

# Serving One and All:

## A History of Social Services in Squirrel Hill

By Emily Leone

In a city like Pittsburgh, with its numerous small communities, neighbors take care of their neighborhoods by keeping them clean and safe, being proactive residents and watching out for each other. It's a natural thing for many to do.

We are fortunate here in Squirrel Hill because our neighborhood also has something many communities don't: a number of valuable social service institutions. From long-standing ones like Jewish Family & Children's Service to newer ones like the Squirrel Hill Health Center and the Good Grief Center, agencies that serve the public are poised to help at a moment's notice.

As these social services have evolved and changed over the years to accommodate changing needs and greater numbers of the population, their audiences have widened and shifted, too. But ultimately their focuses have remained the same: to improve the quality of life of children, families and adults of all ages.

More than a century ago, The Children's Institute of Pittsburgh came into existence in response to the needs of the community. Founded in the early 1900s as the Home for Crippled Children, it was known primarily for many years as a treatment place for children with polio. In the 1960s, the Institute was serving children with a wide-range of disabilities.

Today, the Children's Institute helps meet the special needs of children, young adults and their families.

"We have become what we are today through decades of assessing the evolving needs of our community and planning strategically how best to meet them. Reaching out to the community is, we believe, simply part of being a valued organizational citizen and good neighbor," said David K. Miles, president and CEO. "We are grateful for the opportunity to serve – and for the extraordinary support from the community that, in turn, allows us to help our amazing kids and families in so many ways."

Historically, social service agencies like Jewish Family & Children's Service and the Jewish Community Center were established by the Jewish community, for the Jewish community. Their missions have evolved over the years to include all community members— regardless of their religion, race, denomination or socio-economic status.

For years, the Jewish Community Center has been the "upstreet" destination, a community anchor for people of all ages and backgrounds since 1949, when the Irene Kauffmann Settlement, predecessor to the JCC, opened its doors at 5738 Forbes Avenue, said



Brian Schreiber, Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh President and CEO.

"The JCC, by its very mission, is dedicated to the strengthening of the whole self—the intellectual and spiritual as well as the physical well-being—of each member of our community," Schreiber said. "As part of our core values, our board and staff have beautifully balanced how to be both a Jewish community center and a community center to the community at large."

Similarly, Jewish Family & Children's Service has provided decades of care to the community, from children and families to aging adults. More than ten years ago, JF&CS moved into a larger space on Bartlett Street to accommodate the growing need for additional services in the community. Between their Bartlett Street location and the Squirrel Hill Community Food Pantry on Hazelwood Avenue, JF&CS provides adoption services, a career development center, immigration and refugee services, elder care, psychological services and much more.

And perhaps now more than ever, providing a lifeline to whoever needs it, regardless of their background or situation, is critical, said Aryeh Sherman, president and CEO of JF&CS.

"JF&CS helps people grappling with lifecycle transitions and crisis, and very little has changed in that regard since we were established in 1937," Sherman said. "What has changed over time are community needs and the innovation and resourcefulness required to meet them, particularly in times like these where a difficult economy continues to exact a heavy toll on members of our community and on government funding sources."

Regardless of why a non-profit started or what belief tenants they operate under, all add to the rich, supportive community that is Squirrel Hill. As long as families and individuals need services to better their lives, social services will be ever-present in our community. 🌲