



The members of Roots & Branches Foundation 2015-2016

18 Voices, One Goal: Our Journey to Consensus

by Dalia Garfinkel

In July we started as 18 strangers in an all-day retreat — a philanthropic boot camp of sorts — hoping to learn how to work together and complete a lofty, if nebulous, mission: use our Jewish values and the tools of strategic philanthropy to support worthwhile nonprofit organizations in the Greater Denver community. Over the course of eight months, at two- sometimes three-hour meetings, we became enmeshed in discussion that varied from how we saw ourselves Jewishly, to our backgrounds, and how a range of Jewish and cultural values spoke to us personally and would inform our giving.

We were guided through the process of consensus, finding areas of common ground as starting points for conversation, and making decisions for the good of the group. These conversations were not always easy. In fact, the decisions were frequently challenging, forcing us as a unit to truly examine our values and beliefs. We did this to answer a single unifying question: how do we most want to make a difference? Through conversation, text study and talking about our views on philanthropy and giving, we began to slowly form a foundation to move forward.

We found common ground, areas where our experiences and viewpoints overlapped and built a bridge to our goal: focusing our energy and finding a way for the power of 18 voices speaking at once to not diminish each other, but rather strengthen our collective cause. We were a tapestry of modern Jewish culture, harnessing our values to change the landscape of this beautiful city we call home.

The core of what we sussed-out during those sessions is embodied in the Jewish values referenced in our Request for Proposals: the phrases *tzedakah*, giving in pursuit of a more just world, and *v'hechezekta bo*, strengthening those in need to help them become self-sufficient. Ultimately, those Jewish values helped us focus on two priorities affecting the Greater Denver community: strengthening families and communities through increasing access to healthy food and nutrition education, and

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Roots & Branches Foundation made six grants totaling

\$79,490 in 2016.

Sustenance and Nourishment: Giving Jewishly to Address Food Insecurity

by Sophie Klein

Food plays a central role in some of the best known stories from the Torah. From Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, to Essau trading his birthright for a bowl of stew, to the sustaining power of manna as the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, our Jewish tradition provides us with ample evidence that food is more than just food.

Enjoying traditional Jewish foods inspires a connection to Jewish culture. During one meeting, we explored what being Jewish meant to our group by reading anonymous reflections written by each of us. One person shared: “My Jewish experience revolved around appreciating our cuisine — knishes, lox and rugelach — over going to Temple.” The laughter and



Sophie Klein speaking at a celebration of Roots & Branches' grantmaking

subsequent conversation revealed just how essential food had been to each of our Jewish experiences.

Food features prominently in the ways we observe Judaism, whether keeping kosher, sipping the fruit of the vine on Shabbat or tasting the bitter herbs at Passover Seder. Our rituals routinely incorporate food in symbolic ways to remind us of our past and guide our current actions. The 18 of us each experienced Judaism differently, but food was a shared theme, and it was clear from the start that food insecurity, defined by the USDA as “consistent access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources at times during the year,” was a top concern.

Research into food insecurity in the Greater Denver community revealed the depth of this problem. As shown by the United States Department of Agriculture in *Household Food Security in the United States in 2013*, the percentage of Denver children receiving SNAP benefits (food stamps) has been on an upward trajectory. In Colorado, the Colorado Children’s Campaign report, *2015 KIDS COUNT in Colorado*, states that one in seven people experience food insecurity, with one in five children not knowing where their next meal is coming from.

By funding programs that increase access to healthy food and nutrition education, we hope to provide vital sustenance to our community and also demonstrate Jewish values. The selected programs reflect several cherished values:

- *l'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation, through multi-generational approaches to nutrition and food education
- *kavod habriot*, upholding personal dignity, empowering program participants to choose for themselves
- *v'hechezekta bo*, you shall strengthen, skill-building programs teach community members how to grow produce

Food played many important roles in the Torah, and it continues to shape our practice of Judaism today. Our grantees' work transforms food into more than food.

About Roots & Branches Foundation

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 to explore what it means to give Jewishly and to make grants that help solve problems in Great Denver and Boulder’s Jewish and broader communities. For more information, please go to rcfdenver.org/rootsandbranches.

Empowering Denver to Close the Achievement Gap in STEM Disciplines

by Zachary Kiefer

The values and priorities of our group led us through a thoughtful exploration of the many challenges facing our community. Our diverse backgrounds and viewpoints also converged on the importance we all place on education and equality. Last year, in a bipartisan appeal from the United States Senate Floor, Colorado Senator Michael Bennet advocated for the improvement of educational equality nationwide. He said:

“Poverty breeds deeper poverty; lack of educational achievement breeds deeper academic failure; and broken families are the surest predictor of more broken families in the next generation and the generation beyond that. This is a sentence of unequal opportunity for all poor Americans, no matter the color of their skin.”

Through further research, we identified the growing achievement gap in Colorado as it specifically relates to preparing Greater Denver’s youth for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers as a priority for our grantmaking. Additionally, 16 percent of our overall workforce is Hispanic; however, the STEM population is only 6 percent Hispanic. This gross underrepresentation may be exacerbated as STEM job growth in the US outpaced non-STEM employment by three times and is expected to grow faster than any other job category besides healthcare.

In the spirit of our Jewish value of *v’hechezekta bo*, strengthening those in need to help them become self-sufficient, we sought to fund efforts that prepare Greater Denver’s youth, especially young women and minorities, for the growing number of jobs requiring STEM skills in the coming years.



Members Doreen Molk and Zachary Kiefer

We were overwhelmed and genuinely moved by the inspiring responses from local organizations that tirelessly and selflessly give in order to right the scales of justice. Combined, the respondents to our Request for Proposals reach nearly 4,000 youth annually through STEM-specific curriculum and over 500,000 more through general education initiatives. It was an honor to meet the leaders of these organizations, whose vocation supports a cause for which we all advocate. We are grateful for their contributions to our community and we are excited to follow the impact they will continue to have on the next generation.

Roots & Branches Foundation 2015-2016 Members

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increasing access to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers for young adults.

According to the medieval Jewish scholar Maimonides, "The highest form of charity is helping a man to help himself." The priorities we chose to support fulfill this ideal. This group, which started as 18 strangers, ended up coming together under one banner: the desire to make a difference. And I am proud of all we accomplished together.



Dalia Garfinkel sharing her program reflection at the end of cycle celebration

2016 Roots & Branches Foundation Grants - \$79,490

Strengthening Families and Communities by Increasing Access to Healthy Food and Nutrition Education

The GrowHaus (Denver) \$25,000 to empower families through a *promotora* model in which community members are hired and trained to provide healthy food access and education for their neighbors in Globeville and Elyria-Swansea.

Metro Caring (Denver) \$19,490 to support hunger relief and prevention programs providing families with access to nutritious foods, education about healthy diets and growing food, and services promoting self-sufficiency and overall health.

Re:Vision (Denver) \$5,000 to support families in the Westwood neighborhood through a *promotora* model, in which community members are hired and trained to support their neighbors in creating home gardens to grow their own nutritious foods.

Increasing Access to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Careers for Young Adults through Education and Skill Development

Colorado Association of Black Professional Engineers and Scientists (Denver) \$5,000 to encourage and assist traditionally underrepresented youth in the pursuit of STEM careers through hands-on programs led by professionals in the engineering field.

Denver Public Schools Foundation (Denver) \$10,000 to support summer internships to help develop a STEM-ready talent pipeline as part of CareerConnect, a four-year STEM education and career exploration program for Denver Public Schools high school students.

Groundwork Denver (Denver) \$15,000 for The Blue Team, a job training program in which youth from Sheridan develop STEM skills by working to improve the water quality of Bear Creek.