

# JAFCO

AN ORGANIZATION GIVING EVERY CHILD A PLACE TO BELONG

by Deby Goldfarb

**OMG! LOOK AT THIS: An actual ad that was posted on Facebook: BABY FOR SALE — 4 weeks old; asking \$100K. It may be difficult to believe that this could happen in our society, in our country, at this time, but it did.** It happened because two teenage parents, touched by mental illness, had no idea how to care for a newborn baby. JAFCO ( Jewish Adoption and Family Care Options ) went to the rescue and found that baby “Adam” was not being properly fed or cleaned. The Judge placed the baby in foster care for as long as needed, with supervised visits by the parents. Eventually, the baby cried when he was NOT with his foster parents and years later he was happily adopted by the foster parents. A life was saved since little baby Adam may have died without being given the proper care.

JAFCO has a roster of many other heartfelt stories. Rewind to Parkland, Florida when on February 14, 2018, a 19 year old shooter opened fire on students and staff at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, killing 17 people and injuring 17 others. JAFCO was there to help the community by opening Eagles' Haven, a place where students, teachers and families could come for help by means of support groups, therapy dogs, yoga meditation and expressive art. One student claimed, “JAFCO helped me everyday.” Indeed, JAFCO has helped over 3,080 children in its lifesaving programs just this past year.

JAFCO moves precious babies and children from dangerous conditions into loving foster and adoptive families. However,



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their goal is to first aim for family preservation and to try to keep families together. JAFCO was founded 30 years ago by Sarah Franco and Ronald D. Simon, a true pioneer in child welfare and foster care to help abused and neglected children. Today, there are two sites in Sunrise: The JAFCO Children's Village, located on a five-acre site that provides a wide range of services for more than 350 abused and neglected children and The JAFCO Children's Ability Center (note, it is not named “Disability” Center.) The former has an emergency shelter with 16 beds, open 24 hours a day helping newborns (from mothers with drug addiction) to children 12 years old. There are 6 group homes for the older children or for those children with siblings. These children may stay on until age 21 or 22, or up until they are ready to be independent and productive. The latter branch, The JAFCO Children's Ability Center focuses on helping children with developmental disabilities and their families.



Although there may be only 50 children at a time living on the Sunrise campus, the JAFCO social workers continue to work with hundreds of children in the community who are at risk. Janet Epstein, Philanthropy Director in the Department of Development said, “We are all about families.” She described JAFCO Children's Ability Center explaining that “1 in 6 children born each day will be diagnosed with autism, spina bifida and cerebral palsy or other intellectual disabilities. Those parents can't leave their children and never get a break. Eight years ago JAFCO opened its state-of-the-art Center that offers support for parents, grandparents and siblings.”

One parent, a father of a daughter with autism, fought back tears as he described his joy in seeing his daughter fold her own laundry and learn basic, important life skills. He described how finding childcare yet continuing his work was almost impossible. He said, “JAFCO was able to provide an affordable house that was the same price as my one bedroom apartment. And even though I am not Jewish, they gave me a Christmas tree and gifts for my children.” As he choked back tears he said, “Thank you, JAFCO, for helping me become a real father.”

JAFCO has saved 7500 children since 1992. Many of the grateful children never forget the help and family feeling they received. Often those children, now in their 20's, have come back to visit the campus. In fact, JAFCO created “Our Alumni Circle”, a testament to the family warmth and connection, that continues to provide mentorship, resources and support as they grow and become adults in the community.

Philanthropy Director Janet reiterated JAFCO's effort to keep families together. She said, “we want to spread our awareness and let everyone know we are here so that if anyone knows of a family in crisis, we can be there offering child safety, support and love.” It is important to note that 89% of every gift made goes DIRECTLY to change the lives and the children JAFCO serves. When families find the courage to open up and ask for help, JAFCO's motto is, “giving every child a place to belong.” **stb**

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