of access to resources and support was not just limited to one specific generation, but instead affected parents and children in the same family. We explored different approaches to addressing poverty, and current research taught us that multigenerational approaches to serving families are effective because they recognize and address the complex variety of factors affecting a family's wellbeing. Consequently, our group determined that to really effect lasting change, we would need to fund grantees that give children access to educational programs or resources they wouldn't otherwise have, and also reinforce that support by serving and empowering parents.



Brian Tannenbaum speaking at a celebration of Roots & Branches' grantmaking

After substantial research and site visits to a variety of programs our group was delighted to find several successful dual-generational programs. Ultimately, we were able to provide funding which we hope will empower both children and parents to make long term change.

Background

Each year, Roots & Branches Foundation is comprised of a different group of 18 diverse individuals. Roots & Branches members work together with Rose Community Foundation staff for eight months to explore what it means to give Jewishly and to make grants that help solve problems in Greater Denver and Boulder's Jewish and broader communities. For more information, please go to rcfdenver.org/rootsandbranches.

Growing by Roots and Branches

by Kate Van Daele

Because I grew up around so many trees in Minnesota, anything with the title “Roots & Branches” takes me back to childhood memories, and to the deeper meanings those words can have in one’s life. Moving to Denver eight years ago, I was excited to start my career, begin a new life in a new place, put down roots, and spread my branches.

When I applied to join Roots & Branches Foundation, several friends had told me about their life-changing experiences as part of the program. They had met new friends, learned more about Judaism as adults, and worked together as a team to solve a problem outside of the workplace. I was excited to be accepted and meet this cohort in July. My fellow members came from such different backgrounds, possessed widely varied thought processes, and brought a range of religious experiences to the

table. I knew that I would learn so much being a part of this group.

Roots & Branches is the best leadership program of which I have been part. The group tackles a problem of our choosing that impacts our community. Each member of our group not only dedicated time to do research, review proposals, and make site visits, we also each personally invested in the grantmaking pool to fund the cause we selected.

While our goal was to solve a problem, we also got to know each other not only as professionals, but as friends. I am thankful for this experience, the new friendships that will last a lifetime, and a new dedication to the faith that we share. Roots & Branches not only helps strengthen roots, it also helps extend branches in ways never imagined.



Kate Van Daele participating in a team-building exercise at the opening retreat

Roots & Branches Foundation 2014-2015 Members

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These organizations provide programs that encompass all of our goals and values, and we are very excited to support their efforts.

We are confident the programs we chose to fund will make a positive impact on our community—one that is targeted, meaningful and tangibly improves countless lives.



Alyssa Levy and Marlow Hoffman sharing their program reflection at the final celebration

2014-2015 Roots & Branches Foundation Grants - \$75,680

Supporting programs that help low-income families with children ages zero to five live healthy lives of dignity while working to end the cycle of poverty

Growing Home (Denver) \$30,624 for the *Seedlings Parents Institute*, a series of eight weekly skill-building workshops focusing on parenting skills, including both parent-focused programming and joint activities for parents and their children ages birth to five.

Mile High Montessori (Denver) \$20,000 for *Babies Ready for College*, a parenting skills and early literacy program for families with children ages birth to five. The program will expand to a second permanent location in the Montbello neighborhood, serving approximately 75 children and their caregivers.

New Legacy Charter High School (Denver) \$25,056 to hire an early childhood education director to support the opening of a new charter school for pregnant and parenting teens and their children in August 2015. The school will offer early care and education for students' young children, parenting support and education, and an individualized traditional high school curriculum.