

PRESS RELEASE

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

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Date: July 16, 2020

JFS DELIVERS CAMP-IN-A-BOX TO 225 REFUGEE AND LOW-INCOME YOUTH

Springfield – Refugee and low-income youth face incredible barriers to learning and having fun this summer. Parents are going back to work, families are on tighter budgets than ever before, and many parents have limited English and low digital literacy skills and can't research activities or navigate online content. Sara Bedford, New American Program Director, approached the Jewish Community Center (JCC) to team up and provide a summer full of activity ideas, materials, and English language enrichment for these youth. In just three weeks, JFS and the JCC partnered to provide camp boxes to 225 refugee and low-income youth ages 5-12 – most of them living in Springfield. Camps are closed due to COVID-19, but these "campers" will stay busy with 2 boxes full of activities to do at home.

With the support of a generous grant to JFS from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, JFS and the JCC combined resources to create the boxes. JFS brought on a refugee youth expert, Susan Tuberville, to adapt camp box activities and materials developed by the JCC to be appropriate for refugee youth. A 40-page JCC guide to camp box activities for English speakers became a colorful 80 page booklet to walk English language learners through camp box activities, with added English language development activities. Activity Guides were translated into Nepali and Swahili to increase access and encourage parents to do activities with their children who have more English skills.

The first box was distributed this week: JFS staff dropped off boxes to 100 children in the Springfield area in two days, while an additional 125 kids came to JFS or the JCC to pick up their boxes. JFS will keep in touch with virtual campers throughout the summer, including home visits, check in calls, and messaging groups to keep excitement high. The JCC manages a private Facebook page where campers can connect and adults can share footage of campers enjoying activities and completing projects. Campers can look forward to Box #2 in early August, including a soccer ball and 4 cones!

Families are encouraged to do one activity per day. Box #1 contains four weeks of activities divided into a theme for each week. Week 1: Gratitude includes activities ranging from creating a "gratitude box" and "gratitude grams" to gardening. Week 2: Curiosity includes a scavenger hunt, creating a kaleidoscope, a Frisbee to practice Disc Golf, and more. Week 3: Loving Kindness and Week 4: Friendship includes making a friendship bracelet to creating postcards to friends. In addition, JFS and the JCC provided starter packs for all families in need of basic supplies like scissors and tape.

Camp-in-a-Box was made possible with support from generous partners and funders, and volunteers who tirelessly put activities together and packed boxes to create camp magic for kids this summer.

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Jewish Family Service of Western Massachusetts is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of Western MA.

Since 1915, Jewish Family Service has been providing exceptional social services, grounded in Jewish values, to support and empower individuals and families from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds.

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